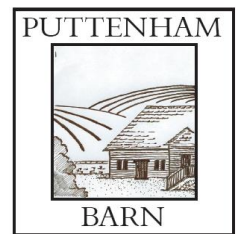


# **PUTTENHAM BARN BUNKHOUSE**

## **Newsletter – Autumn 2024**



### **2024 has been a year of changes and trying out new ideas for Puttenham Barn**

*“I am on the final stage of my 2-month, 1000 mile walk from John O`Groats to my home in Thanet, Kent. Tomorrow I will start the North Downs Way which will take me most of the way home. Puttenham Barn was a lovely place to sleep. The brilliant facilities and friendly wardens made my stay just perfect. Thank you to all involved in this wonderful bunkhouse. - Caden”.*  
(Entry dated 27 October 2024 from the Visitors Book.)

#### **Hello Dear Friends and Supporters,**

Well, here we are at the end of another amazing year in the history of our Puttenham eco venture, for the doors of Puttenham Barn bunkhouse have finally closed on our 2024 season – and what a season! This year we were able to continue offering a welcome until early November thanks to our voluntary wardens and wonderful “behind the scenes” back-up team. During the course of any one year an immeasurable amount of time, energy, imagination and commitment is given to the Project – at least some of which is reflected in the pages that follow – and for this our charity Trustees are enormously grateful.

**Our Visitors Book...** The above quote, as you can see, is from our Barn Visitors Book, a volume started by Chris Meeks on the first day we opened – 7 May 2005. As it happens, this ‘Book of the Barn’ became full exactly at the end of our 2024 season, so we aim to begin anew for 2025! Because the old book represents a meaningful part of our Project’s history, we would very much like to have it beautifully bound for the future, and wonder if there is a supporter who might be tempted to fund this for us...

**Welcoming outdoor folk...** Again and again when looking at feedback received we read and hear of the welcome that visitors receive at the Barn. Our predominant usage, in harmony with our objectives, is by walkers and cyclists, especially being located alongside the North Downs Way and Pilgrims Way.

We are delighted that the past couple of years or so have particularly attracted a steady trickle of pilgrims staying with us, no doubt helped by media coverage about pilgrimage. We suspect there is potential for this trickle to turn into a stream and, responding to this, have produced a Puttenham Pilgrimage postcard designed to encourage more such usage. Some cards have already gone to places such as the South Downs National Park Information Centre at Midhurst and others to a number of churches. We would love to get it out to many more places but to be honest our efforts in so doing are being seriously thwarted by the high cost of postage; for this reason, any donation to help us in that way would be very much appreciated. And, if you can help us by taking a quantity of postcards to deliver personally in your travels, then please phone Chris Meeks – 01483 422774. The invitation is for you to be our Ambassador!



Follow our latest activities throughout the year on our Facebook page <https://facebook.com/puttenhambarn>

We are also now on Instagram - [https://www.instagram.com/puttenham\\_barn/](https://www.instagram.com/puttenham_barn/)

**Happenings during 2024.** Although the Independent Hostels UK survey in the spring seemed to show that two thirds of hostels were reporting similar or better levels of bookings for 2024, we knew that we still had to work hard for our bookings. Although there was a lot of activity on our social media pages and website, we still struggled to successfully convert online marketing to actual bookings.

So, we have been creative! You can see all of our projects within the newsletter, but one bears special mentioning here. Our first project was spearheaded by one of our wardens, Simon Harrold, who created a walking weekend package centred around staying at the Barn. Lots of research went into the history of the area and testing the route, and we were excited to get people booked on! Sadly, there were no takers for the July or September weekend offer, so we will try again in 2025.

We also welcomed newly-trained warden Rosie Hawley to our team this year, and she has already been a big help in our work promoting the Barn to Pilgrims but also being there for so many last-minute bookings. Gemma Tighe was a huge help to Tish when Puttenham residents came to eat at the Barn for the Safari Supper, Simon Harrold has tirelessly worked on creating packages that are ready-made for guests, Sukey Montford is building her own cycling network empire centred around Puttenham Barn, and our local wardens have just been so valuable in keeping the day-to-day going: Chris Loveless, Colin Edwards and Hilary Carvell. A big thank you also goes to Hazel Putland, our gardening volunteer – the garden just gets more and more beautiful and it is finally given the love it deserves.

### ***Neighbouring hostels...***

The importance of working in harmony with like-minded folk to mutual benefit is again and again amplified by building positive relationships. With this in mind, we have encouraged the formation of a 'Friends of Tanners Hatch' group, part of seeking to find a more secure future for that Hostel (16 miles east of Puttenham along the North Downs Way) as well as our own venture. We are doing our best to foster imaginative steps which hopefully will in time lead to Tanners Hatch once again opening its doors to individual walkers and cyclists for the benefit of the whole open-air movement. There is optimism that this will also lead to a more secure future for both ventures.

The other exciting news is of the former Holmbury St Mary YHA, recently renamed the Hurtwood Hostel, which is now independent yet still under the "YHA umbrella". A Cycle Hub is due to open there in early 2025 incorporating the hostel, a cafe and specialist bike shop.

On the theme of working together, we acknowledge with deep gratitude the invaluable contribution made by Sam Dalley and Independent Hostels UK. Importantly, IHUK gives support and encouragement to small hostels, Camping Barns and the like, yet also pioneers other more out-of-the-ordinary happenings such as the Parliamentary Reception held in April 2024 – see separate report on Page 4.

### ***Our finances in 2024***

Looking overall at our finances, the signs are that despite substantial efforts by our volunteers (as most of you know, we employ no paid staff) income has been overtaken by expenditure to the extent that at the time of writing our charity is anticipating a deficit in the region of £1000 for the current financial year.

*Please*, therefore, can you help us by, for example, publicising Puttenham Barn within any other outdoor organisations of which you might be a member, or by giving us a donation? Our somewhat loose-knit supporters base could be enlivened if we had someone new who could take on building this up... If this is a role for you, please contact our Volunteer Co-ordinator Tish on [support@puttenhambarn.uk](mailto:support@puttenhambarn.uk)

*Grateful thanks to Chris Meeks and Tish Piwowarek for this overview.*

## OUR 19<sup>th</sup> YEAR OF WELCOMING VISITORS

A reasonable number of walkers, cyclists and others seeking simple but caring accommodation in our beautiful area enjoyed the unique warm welcome offered by our volunteer wardens during the 2024 season. We continue to seek ways of spreading the word about our facilities as so many people still say they only found us by chance.

### Weekend stay by The Devon Young Ringers

A first for us: we were delighted to welcome a bell ringing group for a two-night sole booking. Elena Brake, Young Ringers Co-ordinator for the Guild of Devonshire Ringers kindly sent us a report on their eventful trip.

*'In July 2024, Devon Young Ringers enjoyed a weekend stay at Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse. We brought a team of under-18 church bell ringers to Puttenham, and travelled from there on the Saturday morning to compete in the Ringing World National Youth Contest in London!*

*The ages of our band ranged from 10 to 15, and we had the chance to ring at some really famous bell towers in London, they did us proud! Devon Young Ringers came an impressive 6th place out of 14 in the 6-bell call change competition.*

*During our stay at Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse we also very pleased to be invited to ring the bells at Puttenham Church, just across the road from the Barn and we joined in for Sunday service ringing at nearby Seale before we headed home.*

*We were so impressed by the accommodation and the hospitality of both Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse and the bell ringers who welcomed us to ring at their churches.*

*We spent our Friday and Saturday evenings round the table in the bunkhouse playing card games and enjoying food prepared in the well stocked kitchen.*

*The accommodation was spacious and perfect for our needs, we hope to be back again!*



Ringing in St John the Baptist Puttenham Church



Outside St James Garlickhythe Church, London



Relaxing in the Barn kitchen after so much hard work!

*Photos by Chris Bass*

Our warden Ben added the following comment in his follow-up notes: *'The bell ringers had left the Barn in tippety-top condition. They can come again!'*

## ANOTHER BUSY YEAR OF VARIED AND CONGENIAL ACTIVITIES

### **Visit to Parliament - by Morag Warrack**

Morag reports:

*'In my role as trustee of Puttenham Bunk Barn I attended a Parliamentary Reception in April which was hosted by Sarah Dines, MP for Derbyshire Dales, Victoria Lady Warwick of Visit England (the new name for the English Tourist Board), Sam Dalley of Independent Hostels UK and Lord Patrick McLoughlan, a previous W Derby MP.*



*People from all over the UK were present at the reception, all of them passionate about the beautiful areas where they live, from far north of Scotland to Cornwall and Wales. Many hostels are run as small charities, but most are run as small businesses by people who choose this as a lifestyle choice.*

*Sam Dalley, who started the Independent Hostels UK movement 30 years ago said, "We know it tackles people's mental health. It makes people feel better. It regenerates local visitor economy such as transport, pubs, shops, cafes and outdoor activities, and addresses loneliness and other emotional issues."*

*There's a website and a great guidebook for Independent Hostels in the UK and there are now five independent hostels for every two youth hostels. Many of the hostels are available for private hire and most of them are in National Landscapes (the new name for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). They have the lowest carbon footprint of any form of accommodation.*

*It was a great opportunity for networking with other small hostels, and Chris Meeks joined the informal gathering in the pub at lunchtime which was the most productive time of all, when we got to know our neighbours from Tanners Hatch!*



Floral delights:  
the containers  
in the barnyard  
still looking  
lovely into the  
autumn  
months.

*Photos by  
Dave Williamson*



## Safari Supper



The Puttenham Safari Supper is a fantastic local event where different properties in the village host a starter or dinner, and participants move between properties to enjoy the meals and meet their neighbours in a social and fun way.

It is organised by Simon and Yasmine Prichard in the village, and participants pay £15 each, which goes towards the Marwick Hall.

On 7 September, Tish Piwowarek and our warden Gemma Tighe prepared a starter of quiche and light snacks for 7 Puttenham residents, who had never been to the Barn before. They enjoyed a quick tour, amazed by this hidden gem in their village, before sitting down for lively conversation round the table.

Everyone then dispersed to other properties for their next course, with Tish meeting new Puttenham faces around a beautifully laid dinner table at Rachel's house.

Dessert was served at the final destination of Marwick Hall, where all 70 participants and hosts gathered in a joyful culmination of a delightful evening.

Our Barn neighbour Jenny also helped by providing napkins, ice and a lovely bouquet of flowers.



*Report and photos by Tish Piwowarek*

## ANONYMOUS DONATION



We were delighted to be presented with this beautiful limited edition signed print by local artist Charles Bone PRI ARCA. Entitled Puttenham Church, it was bought at the annual Puttenham Fete and donated by an anonymous benefactor. It is now safely displayed in the kitchen where the maximum number of people can see it.

Charles Bone lives locally and is a recognised UK award-winning painter and watercolour artist, author and illustrator.

Look carefully and you will see that a corner of the barn is included in the scene!

## Puttenham Village Fete



Grateful thanks to Chris Loveless for loaning this pink gazebo, which helped us to stand out at the Puttenham Fete in June! Further helpers new to the team on the day included Rosie Hawley and Hilary Carvell.

Volunteer Hazel Putland came up with a new activity for children – matching pairs of pictured wildlife found at the Barn - but we found that adults enjoyed the game just as much!

This year's competition for a free stay at the Barn comprised guessing the Barn's location on an aerial map. We congratulate Felicity Taylor, who was the winner randomly chosen from 8 correct guesses.

Well done also to volunteers Tish Piwowarek and Rosie Hawley who got involved in the village tug-of-war event – of course their team won!

*Report and photos by Tish Piwowarek*

## Annual Review held in July

A very good turnout of volunteers and supporters enjoyed a lively and informative Annual Review at the Marwick Hall in Puttenham.

The main topics covered were:

- A review of our last season with Treasurer's report and Trustee plans for the future.
- A talk by Nicole Lazarus, a leading light with the new 'Friends of Tanners Hatch' group, to share with us about the future of Tanners Hatch Hostel (remotely located on Ranmore Common) and the developing relationship with ourselves.
- A report of our involvement with Independent Hostels UK Westminster event.

The afternoon concluded with further suggestions on how we can continue to make a difference.

Special thanks to Hazel Putland for providing teas, coffees and a wonderful spread of baked delights, with an extra cake donated by Martin Barnes.



*Photos by Dave Williamson*



## ***What it's all about...***

On August Bank Holiday Monday volunteer warden Rosie Hawley managed to capture this happy scene as good friends Hugo, Ed and Matt were setting off from the Barn into the (very) blue yonder on their next adventures!

The guest book comment reads:

*'Lovely stay for the three of us cycling the King Alfred's Way! – Thank you for the kindness and hospitality!'*

This picture also reflects the environmental ethos of the Project. In the background is the specially designed cycle shed with solar panels on top.

## ***New Sunday bus service along the Hogs Back***

In September POND trustee, volunteer and avid sustainable transport campaigner Chris Meeks advised:

*'I'm delighted to report that we do now have a new Sunday bus service from Guildford to Alton, from where there are connections to Winchester. If travelling from Guildford to our Barn, alight at 'Hogs Back Picnic Area' (where there's a café). Please note the walking route from there is on paths and difficult after dark.*

*What has happened is a real "milestone" for those of us campaigning for improvements to sustainable transport as well as being a breakthrough POND has wanted for a very long time – one that will indeed be helpful to the Barn.*

See <https://www.stagecoachbus.com/news/south/2024/may/new-sunday-buses-launched-between-alton-and-guildford>

*The 65 bus is the only service going near the Barn that operates seven days a week and – importantly – Bank Holidays as well!'*

Our website travel page shows a map for going both ways between the Hogs Back and the Barn, along with written instructions. See <https://puttenhambarn.uk/travel.html>

## ***Heritage Day 2024....***

On 14 September we were pleased to welcome a steady stream of visitors to the Barn as part of the national Heritage Open Day. Banners brightened up the entrance to the barnyard, guiding people from The Street to our somewhat hidden gem!

Many thanks to the volunteers who showed our visitors around the Barn, answered any questions about our project and offered a cup of tea or coffee.



*Photos by Dave Williamson*

## ....and Weekend Cycling Event

To coincide with the Heritage Open Day and to celebrate the link between Puttenham Barn and other independent hostels connected with the Friends of Nature UK network, volunteers Sukey Montford and Tish Piwowarek worked hard to organise what was a brilliantly successful cycling event.

Sukey travelled to both hostels and then cycled to Puttenham, mapping two new routes. The event was then supported by the relevant Cycling UK groups, with qualified cycle leaders in charge of both free rides. The group from the Court Hill Centre near Wantage, and supported by Cycling UK Wantage, tackled the 60-mile route to the Barn, and Sukey supported the group riding the 30 miles from the Sustainability Centre – The South Downs Eco Lodge (previously called Wetherdown Lodge).

On this wonderfully sunny weekend both groups arrived at the Barn in fine spirits and ready to enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal kindly provided by David Calvert, ex-professional chef and partner of volunteer Tish. After a good night's rest in our comfortable bunk beds and a special cooked breakfast on Sunday morning, the intrepid riders were waved off by our volunteers for their return leg.

We are planning on creating materials for each hostel to keep on site, showing the relevant route and encouraging cyclists to try it in future. We also hope to create active connections between houses on the Friends of Nature network.

Group from  
The Court Hill  
Outdoor Centre  
near Wantage,  
Oxfordshire



Group from  
The Sustainability  
Centre –  
The South Downs  
Eco Lodge



A marvellous  
achievement  
by all!



*Photos by Sukey Montford*



## BITS AND PIECES

### Warden Training

A successful wardens training day took place in May and we are delighted to welcome new volunteer wardens Stephen Angus, Honey Foxwell and Rosie Hawley.

### Broadband

Our 270-year-old Barn has 21st century fibre broadband in anticipation of the national switchover from copper cables next year.

### Earplugs

Former Barn visitor Kat Collman kindly donated a box of 50 eco-friendly earplugs. Together with the 10 'bio' earplugs purchased by Tish for the shop, we are sure they will prove popular with the occasional light sleeper.

### Kitchen upgrades...



After about 20 years of loyal service our old combination microwave oven was feeling its age; a replacement was recently purchased.

Also, following requests from guests and wardens we have provided a few additional kitchen items and added staging for extra food storage. Dave Williamson cleverly upcycled wood saved during the improvements to the dormitory to create this made-to-measure asset.



*Photos by Dave Williamson*

### Village speed limit

We are delighted to report that Puttenham village now enjoys a 20mph speed limit!

## THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER – READERS' TRAVEL TIPS...

We are very grateful to Hilary, a friend of warden Sukey, who wanted to share details of the Barn with Guardian readers in their special October feature on hostels – and there we are on their web site for all to read about our wonderful facility!

<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2024/oct/18/readers-favourite-uk-hostels-bunkhouse>

## FUTURE EVENTS

- Tish Piwowarek is hoping to organise another pub quiz at the Good Intent early next year. This has been highly successful in the last two years, if folk are interested in putting together a team for this event please let Tish know – contact at the end of this newsletter.
- To celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2025 we have exciting plans taking shape for a special Ceilidh at the Marwick Hall on 17 May. If you would like to come and need overnight accommodation at our Barn (free of charge on the Saturday night) please contact us by 6 January, emailing [chrismeeks@chrisjm.plus.com](mailto:chrismeeks@chrisjm.plus.com)  
Please mark the date in your diary – further details to follow!

## THANK YOU, EDDIE AND MARY MEEKS!

Volunteer **Eddie Meeks** has been carrying out our portable appliance testing ('PAT') and maintaining meticulous records since 2008. Eddie now feels it is time to retire from this role, which he generally combined with a spell of wardening together with his wife **Mary** - usually at the start of the season when the Barn is often still on the chilly side. We are hugely indebted to Eddie and Mary's support over the years and send them both our very best wishes.

## TO OUR WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS...DID YOU KNOW?

Many of our volunteers helpfully purchase necessary items for the Barn without reclaiming the expense, just as their small way of 'making a donation'. This generosity is truly appreciated. But did you know that we can claim Gift Aid on cash donations if you are a taxpayer? That's an additional 25p from the government for every £1 donated, but unfortunately we cannot claim it on donated items. So, kind volunteers, please claim your expenses from our treasurer...and then feel free to donate the funds back to us!

## VOLUNTEERING REQUEST

Are there any budding handymen – or indeed women – out there who would like to help volunteer Dave Williamson with the odd jobs that arise fairly frequently at the Barn? Some help in lightening Dave's load would be much appreciated, this is a varied role which provides interesting insights into the operation of the Barn – with a guarantee of picking up useful maintenance tips along the way!

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## WE REMEMBER PAST SUPPORTERS

We were sorry to hear of the recent death of former volunteer **Byron Grainger-Jones**, his son offering a book which he thought we would appreciate. Byron wardened for the Barn over a period of years and for a time served on our managing committee; on one occasion he gave a generous donation to help improve insulation in the area where the warden sleeps. In later years Byron lived in Shropshire, continuing his political interests.

We also remember with appreciation **Keith Wilkinson**. Keith was a life-long cyclist who served in leading roles within the YHA Southern Regional Council, seeking to protect the interests of cyclists and walkers. As someone who valued small and simple hostels, Keith had a particular affection for Puttenham Barn.

## AN INSIGHT INTO OUR BOOKING PROCEDURE

Our 'man in the Netherlands', Website Co-Ordinator Alec McCalden, explains how our booking system functions:



*'Do you ever wonder what actually happens when people use our website to book at the Barn and they click the "Make a booking" button? The action connects them to our long-term booking partner, Free to Book. They're an independent software company founded and run by two brothers in Glasgow, Scotland. We keep the calendar they hold for us updated with available sleeping space, so that the potential visitor can see immediately whether a date is available or not. Each day can be individually priced as well if we want to make mid-week bookings more attractive, for example. We don't actually do this at the moment. The visitor enters the number of people staying, claims discounts for young people or for a full barn, and then enters their personal details. Their cards details are then passed direct to Stripe Inc in the USA, who contact the visitor's bank to confirm the details and take the money, which they then pass to us. We never see or need to know the security details of the transaction. Stripe are now a huge financial services company in San Francisco and Dublin, and founded by two brothers from County Tipperary in Ireland.*

*All this happens within a second or two of the visitor confirming the booking. Free to Book confirms the booking to the visitor with an email, copies that to us for confirmation, and updates the calendar to show reserved sleeping spaces. We usually then manually confirm that with a separate email to the visitor, and suggest that they read our frequently asked questions page on our website so as to know what to expect.*

*After they've had a good time staying at the barn, Free to Book then emails the visitor with a request to give us feedback on how we did. What's really nice is that almost everybody says what a great place it is! We then show their reply on the Reviews page of our website. We're really happy with the arrangement with Free to Book and Stripe Inc. It works well, the costs are reasonable, and it has been very reliable for the whole time we've used it, which is now about 15 years.'*

**Thank you so much, Alec, for your expertise in ensuring this system runs so smoothly!**

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### **And finally...**

Back in March as volunteer Dave Williamson was leaving the Barn after carrying out some odd jobs, he glanced up and saw a man dangling from the church tower.

A specialist company based in Cumbria was fixing the clock dial in place as it had worked loose.

Dave obtained permission to take a second snap from a closer angle.

The abseiler had to wear a bee-keeper's suit due to bees nesting in the tower!



Photos by Dave Williamson

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**~~ Newsletter contributions welcomed by Hilary – [support@puttenhambarn.uk](mailto:support@puttenhambarn.uk) ~~**

***This newsletter is published by Project Oasis North Downs,  
the registered charity that manages Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse***

**Web site: <https://puttenhambarn.uk>**

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