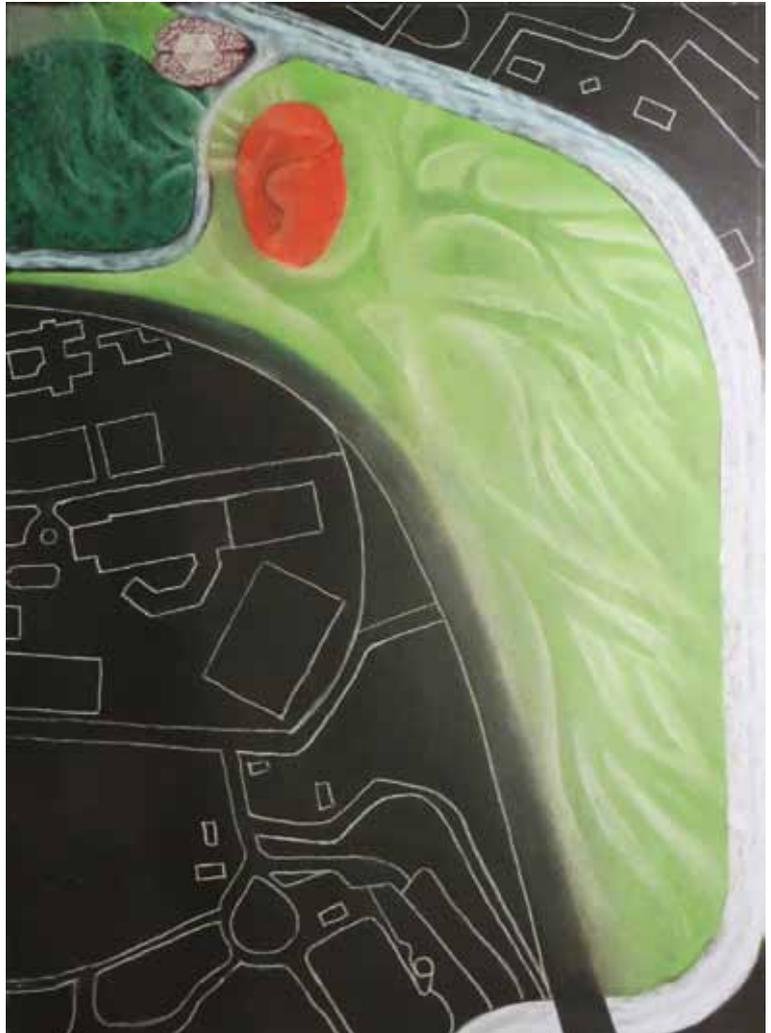


Director's Message: A Place to think with...

Having thought that we would have no part to play in the **Prepare for Battle** celebrations, it came as a pleasant surprise to find ourselves as potential players in a major young people's initiative to celebrate parliamentary democracy. Although some trustees were understandably cautious at first, we welcome the Lewes Youth Theatre and their daring idea of a Medieval camp and Democracy Tent for the following reasons:

- We have worked from within to speak up for the wildlife and, for example, suggesting headphones being used by audiences and moving some of the proposed stands to less sensitive areas.
- The Reserve is not home to incredibly rare species - it is a lung for the town, - a modest Reserve that has a robust diversity of wildlife much of it in the water of Heart of Reeds and the ditches.
- We have already made significant friends among the 18 - 23 year age group who view us positively and may well help us in the future.
- They have been very open to the wildlife arguments and have welcomed the idea of some conservation sessions that will be delivered on site.
- We have no responsibility as the event is being overseen by Lewes District Council BUT it will bring welcome publicity and will feature in some of the democratic debates about common land.
- This is a once in a lifetime event and we honestly don't think it will do any major damage and, instead, will do a lot of good for an upcoming generation.
- The Railway Land is a **'place to think with'** - from biodiversity to sea level rise - it is not an isolated jewel cut off from society but a Man and Biosphere reserve recognised for its exceptional work in relation to people and wildlife.



Above: 'A Place to Think With' - Image by Tom Walker

The Prepare for Battle initiative mirrors aspects of my doctoral research that has underpinned our approach to the Railway Land – namely that such small urban reserves are not simply areas with lists of wildlife to learn and protect, but potential *'places to think with'* – as Alex Kirby (former BBC environment correspondent) put it several years ago, as *somewhere to think the unthought'*. And so it is no accident that we are about to become a **sea level rise community hub** in association with the Environment Agency.

This major initiative, which will see the Linklater as part of the first Climate Change Trail in the UK has endowed us with some ground breaking materials to help us 'think the unthought' with regard to adapting to sea level rise.

We are proud to announce that our guest speaker at this year's AGM on Friday 2nd May will be John Gower, Project Manager of Coastal Communities 2150 who will formally open the exhibition that will be on public view from Sunday 4th May.

Furthermore, our support of Dr Colin Tingle's work on Eco-System services is aimed at exploring how a local currency might be linked to supporting local, enterprises – a daring initiative.

Our encouragement of Jocelyn Jones' recent workshop on food sovereignty sparked a spate of new networks regarding local food production and our collaboration with Dr Tom Crossett on his work on the chalk aquifer is designed to help us think about the value of the chalk under our feet.

Our displays on soil, chalk, river processes, honey bees, the ground source heat pump and Chris Drury's Heart of Reeds are all designed to encourage thinking sustainably in terms of inter-dependence and partnerships within a democratic framework.

It is also a time of transition, as almost a year ago I gave notice to Trustees that I will step down as Director at the end of September 2016.

There is still much to do in terms of laying down a lasting framework on which others can build and to that end I am delighted that we have not only been able to develop and expand the work of Steve Savage on the fresh water ecology of the site but also to incorporate Sally Christopher's specialist work with the Nature Corridors group of adults with learning disabilities and especially their new Facebook page which can be found at :

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Nature-Corridors-For-All/342870339186400?ref=stream>



*Above:
The Environment Agency recognises the outstanding contribution of Dr John Parry to the Coastal Communities 2150 project. As a member of the Coastal Futures Group John led the engagement with young people and continues to give the project's materials and messages a platform through the Linklater Pavilion and in schools. He was instrumental in developing the local Environmental Youth Initiative which launched at the CC2150 Closing Conference with the handover of the baton in Brighton on Wednesday 12 February 2014. John is also setting up a twinning between Priory School in Lewes and Pieter Zeeman in Zierikzee, the Netherlands*

Our most immediate challenge is to secure further funding from Adult Social Care for the next three years to a point where our ground-breaking work with the beneficiaries is self-supporting. Alongside this we are also bidding, through the Heritage Lottery Fund, to become an underwater webcam freshwater ecology centre in collaboration with the South East Grid for Learning. We also plan to submit an Arts Council bid for a major art project in 2016 in collaboration with ARCC (Activities, Respite, Rehabilitation Care Centres) based in Rye.

These are exciting but challenging times which is why your support as members has, and continues to be, so valuable. Membership is another aspect of our approach that we are looking at in order to provide greater benefits. You have been incredibly loyal and generous in backing us to a point where we can now look seriously at giving something back and we will be working on this and will consult you.

Have a very good summer and we look forward to seeing you.

John Parry.

The Young Person's sea level rise initiative

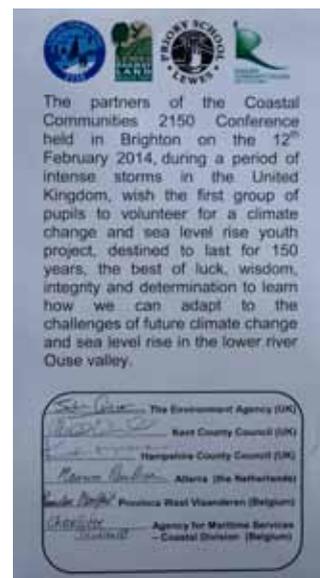
Almost two and a half years since the idea of a young people's sea level rise and flood response group, it was with some emotion that I finally got to hand over a baton to a group of children at the Thistle hotel in Brighton during the final European workshop of Coastal Communities 2150. This extraordinary programme has explored the implications of sea level rise over the next 150 years and the Linklater will become the start of the first ever Climate Change Trail in the UK as well as a community sea level rise hub of ideas and debate.



Inside the baton (see right) which was beautifully made by Caroline Dorling, was a message for the young people signed by some of the delegates and you could hear a pin drop while it was being read by one of the pupils. The group has now met and have formally replaced the Junior Management Board which ran for 16 years and whose members did such a fantastic job.



This is the start of a new venture and I have been joined in it by Jo Higgs from the Environment Agency - she brings so much to the group and we are lucky to have her support.



The first meeting included generous inputs from Tom Crossett and Dave Sykes who is featured (left) giving personal insights into how the river Ouse actually works through Lewes.

John Parry

Notice of AGM of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust Ltd **7pm on May 2nd 2014 at the Linklater Pavilion**

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Minutes of AGM held Friday 19th April 2013 and matters arising
3. Annual Report and Accounts year ending 31st October 2013
4. Election of Trustee Members of the Management Committee

Under our Articles of Association half the members are required to retire each year and any Members joining since the last AGM are also obliged to retire. All are able to offer themselves for re-election. Retiring this year and offering themselves for re-election are Jenifer Barton, Roger Beasley, Thurstan Crockett and Martin Fox

5. Appointment of Auditors
6. AOB

Papers for items 2 and 3 have been sent out as a separate booklet with this newsletter. Please bring them to the meeting on May 2nd.

At Approximately 7.30pm: Guest Speaker John Gower

An illustrated talk by John Gower, Project Manager of Coastal Communities 2150 followed by the formal opening of the 'sea level rise and adaptation' exhibition that will be on public view from Sunday 4th May.

All are welcome to attend both the AGM and the talk.

Dates for your Diary:

Friday 16th May - Sunday 18th May:

"Prepare for Battle@750" a three day festival to commemorate the Battle of Lewes. A medieval village will be built on the water meadow owned by Lewes District Council and be lived in by up to 150 young people led by Lewes Youth Theatre. On the Reserve itself there will be a democracy tent, music, dance, storytelling, a new play by John Agard, workshops plus food and drink. The festival is open to all and is free to anyone under the age of 25. Ticket prices are £8 for the Friday, 5-11pm: £10 for the Saturday, 2-11 and Sunday, 2-10pm. A three day ticket is available for £25.

Village building sessions will take place over three weekends starting 29th March and ending on the 15th April.

2014 Linklater Sunday openings start: 4th May

From 6th July and throughout August. 'Knowtrash'

A major community event at the Linklater: 'Knowtrash Exhibition' with bookable and drop-in workshops, for schools, families and the general public.

Dr Alison Jolly – a personal tribute

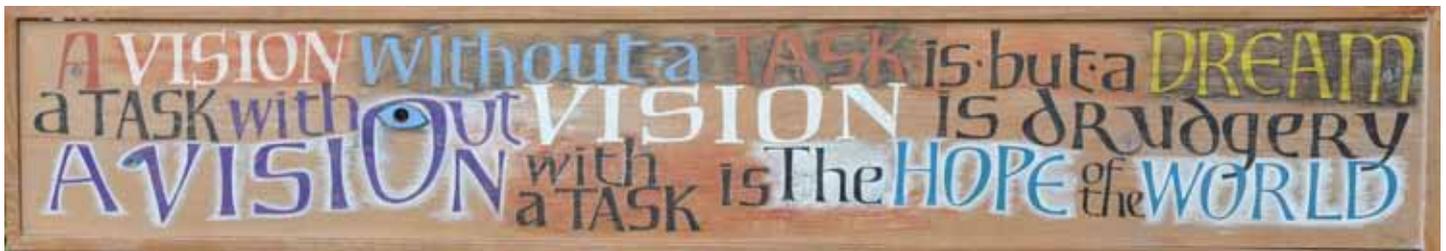
Typically, on first meeting Alison Jolly, she asked for a one-to-one tour of the Railway Land. We reflected on the value of small reserves and it became clear that not only was she a champion of such places but incredibly knowledgeable and pioneering. We 'clicked' and within a few weeks she asked if I would read the first chapter of a manuscript of her life and the Berenty reserve in Madagascar which had become the base of her seminal work on ring tailed lemurs.



I politely returned the chapter after a few days, reacting with some positive comments and she asked if I would read a second chapter. I duly did this and returned it, again with some positive comments. This was Alison's way – to test the waters steadfastly and then to pounce! This time, she asked if I would look at the whole manuscript and no longer be so polite about it – 'tear it apart, John, and give me your honest view. You are the reader I have been looking for, for 7 years.' So began a friendship of respect and honest comment. The manuscript was a fascinating read but with some lapses of continuity and sometimes pages that I just found boring. After a month and with trepidation, I returned the manuscript covered in places with scratchings out, questions and hesitant suggestions. Back came a warm and generous 'thank you' card for doing exactly what she had hoped I would do.

Little known to me, the final manuscript winged its way to New York and about a year later 'Lords and Lemurs' was published – it arrived with a card from Alison saying, 'A success with Houghton Mifflin and I think the RLWT should benefit too, please find enclosed cheque.' You could have knocked me down with a feather.

Alison and Richard's continued support, especially in those early days of the Linklater vision has been inestimable. As the building was nearing completion, they asked if I would accept, on behalf of the Trust, a little something from a defunct United Nations annex in New York. Holding back the tears, I mumbled, 'Of course, it's wonderful' and have never been patted so hard on the back as Richard thundered, 'Excellent, we hoped you would accept it and you have!' The anonymous words carefully set by John Skelton now have pride of place in Reception.



They are a constant challenge – a typically high standard for which to aim and, for me, one of the bedrocks of the idea of using places such as the Railway Land as a 'place to think with.' We remember Alison with great affection and are privileged that she felt our cause was worthy of her finely tuned and up to now, anonymous support. Her wish to be remembered in some way linked to the project is an honour and it will be a sad yet joyous moment when we will unveil something very special, yet typically understated, in the summer.

John Parry.

Madagascar Project Report:

Dr Alison Jolly who died in February was a generous and influential supporter of the RLWT. She introduced us to Dr Hanta Rasamimanana and her research which we have encouraged.

High plateau almost pristine forest conservation: an indoor/outdoor learning strategy for suburban children.

Dr Hantanirina Rasamimanana with RLWT funding has written a conservation project for the remaining primary forest on the royal hill of Ambohimanga, an area surrounded by grasslands and threatened by fires. Ambohimanga is the ancient capital of the 19th Century kingdom of Madagascar. It is an UNESCO world heritage site due to its cultural significance. It is visited by both Malagasy and foreigners, being only 21 km from the present capital, Antananarivo. Ambohimanga means “Blue Hill”. Blue is the color of sacred things in Madagascar. Its “palace” complex includes the one-roomed wooden house of the original king and Victorian-era houses built for later queens, as well as an impressive fortress wall, stuccoed with the whites of 6 million eggs.



On the flanks of the hill grows about 8-10 ha of sacred forest. It has been protected by people but has already been threatened by burning. The plateau of Madagascar consists of grass-covered hillsides and valleys growing irrigated rice. Like the South Downs this is an artificially maintained ecosystem. The South Downs are maintained by grazing alone, but the Plateau is maintained by burning to produce a “green bite” of new shoots for livestock at the end of the dry season. Madagascar is about 2 ½ times the size of Great Britain. The 90% of Madagascar with no original forest is mostly burned and reburned grass. There are still a few other areas of original plateau forest but all are much further from Antananarivo than Ambohimanga, which offers people from the capital a chance to see what their native habitat was like before its transformation by humanity. Like the Railway Land, the forest is small and much in need of restoration, but important because it is accessible, educational and sacred.



Alison, Hanta and two research students

From research to concrete solutions:

Three students will do their 5th year Masters in Education theses on the project: two on forest edge grasses and their potential to aggravate or impede fire, and one on environmental education focused on the forest of Ambohimanga. Initial field trips enabled the students to investigate forest-edge grasses and the potential of extending the present guided tours with an option to visit the forest.

A full grass inventory in the different ecosystems, from burned savanna, intact savanna to forest revealed 12 different grass species in and outside the forest and they have their specific feature regarding the fire action. Each grass species behaves differently against the fire. Some are resilient and grow again and again after burning while others die and disappear. Many others need the fire to grow again. Moreover, combustible traits vary from one to another grass. The longer the grass burns, the more it spreads the fire, it is resilient to fire. A grass with high combustibility burns out quickly preventing the fire to spread away such as *Hypahenia ruffa*, (see right) used in handcraft and for brooms and baskets.



Exhibitions have been organized in some schools around

Antananarivo by using posters that show the importance of the grasses in maintaining the stability of an ecosystem in perpetual evolution because of the fire.

From education to action: responsible children who care for their environment

The 5th grade pupils of the public primary school of Ambohimanga were taught about the interaction between fire and grass using fieldwork observation and experimentation on grasses. Their final project was to improve their school surroundings. They were taken outdoors to observe what should be improved around their school. The school is surrounded by some dwellings, agricultural clearings, savanna, trees, and a lot of rubbish. Then we gathered pupils' ideas about their environment and its related problems or weakness. Pupils identified problems and with enthusiasm they proposed 4 projects. First to implement a garden around the school, second to built a toilet covered with the high combustible grass as a roof so it would not burn the timber. Third to put some trash containers in the school with panels telling pupils to put the trash in there and not outside and fourth to plant *Hypahenia ruffa* all around the forest to preserve it from fire. We lack experience to help the children to draw up their plans for the project and build a model with papier-mâché. That would be an art activity in schools, but this is the kind of program never initiated in Malagasy schools, and a skill we wish to learn. We want children to be brought to the forest to study the plants and eventually the animals there. Such activity needs school director's and teachers' support which does not exist in public schools, so we decided to switch our action to a private school.



A newly established school called "Brightness School" is located in the suburban southern area of Antananarivo. The school mainly recruits roaming children who have little chance to finish and succeed schooling without external support. Currently, we intend to include Environmental Education in the school curriculum with teachers' and students' active involvement following step by step the environmental education objectives. The teachers have already received preliminary training but more training is always needed.

For this first school year 2013-14, 100 primary school students, from grade 1 to 5, with their teachers will be led to Ambohimanga hill, every 2 months in turn, to appreciate and to participate in the preservation of the original high plateau forest. Brightness School's teachers and children plus guides and botanists from the project will work together to make an inventory and to identify plant species with its local uses. Such information will be carved in signs indicating the important and endemic trees of the forest. As one of the few remaining original high plateau forest, students will be also involved in the reforestation program, already initiated by the Guide Association, by setting up a local tree nursery, planting trees and reforesting burned and eradicated forest surfaces. The forest will be mapped in order to improve visitors' safety.



The project will be evaluated in July 2014 by means of the national exam CEPE , some internal ones and by observing the state of the school's surroundings. Some quiz questions are expected from the Railway Land as part of an information exchange. From February to June 2014 we are conducting fieldwork in the forest. Between January and June we will be implementing the tree nursery and writing materials for the signs, and the funds from the RLWT will pay for this work.

Dr Hanta Rasamimanana

February 2014 - Photographic Competition and Exhibition

The photo exhibition was a real success. We had approximately 250 visitors over the six days, and the 'people's choice' was **Jon Tooley's** wonderfully dramatic picture of a cormorant. (see below)



Norman Baker MP attended the opening reception and made his choice of the three category winners, and the best under 16 photographer.

'Structures' : trees against the sky by Sarah (see right)

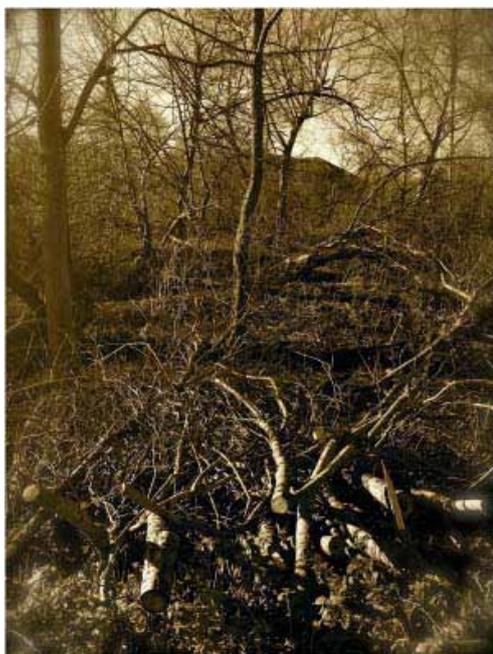


'Surprise': Richard Johnson's picture of the cycle rings with Jane McIntosh peeping through. '

Reflections' : Ed Kirby's two boys standing in golden water in the scrape.

(and below)

The under 16 winner: Tom Bradley's sepia picture of branches.



Geoff Bush generously provided vouchers from 'Lewes Framers' as prizes. He awarded 'Commended' to the high scoring photos in the 'people's choice'.

Natasha Stonestreet, Birds flying: Ed Kirby, Frosty Dogs and Bridge: Robert Cash, Wall: Dawn Parsons, Heart of Reeds : Richard Johnson Winterbourne trees: Paula Stanyer, Dog reflecting: Miranda Kemp, Floods: Cyrus Lai Pak Lam, Reflections: Joe Rideout, Reflection: and Angus, Golden tree.

About 30 people came for the final reception when the presentations to the winners were made by Mayor Ruth O'Keeffe.

Next year's competition is being run in conjunction with the National Trust, linking Black Cap and the Railway Land, and the categories include 'battle', 'weather' and 'timeless qualities'.



So get your cameras out to capture all the relevant Battle of Lewes events in 2014 - Prepare for Battle 750 is being held on the Reserve during the weekend of 16-18th May.

Bird Report - Checking on the Birds

Walking round the Railway Land Reserve is always worthwhile whatever the weather. If it is hot suncream and sun hats are the order of the day. If it is wet, wellies and waterproofs are donned. If there is a biting wind and snow, anoraks are firmly zipped up, hats pulled down over our ears and gloves keep our fingers warm and so we have a relaxed stroll or bracing walk enjoying the sights, sounds and scents in our little jewel of a nature reserve.



Black headed gull: Chroicocephalus ridibundus ©RSPB

HOWEVER, those of us who check on the numbers and species of birds around on a particular morning have a difficult job. We have to be able to use binoculars without them getting covered in rain or alternatively becoming fogged by our cold breath. We have to be able to write down our observations without our fingers becoming frozen or without our notes being reduced to a mush by the rain as we need to decipher our writing later. If it is hot, or extremely wet or blowy, the birds may well be hiding away and prove impossible to see.

We birders usually go out in pairs and as we all seem to be busy people, arranging a mutually convenient day can be tricky. If the date has to be re-arranged because of hopeless weather it gets even trickier. Therefore I reckon that to go out every two weeks since the New Year to count the birds, given the weather we have had has taken some dedication on the part of the bird team!

Of course the varying weather conditions also make for interest. Recently one of us has fallen full length in the mud and I got a boot full of water when negotiating what is normally a sound path.

Some of our regular paths became no-go areas and it is fun to see the mallards swimming about in what is usually woodland. Our bird numbers have been affected too, as the meadows, while rich in invertebrates in the ditches, are usually low on bird numbers but the flooding has enabled them to meet the needs of many herring and blackheaded gulls. I must admit that we do enjoy what we do and if anyone would like to join us, please email me for more details.

Leonie Mercer

leonie.m@tiscali.co.uk

Highly commended photo of herring gulls taken by Natasha Stonestreet during this winter's flooding



Renewal of Membership

If you are already a Life Member or pay us by standing order **thank you**.

We rely on the continued interest and support of our members and are holding the annual membership fee at £10 for another year.

I have attached a copy of the renewal form for you to use if you haven't renewed your membership of the RLWT for 2014. It is very important for us to claim £2.50 Gift Aid on membership contributions if you are a UK tax payer, so please use the form when you send your remittance. Contact me if you would like to pay by standing order or want to check on your membership status.

I hope that the different projects and partnerships described in this newsletter by John Parry have encouraged you to remain members of the RLWT.

We particularly appreciate the practical volunteer support that many members give us by hosting and helping at events.



The Pepler family
(see left) are regular
Sunday afternoon hosts.

If you would like to join our
volunteers please contact
me by email or phone.
(see below).

Pat Rigg,
Membership Secretary

For access to past newsletters or to see this
printed version in full colour go to:

www.railwaylandproject.org

& click 'newsletters' in the left hand column

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Membership Renewal / Application

Forename:.....Surname.....

Address:.....

Town:..... Post Code:.....

Tel No:.....email:.....

I wish to become a member / renew my membership of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust (RLWT) and receive quarterly newsletters and make the following payments

Annual membership £10 (minimum per household) £.....

Donation towards RLWT funds £.....

I would like to receive newsletters by email (tick if applicable)
note: receiving newsletters by email frees up £1.20 of your subscription for other RLWT projects and services

I understand that the information I have provided above will be retained for membership records only; held securely and only processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998

Gift Aid declaration – please tick ONE of the following

Please treat

- the enclosed gift as a Gift Aid donation OR
- all gifts of money that I make today and in the future as Gift Aid donations OR
- please do NOT claim Gift Aid on this donation

Signed:..... date:.....

You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or capital Gains Tax for the year (6 April one year to 5 April the next) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that RLWT will reclaim on your gift.

Please notify RLWT in due course if you

1. Want to cancel this declaration
2. Change your name or home address or
3. No longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains

Tax claimed by the Charity - the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 you give on or after 2008

If you pay Income Tax at the higher rate, you must include all your gift Aid donations on your Self assessment tax return if you want to receive the additional tax relief due to you

Please return this form to:

Pat Rigg, 9 Barn Stables, De Montfort Rd, Lewes BN7 1ST

Tel: 01273-487798 - email: patspur9@gmail.com

