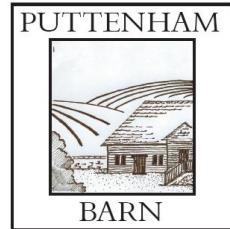


PUTTENHAM BARN BUNKHOUSE

Newsletter – Autumn 2025



Some excellent feedback including this comment from a very experienced hosteller: "These guys really go out of their way to welcome you, so even if you're a lone traveller you're assured of some great characters & informed company"

As the end-of-season work party date approaches we reflect upon another year of welcoming the weary traveller to our unique oasis in the heart of Puttenham. 20 years from our opening season we still greet so many people looking for a very special experience. Successful warden training days took place on 4 occasions in 2025, with a number of new recruits having enjoyed their first duty at the Barn, helping to ensure continuity as we look ahead to the future.

Our many other volunteers give up so much time to keep the project running smoothly, each making their own special contribution. To mention just a few here:

Eric Worpe is repairing the rainwater harvesting system as well as doing other jobs such as Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) and draining down / reinstating the water supply at the autumn and spring work parties. We are so fortunate to have so much expertise on hand. Hazel Putland continues to look after the barnyard beautifully, providing expert knowledge in all things botanical.

Penny Hewitson from the village is now helping out with our laundry needs, along with holiday help from her friend Christine.

David Kirkham has updated the splendid publicity leaflet he produced some years ago; a print run of 1,000 leaflets on recycled paper was organised earlier in the year.

There's nothing like a traditional Ceilidh to bring people together – our event held in May at the Puttenham Village Hall was the perfect way of celebrating Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse's 20th birthday!

The Tanners Hatch Ceilidh Band entertained us with their wonderful music and members of the Friends of the Tanners Hatch group also joined us for the evening – the latest update on this very special hostel can be found on Page 9.



See Page 2 for more photos from this fun evening, as well as a write-up by volunteer Morag.

All Ceilidh photos by Tish Piowarek



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/

JOYFUL 20th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS



Trustee Morag Warrack reports on this memorable occasion:

'Birthday barn dance, community ceilidh, putting the fun into fundraising... however you want to look at it, our May event ticked all those boxes!'

It's now 20 years since the Barn was established - a landmark well worth celebrating, so with the hall decorated, dancers were ready to 'Strip the Willow'!

We're hugely grateful to the fantastic Tanners Hatch Ceilidh Band who so kindly donated their time and energies for the evening. Thankfully, our excellent caller Geoff Chapman was patient with our stumblings, as were the other dancers!

Around 50 people attended and enjoyed the tasty and plentiful buffet brought in from the Good Intent, as well as the raffle and drinks.

A small profit was generated, and thanks to a subsequent very generous anonymous donation, we are delighted that the Barn's 20th anniversary was celebrated in style.

Thanks to all the wonderful volunteers who were involved in the many, many aspects of setting up and running this family-friendly village event.

Same again next year, for a coming-of-age party, perhaps?'



Worthy winner of one of our generously donated prizes was Dave Williamson, here enjoying his £20 voucher from the charming Seale Tea Rooms – we suspect a very popular stop-off for many of our visitors.

STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE POND ENJOY A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Led by Professor of Biology and veteran traveller James Godde, in May a group of 14 university students from Monmouth College, Illinois walked nearly 200 miles on the Winchester-to-Canterbury pilgrimage trail, to follow in the footsteps of the characters of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales written in the late 1300s. A restful night's stay at Puttenham Barn was appreciated by these intrepid souls.

An article written by James can be found at

<https://www.monmouthcollege.edu/live/news/5360-a-stroll-through-england>

Here are some extracts to give a taste of the trip:

Before his group set out, Godde said it received a blessing at Winchester Cathedral. A brief about the pilgrimage reads, "You walk along yew tree-lined paths, over chalk grassland, through expansive meadows, ancient woodland and past babbling brooks, as well as churches, of course.

Upon reaching their destination for the day, the group would enjoy dinner at a local bar and grill, then stay, for the most part, in "OK-ish" hotels," said Godde. "One of the more adventurous places we stayed was a barn that had been converted into a bunkhouse. And the night before we reached Canterbury, we slept on the floor of a church. That was character building. It was not real plush. But I'm sure the students will all remember the night on the church floor."



The group split into two for their departure from Puttenham, fortified by a hearty breakfast kindly dropped off by volunteer Ben Smithies. James Godde is second from right in the right-hand photo.

"We visited three churches a day, on average," James said. "You get a little stamp in your pilgrim's passport at the churches. The students were really excited about that. More of the churches than not were open, and you could go in and use a stamp on a table.

Our longest day was 19 miles, and somewhere between that and 15 miles was pretty much the norm," said Godde. "They were troopers. I was very pleased that England doesn't warm up as quickly as we do. Most days were in the mid-60s, which is good walking weather. We got a little bit wet sometimes, but it was very doable. Near the end, it warmed up, and we hit the low 80s. That was pretty toasty."

A memorable trip indeed for these young people!

HAPPENINGS IN THE BARNYARD

New electric bike charging station

Dave Williamson used his imagination and engineering skills to design and build this electric bike recharging station. Dave reports we were quoted nearly £5,000 for an off-the-shelf unit, so he made one for less than a fiver from a metal box someone had fly-tipped and free wood from various sources which included searching the Puttenham bonfire site.

Our neighbour Ruth kindly donated paint and Dave used a lot of the screws he had kept from when the old garden fence was replaced. So, a truly recycled and up-cycled facility. Great job, Dave!



A bumper year for apples!



Wonderful early October colour in the barnyard – some of the abundant crop from our 'Scarlet Nonpareil' apple tree artistically arranged. Our visitors and barn neighbours are welcome to help themselves to these delicious fruits.

This beautiful variety of English dessert apple with juicy, sweet flesh was discovered in 1773 at an inn in Esher and received the Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1901.

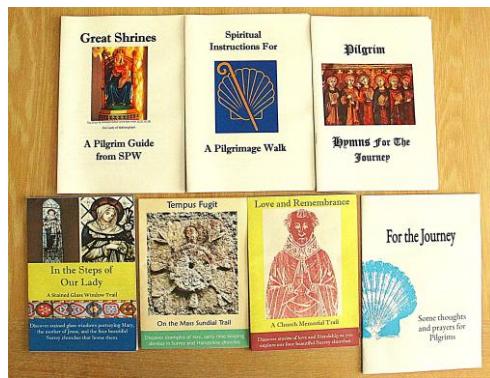
In memory of his parents and following a lot of research on local varieties, volunteer and Trustee Chris Meeks organised the purchase of our two lovely apple trees as one-year-old saplings back in 2012.

All photos by Dave Williamson

BITS AND PIECES

A comment that kept coming up at the regular 'Operations' meetings was that nobody had cleaned the solar panels so on a May evening when he was wardening, Dave Williamson got on with it.

Well done, Dave!



Pilgrim literature produced by Seale, Sands and Puttenham Churches.



Above right - our barnyard neighbour Ruth has kindly loaned the Barn a signed print of Puttenham Church, painted by local artist Charles Bone. Volunteer Dave comments: "It looks like Charles painted it standing in the middle of the road. Considering how dangerous that bend is, he took a big risk."

We all take great care crossing at this blind corner!

A strange caterpillar was found nesting on one of the apple trees in the garden which caused some excitement. Hazel Putland did some research which revealed it was that of the pale tussock moth, often found in hop-growing areas. Dave Williamson managed to get this mentioned along with the Barn in an article submitted to the Woking News And Mail. Unfortunately, the caterpillar apparently became dislodged during Storm Amy.



Photo – Wildlife Trusts

VOLUNTEERING

Company Secretary - Do you or anyone you know have the equivalent of an hour a week to spare? Our current Company Secretary has recently stepped down with our grateful thanks, and we now need some support!

Could you share your skills to help us with a small amount of legal documentation? The annual report and accounts are prepared by the Treasurer but we require someone to file these micro accounts at Companies House.

If you (or anyone you know) might be willing to attend the quarterly Trustees meetings - two are remote and two are at the barn in Puttenham - we'd love to hear from you. As we are run entirely by volunteers, you may also wish to become involved in other opportunities as well.

If interested, please contact trustees@puttenhambarn.uk

Bookings/warden coordinator - Ben Smithies has been carrying out this crucial and demanding role for several years and has decided to step down from the 2026 season. It was felt that the job would be easier if it was split between at least two people, so we plan to have a small working group to put together some new thoughts on how barn bookings / warden management can work. Ideas are needed from anyone who has suggestions or wants to improve the current system, and we are thinking of enticing people to a brainstorming session at the Good Intent. Do get in touch if you feel you could contribute, even in a small way, or indeed would just like to participate in this social occasion.

A third role to be filled urgently is **Social Media / Marketing Volunteer**.

For further details and contact information please visit <https://puttenhambarn.uk/>

Our Charity – seeking further Trustees...

Our charity managing Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse – Project Oasis North Downs (POND) – is looking to the future and seeks to appoint additional Trustees with vision and imagination to further strengthen and guide the organisation. Could this be a role for you?

Within the Trustee group as a whole we need folk with a spectrum of knowledge and skills relating to managing this amazing Project. In short, we need people with an enquiring mind, a strong environmental conscience and well attuned to outdoor activities who in a positive way can contribute towards our Barn becoming even more of a beacon of environmental excellence.

Whilst day-to-day activities of the Barn are handled by our Operations Committee, Trustees operate more strategically and seek in harmony with all our other volunteers to navigate a way forward for the charity. The rewards of being a Trustee include a sense of satisfaction in helping outdoor folk explore the countryside, yet also the companionship of working alongside other like-minded people. There is a minimum of 4 Trustee meetings a year (sometimes held on-line) and reasonable travel expenses are payable.

If you might be interested in becoming involved and would like to explore the possibility without any commitment at this stage, please contact Chris for a chat with one or two of our existing Trustees, or simply to gain further info:

Email chrismeeks@chrisjm.plus.com or phone 01483 422774.

WE REMEMBER PAST SUPPORTERS

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of our friend **Caroline Galloway** was held in July when family and friends gathered at Godalming Quaker Meeting House. Amongst those present were Barn volunteers past and present - David Kirkham, Hazel Putland, Sue Hall, Chris Meeks, Cherry Allan and husband John (who played his flute beautifully for the hymns). Chris in his presentation spoke warmly of Caroline's connection with Puttenham: He explained how on one particular occasion Caroline led a wonderful wildflower walk for us along part of the Pilgrims Way, when she described with her characteristic enthusiasm the plants alongside the route; being a herbalist, this reflected her enormous knowledge of the subject.

Chris found good homes for hundreds of Caroline's natural health books, the financial proceeds from which were divided between at least two different charities, one being our own Project Oasis. Pictured below are two of the items thoughtfully gifted us by her family, for which we are indeed grateful. The mirror is now installed in our shower room while the bench is a more than welcome addition to our garden.



Photos by Dave Williamson & Martin Barnes

Many readers will have enjoyed the 'Round the Hogs Back' bike rides organised by **Martin Taplin**, who sadly died in October 2024. This annual event always included a welcome stop at the Barn for refreshments, with Martin giving a short talk on our Project to spread the word. Martin was also one of our stalwart supporters in the early days, participating in many work parties as the Barn and barnyard slowly took shape.

We send our sincere condolences to volunteer and former Honorary Treasurer Keith Chesterton on the recent loss of his wife **Jill**. Many a cosy Committee meeting was held in the kitchen area of their Guildford home 'Firle', and we know Jill was a loyal background supporter of Keith's myriad roles in the community and volunteering sectors as well as devoting much of her own life to public causes.

A SPRUCE UP OF THE WARDEN'S ROOM...



In August, volunteers Martin Barnes and Dave Williamson took down the sheets forming the false ceiling in the office at the barn, thus revealing the roof space hidden for many years.

The sheets were covered in particles which had blown in through the roof tiles, so they were dusted off in the garden. The roof space was then also spring-cleaned; this included removing traces of the wasp nest from some years ago.

Martin took the sheets home to mend some rents and tears and a week or two later they were carefully put back in place, with Martin scaling the heights of the stepladder and Dave recording the event.

...AND A WELCOME ENHANCEMENT FOR OUR WARDENS' WELL-BEING

An anonymous monetary donation was gratefully received, the accompanying suggestion being that a portion of the sum be put towards an item which would benefit our volunteer wardens.

A practical bedside reading light was decided upon and it seems to be very popular. One warden has found this especially useful, commenting that they now don't have to get out of bed to turn the light off when they've finished reading!



TANNERS HATCH HOSTEL - FUTURE

As we go to press with this newsletter the future of Tanners Hatch, our neighbouring Hostel on the Polesden Lacey Estate, is “on the edge” as to whether it will survive into the future.

As many of you know, our Puttenham Project encouraged ‘Friends of Tanners Hatch’ to be formed, a group of YHA members with vision, imagination and determination who wish to see Tanners continue as a Hostel. Yet more than that, and importantly, they have between them a considerable spectrum of expertise including practical skills and knowledge of the building.

Although the Friends group prepared and submitted a professional Business Plan to YHA demonstrating how Tanners could be viable as a Hostel and managed effectively, the profoundly sad situation is that YHA then ignored the opportunity to work positively with them, instead deciding to surrender its lease back to the National Trust – thus abandoning one of their most iconic and much-loved hostels.



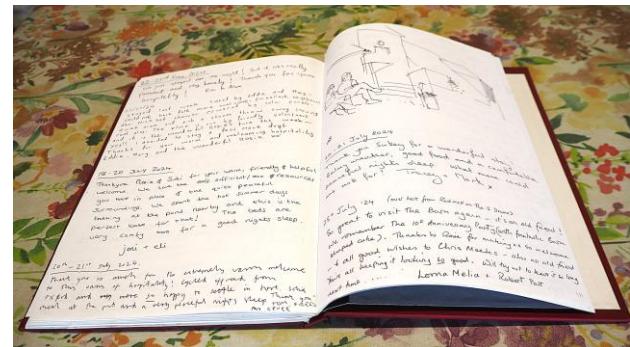
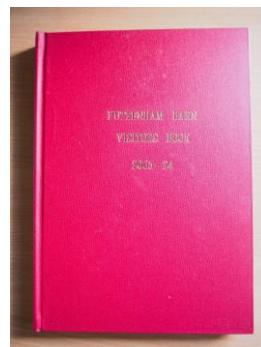
Undeterred, the Friends group recently submitted a formal ‘Expression of Interest’ to the Trust as part of what is now a bidding process for future use of the property; if successful, they envisage creating their own independent charity with a view to Hostel relaunch in 2026. We wish them well in this process and shall continue to give any support that we can to their amazing endeavours.

Tanners Hatch was originally found as a ruin, restored by YHA members and opened in 1947. That same spirit of adventure enabled us to open what is now Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse and remains alive amongst the YHA members who now form Friends of Tanners Hatch. Let us hope they, with our support, can go on to fulfil their dreams.

Chris Meeks – November 2025

RECONDITIONED VISITORS BOOK

We are indebted to Mike Summers, a friend of volunteer Ben Smithies, who has very kindly rebound our original Visitors Book free of charge. After almost 20 years of contributions the cover was looking rather worse for wear; it is now beautifully transformed.



Available for viewing at the Barn, the book is packed with enthusiastic and congratulatory comments by visitors from our opening day in 2005, and is a testament to so many varied and adventurous travels over the years.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT...

As Dave Williamson was driving over to the barn he passed a guy skateboarding along the road from Christmas Pie.

It turned out he was coming to stay at the Barn, so we've had our first guest to arrive by skateboard.

Dan Vadolia stayed for three nights and we are grateful to new Volunteer Warden Sarah Cook for this delightful photo!



APPRECIATION

Finally, **appreciation** from our Barn Trustees to all the wonderful volunteers who play a part in keeping Puttenham Bunkhouse going. Everyone is important and there's a big welcome for you, too, to join in! Grateful thanks, also, to those who give donations or become members, for - in common with a number of other small hostels - finance can be a real challenge. Hopefully a form to subscribe is attached or enclosed if you are able to help us in this particular way.

In 2025 we have celebrated 20 years of welcoming walkers and cyclists to Puttenham Barn: With 2026 on the near horizon, we warmly invite *you* to be part of our future.
- Chris Meeks

~~ **Newsletter contributions welcomed by Hilary – 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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