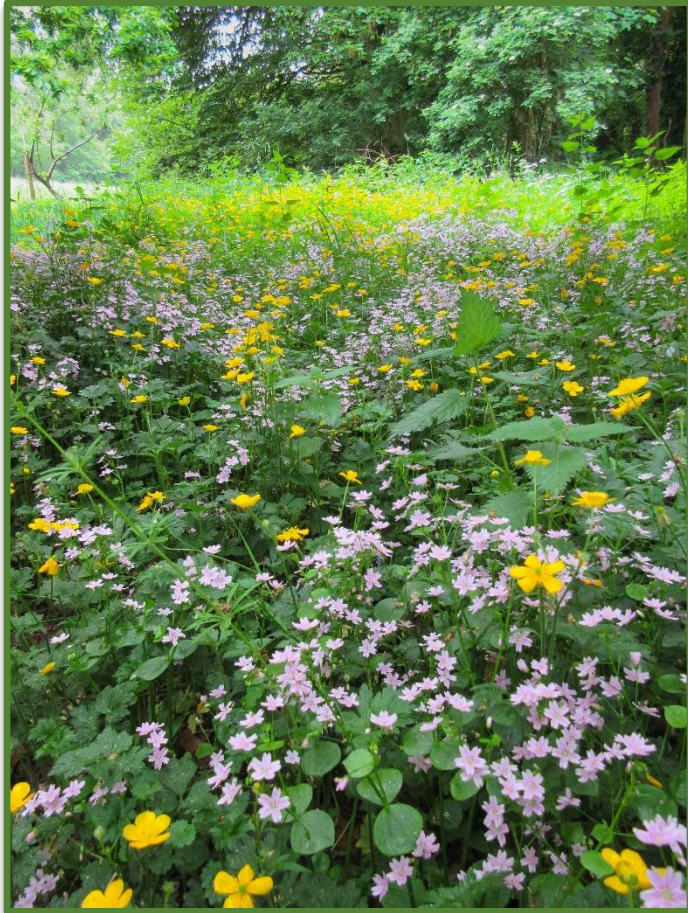


# BRENT ISLAND TRUST



THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

1994 – 2019

## Introduction

Brent Island Trust offers a warm welcome to everyone who is helping us celebrate the Silver Jubilee of our purchase of Brent Island. It is difficult for some of us who were heavily involved in the early days of the campaign to save this precious asset to grasp that this was all 25 years ago!

Much has changed since then – Tom Anderson no longer brings his beef cattle down to graze on the Meadow on frosty Autumn mornings. Foot and Mouth in 2001 ended that, and new restrictions on livestock movements mean it won't resume. Christine Halstead, whose generous donation was the catalyst in setting the whole project in motion, no longer looks down on The Island from her home at 'Riverside'. The Weir and the Linhay have been restored, new gates installed to create easier access at the entrance, and work carried out to protect the riverbank by the 'beach' area upstream of the Weir. We have tightly mown some areas of the meadow in the Autumn and sown Yellow Rattle seed. This plant weakens coarse grasses and allows more wildflowers to flourish. Brent Island has its own website, hosting a treasury of information from our Constitution and Management Plan to updates on our activities, the results of species surveys, and a copy of our regular newsletter to members. The Easter Egg Trail on Easter Saturday has become a fixture for many families and, almost by accident, another source of funds.



**Tom Anderson and his cattle**



**Sowing Yellow Rattle seed**

Some things stay the same. Members still gather in sunshine and rain for regular working parties. We cut back encroaching brambles, keep the paths clear, fill in holes in the Meadow, maintain the Linhay and carry out all the other tasks needed to keep The Island in good shape. We carry out regular surveys of our trees, plants and wildlife. The committee of Trustees meets every two months to deliberate over issues which arise and plan events such as the Christmas Stall. The grass in the

Meadow is cut short once a year, by tractor and mower rather than cattle, and is raked up a week or two later by eager members of the Scouting and Guiding movements. The Island is still a place to be enjoyed by the whole community – early morning dog walkers, mothers bringing babies and toddlers for a mid-morning stroll, school parties discovering the secrets of Nature, families picnicking, children paddling in the river on sunny Summer afternoons and evening strollers watching the bats swoop over the weirpool.

We have received so much support for all we do from the people of South Brent and beyond, whether through membership or at the various events we attend in the village during the year. The success of Brent Island is a success for all of us, whether we are visitors, volunteers or Trustees. To them all we owe a debt of thanks for all we have achieved over the past 25 years, and to them we look for continued support to carry on our work of caring for this treasured haven for the next 25 years and beyond.

**Guy Pannell, Chairman, June 2019**





**Working party, April 2017**



**Brass plaque near the Gate:  
'THE ISLAND  
PURCHASED BY  
PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION  
OPENED  
JUNE 5<sup>TH</sup> 1994'**



**Welcome sign on the Gate:  
'THE ISLAND  
For the protection  
of wildlife and for  
people to enjoy  
BRENT ISLAND TRUST'**

## Brent Island Trust – a brief history

Brent Island is an area of just over three acres, standing below St. Petroc's parish church. Having been a playground for generations of village children it was bought for the community 'for the protection of wildlife and for people to enjoy' in 1994 for the sum of £25,000. The money was raised through a public appeal which attracted donations from across the UK, through fund-raising, and with the help of grants from three local authorities, £2,000 from the Dartmoor National Park Authority and £2,500 each from Devon County Council and South Hams District Council. It is designated as public access land, through an agreement with the DNPA. It is a much loved and regularly used amenity for relaxation and enjoyment of the countryside by people of all ages from the village and a much wider area. We have worked very closely over the years with the National Park, who have helped us in many practical ways, including fencing, the rebuilding of the Weir and in restoring the ancient sluice gate to the leat.

- **1994** Granted charitable status and becomes the Brent Island Trust
- **1995** Winners of Dartmoor National Park Authority's Edward Morshead Award 'for community projects which contribute to the quality of the landscape' for the purchase of The Island and restoration of the Weir
- **1996** Winners of the Association of National Parks Authorities' award for community projects in Southern England and Wales, runners-up in national awards to the multi-million pound Wensleydale Creamery revival
- **1997** Derelict Linhay rebuilt and reopened, with grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Dartmoor Trust, and English China Clays
- **2004** Celebration party on The Island to mark 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- **2010** Small orchard of native apple trees planted in memory of our late Secretary, Don Stansbury, and others
- **2014** Weir strengthened, fish pass improved to meet new conservation standards and bridge repaired. Sluice gate to the leat rebuilt. Party on The Island to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the purchase
- **2015** Yellow Rattle sown in parts of the Meadow to weaken the coarse grasses and encourage wildflowers. First Easter Egg Trail
- **2016** Family Activity Day. New logo and clothing range introduced
- **2017** Bat survey shows we have at least nine of the UK's 18 species flying over The Island
- **2018** Interpretation board placed on The Island. Steps to beach area built. New gate installed to make access easier for all visitors



**10<sup>th</sup> anniversary party**



**20<sup>th</sup> anniversary party with Chairman, Peter Hopwood, and Sarah Wollaston MP**

Brent Island Trust organises regular surveys of species of flora and fauna on The Island which are published on our website and in our Management Plan, which is reviewed at regular intervals. In the early years the Meadow was grazed. Since then we have had the grass cut and raked up to reduce fertility and encourage wildflowers. In recent years the grass has been cut professionally, and the raking carried out by all sections of our local Scouting Group and Guides, who also carry out clear-outs of silt and debris from the leat.





**How times change. Tom Anderson mowing the Meadow in 2003 (above) and John Severn in 2016 (below). Note the addition of high-visibility jacket, ear defenders and smart, shiny paintwork!**

## Wildlife Surveys

Wildlife has been surveyed and recorded on The Island since its acquisition and we now have a healthy list of birds, bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts), fish, insects (especially butterflies, moths and aquatic invertebrates), lichens, mammals (especially bats), reptiles & amphibians, plants & trees and spiders.

The tally of wildflower and grass species in the Meadow now stands at 34 and in total over 100 species if we include those of the entire Island together with its ferns and trees. The Island's population of the much over-looked bryophytes is very impressive with a total of 59 including the nationally-rare many-leaved Pocket Moss.



**Many-leaved Pocket Moss**

Photo: Mike Ingram

Surveys of bats have revealed at least 10 species flying over The Island (out of the UK's total species count of 17) and is worth listing :

Soprano Pipistrelle	Daubenton's bat	Natterer's
Common Pipistrelle	Noctule	Leisler's or Noctule
Pipistrelle species	Barbastelle	Lesser Horseshoe
Whiskered or Brandt's	Myotis species	



**Yellow Stagshorn  
fungus found on a  
rotting tree stump**



**Extracts from the booklet published in 1999 to celebrate the Trust's first five years, written by then Chairman Guy Pannell and the late Don Stansbury, our Founding Secretary, whose efforts were a major factor in our success in buying Brent Island.**

*(These have been abbreviated, and updated where necessary)*

Five years ago [*in 1994*] the people of South Brent showed just what they could achieve if they put their minds to it. The news that an area known as The Island was coming on the market sparked off a chain reaction that is still going on, demonstrating how a community can play a vital role in acquiring and managing conservation and amenity land.

The concept had a small beginning in the Autumn of 1993. A few of us who knew The Island and appreciated its value to the village got together and agreed to call a public meeting. The rest, as they say, is history. The meeting was attended by 50 people, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of launching an appeal to buy The Island "for the benefit of the public". That aim was quickly refined into the twin objectives that we still pursue - that it is a place "for the protection of wildlife and for people to enjoy".

The campaign was an unbelievable success. Well over 100 people came to explore The Island when we arranged a public viewing in November. Money flowed in after a generous donation from Christine Halstead set the ball rolling. We found strong support from a number of organisations, with grants and donations totalling more than £9,000, including major backing from Devon County Council, South Hams District Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. But as is still the case today it was the personal commitment of so many individuals that proved to be the key to success, with personal donations and fund-raising events accounting for nearly £18,000. By Easter 1994, the deadline set by the vendors, we had reached our target of £26,500. In April we became the owners of The Island, and after preparatory work by our members, and with valuable help from the National Park, we were ready for the official opening by naturalist Kelvin Boot on Sunday 5th June.



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The original 'For sale by public auction' notice



**Opening of Brent Island by Kelvin Boot, naturalist, on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1994**

That was a marvellous occasion, which many there will never forget, but it was only the start of an ambitious enterprise. There was no time to relax and recover from our efforts. We had the Weir to worry about, a derelict Linhay which demanded a decision, and we had to agree how to manage the land itself. Whilst addressing these, we also succeeded in registering what had been the Brent Island Group as a charitable trust in just about record time. Committee members have been required to demonstrate considerable dedication and powers of endurance as we tackled the projects one by one. But at every stage we consulted our members, and it's this partnership which has proved the foundation of our success, with so much valuable advice and practical help on hand.

In the Autumn of 1994 we invited members to help us draw up our first management plan. That and the subsequent yearly modifications (*now five-yearly*) have proved a highly effective blueprint for reconciling a flourishing wildlife with open access for people - and dogs! By the Summer of 1995 we had raised more than £5,000 to fund the rebuilding of the Weir, which was on the point of collapse. It was a project which drew enormous public attention, whether in the shape of volunteer help, or simply to marvel at the men managing huge machinery so delicately as they manoeuvred huge boulders into position. Next was the Linhay, and after consulting our



members in a spirited debate, we embarked on an ambitious scheme to reconstruct it during the Summer of 1997. Once again, we raised the funds - more than £18,000, with a major contribution of £13,000 from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The result fits well into the landscape, as an attractive shelter for wildlife and people and as the focal point for information about The Island and the Trust.

The Island is regarded as a model for co-operation between public authorities and the community. It shows how people can act together to enhance their environment. It's the kind of initiative which could lead to many more amenity areas being provided than if we relied solely on the public purse to buy and manage them. Our efforts have won recognition locally and nationally. We have been runners up, and in 1997 winners, of the Edward Morshead Award for conservation projects within Dartmoor National Park. This led to our being put forward in the national contest for projects from all the National Parks, winning the regional section and being placed second overall.

The Lottery Heritage Fund has taken a keen interest in the Linhay project, with a key adviser making a visit earlier this year to see the fruits of public and community partnership.



**Edward Morshead Award 1995. Don Stansbury (Secretary), Mavis Hewitt (Treasurer), Guy Pannell (Chairman) and Dave Hewitt**



**Association of National Parks Award 1996 for best community project in Southern England. On the left is Ian Mercer, Secretary General of the Association of National Park Authorities, and on the right Don Stansbury, our founding Secretary**



**South West Heritage Heroes Awards at Powderham Castle, March 2005, celebrating the Weir improvement project. Dennis Hall, Jennie Mitchell (committee members), Mike Roberts (Chairman)**



## Bargain for an island race

*One Devon village has ensured that it will always have its own nature reserve, says **Brian Pedley***

**Feature article in the Daily Telegraph on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1996**

It's good to know The Island is appreciated by those outside Brent, but it's even better to know it's loved by those who live here or make visits. We have a place that is used, and cared for, by almost every section of the community. Parents bring children down to picnic and enjoy the meadow, the trees and the river. Youngsters from the school use it for projects and as a delightful place in which to learn about Nature. Outside school time they can splash and run and have fun. Teenagers relax in the Summer sun. And for everyone from under eight to over 80 The Island is a place to enjoy nature's gifts.





**Puffs picnic for St. Petroc's toddlers**

This is thanks largely to our flourishing membership - standing now at more than 150. Without them it would be impossible to fund our work and find the volunteers we need. Most importantly our members demonstrate the value The Island has for the community. It's their enthusiasm and interest which makes The Island what it is, and it's important we sustain this support if we are to hand on The Island in good heart to future generations. Do encourage friends, neighbours and anyone who treasures The Island to join us in caring for it. Five years has passed very quickly, but we want The Island to be one of Brent's jewels in another 500 years.

## **The Trust**

The Island is owned by the Brent Island Trust (registered charity number 1041415) and vested in the Official Custodian for Charities (3rd November 1995.) The Constitution of the Trust as a charity was adopted on 28th June 1994. Members of the Executive Committee are Trustees under charity law and as such are responsible for managing The Island in accordance with the constitution and with charity law.

The Charity's objectives are:-

to hold and manage for charitable purposes only, that land in South Brent described in the conveyance dated 12th April 1994 between Mary Bench on the one hand and Christine Halstead, Mavis Hewitt, Don Stansbury and Guy Pannell on the other (hereinafter called The Island) for the public benefit and in particular to:-

1. Protect and conserve the natural and historical interest of the land
2. Provide for the recreational and educational use of the land in the interests of social welfare.

### **The Weir**

When we bought The Island the Weir was in an advanced state of decay and very dangerous. Rivers do not like weirs and will remove them unless they are kept in repair. When two mills took their power from this weir it was kept in good repair, but for thirty years prior to our purchase it had been slowly collapsing. Most of the parapet was still in place but below it the river had dug a trench six or seven feet deep which trapped the water and churned it, creating immensely powerful currents. Because the parapet sloped nine inches from the bank to the leat gate people, and that of course included children, could walk part way across the top of the Weir even in quite high water and that was very dangerous.

After a great deal of preparatory work we were able to carry out our first restoration of the Weir in the Spring and Summer of 1995. About 75 tons of rock and 14 boulders weighing about four tons each were used to pack the area behind the Weir wall and create the fish pass, using heavy machinery such as swing shovels and dumper trucks. Then, under the supervision of Dave Hewitt, a number of young men worked through the Summer holidays to secure the surface.



*The Weir has been further strengthened twice – first after a great storm surge in the river carried away some of the structure on the night of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2000/1<sup>st</sup> January 2001, and again in 2014 after further flood damage to the fish pass. This last operation included pumping tons of liquid concrete into the structure to form a solid mass, while retaining the attractive stone surface of the weir slope. The fish pass was strengthened and deepened to meet new conservation standards, and the whole operation, costing in the region of £40,000 was co-ordinated by the Westcountry Rivers Trust, who secured much of the funding.*



**The Weir during reconstruction**





**The Weir today**

## **The Bridge**

The bridge was inspected in 1994 for safety by the Dartmoor National Park Authority who found it to be in a good state. We were advised to dress the surface with gravel and this is done occasionally. *A professional survey was carried out in 2011 by Consulting Engineers Aecom, who recommended some repairs. These were carried out in the Summer of 2014.*



## The Linhay

There has been a linhay, an open fronted agricultural building where animals can shelter or implements be stored, on The Island since at least 1842 when the tithe map was drawn.

The purpose of renovating it was to preserve it for its historical interest whilst also providing for people and for wildlife. It is a place for information so that people can better understand what they experience and share and support the use of this land. The key to what we are doing is communication. When people see brambles and nettles and ivy they think it is waste ground but this is not waste ground. Brambles and nettles and ivy are very important for wildlife.



**The Linhay before reconstruction**

In 1994 the Linhay was a ruin. It was derelict and dangerous. It had been abandoned and vandalised. The roof was gone. The walls were falling. Before The Island could be opened to the public it had to be fenced. The Weir, because it could not be fenced, was our most urgent initial public safety concern, but when that was done we turned our attention to the Linhay. We had to either demolish it or restore it. After lively and full debate we decided to restore it so that it would provide a shelter for people and for wildlife and a place to display information about The Island. The cost of just over £19,000 was funded by a grant of nearly £14,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Trust's own money, together with an additional

£2,000 from the Dartmoor Trust which enabled us to make some very significant improvements.



**The Linhay during reconstruction by Alan Lake in 1997**

Three of the four main beams are Midland oak supplied by South West Hardwoods of Callington. The inside front beam, which is 6 inches wide, is Devon Oak from Peter Quinain of Honiton. The floor is granite. The seats are Delabole slate. The oak display boards were made for us by Bowden and Tucker of Buckfastleigh.

The building provides a necessary amenity and it makes a very important statement about the value of this land to people and to all kinds of life. The loft is divided with entrances north and south. We hope a barn owl will choose to take up residence but meanwhile it's used by jackdaws and magpies. There are twenty separate areas under the eaves and there are shelves and holes to be occupied. There are now fewer open buildings in the countryside and we watch with interest and record the wildlife use of this one. In 1998 mistle thrushes and tits nested here.





**The Linhay today**

## **The Leat**



**The Leat during reconstruction work**



**The Leat today**

Philip French of Corringdon Farm very generously repaired the Leat gate in 1994 adding an iron structure which was made by Gerald Cleave. It was a

considerable task and has extended the life of the gate although it still has to be treated with care. The gate has been padlocked. In the Summer of 1999, the Trustees looked at the Leat along most of its length and saw some of the problems as it passes through different properties. The current policy is to keep the level just below the outfall pipe. *By 2014 the timber in the sluice gate was in such a poor condition it needed to be replaced. Contractors Castleford Engineering, from Newton Abbot, installed a new sluice gate, constructed from chestnut and utilizing the old metalwork to retain the link with the past. This was drilled to permit a steady flow of water into the Leat and a stainless steel grille has been installed to prevent river debris blocking the flow. This system has worked well, reducing the occasions when we have to clear blockages from the gate.*

## The Gate



Today's split gate with push-button lock

The area near to the entrance is intended to seem welcoming whilst communicating the essential messages through the notice on the gate, the plaque on the stone, the access notice, and the information for dog owners. We try to minimise notices because they can spoil the feeling of the place. It is often better to talk to people individually and get their agreement. Camping is not allowed because, in a place that is open for everyone to enjoy, camping makes space private and deters ordinary users. We also do not want fires. We have had quite a big fire lit under the "elephant" beech damaging its roots and its foliage. Fires are destructive. Around The Island we have "habitat piles" which are home to various wildlife species. We discourage cycle riding. Children under 12 can fish with our permission. *This has since been raised to 16, so long as they have the necessary licence.*



**New steps wall by the 'beach' to ease access and limit erosion**



**Many aquatic invertebrates lurk in the river. Stonefly nymph (left) and Caddis fly larva (right) were found during a survey by pupils from King Edward VI Community College in Totnes**



## The Changing Landscape



**The Leat in 1966/7**



**The Leat today**

This view of The Island from the gate was taken in 1966/7. The curve of the leat is immediately recognisable. The post on the left is familiar. The natural features are different. The two large conifers on the right have gone. Their stumps must be somewhere in the undergrowth, but we have not seen them. There are almost no trees on the riverbank. The view from the entrance across The Island to the trees on the other side is almost unimpeded. The western red cedar is not showing. The oak and the beech across the leat from the entrance do not feature. We had to cut large branches off these two trees in order to get the swing shovel in to repair the Weir. It is surprising how rapidly the natural landscape changes. It cannot stay the same. In 1994 there were three apple trees growing on The Island. All three have now fallen and one is very dead. The natural process of growth and decay is quicker than we may anticipate. The wild cherries we planted by the Linhay have more than doubled in height. The oak seedlings we left at the eastern end of The Island are now small trees. Whatever management objectives we may choose, it is not an option to keep it as it has been.



**The last remaining Island apple tree in the 1990s.**

Cuttings were taken from this tree and grafted on to new rootstock to provide healthy new trees which have been planted in two places on The Island, including the new orchard at the South-western end of the Meadow.

## Fund Raising

Subscriptions and donations provide our main income, but occasional fund-raising events make a welcome and necessary addition. Our Christmas stall with carols in the square has become a tradition. The Island is not expensive to run from day to day but we have to be ready to deal with problems as they arise, particularly if they concern public safety. Fund raising, donations and subscriptions are helping us to build an essential reserve.



**The Christmas Stall in The Trust's early days**

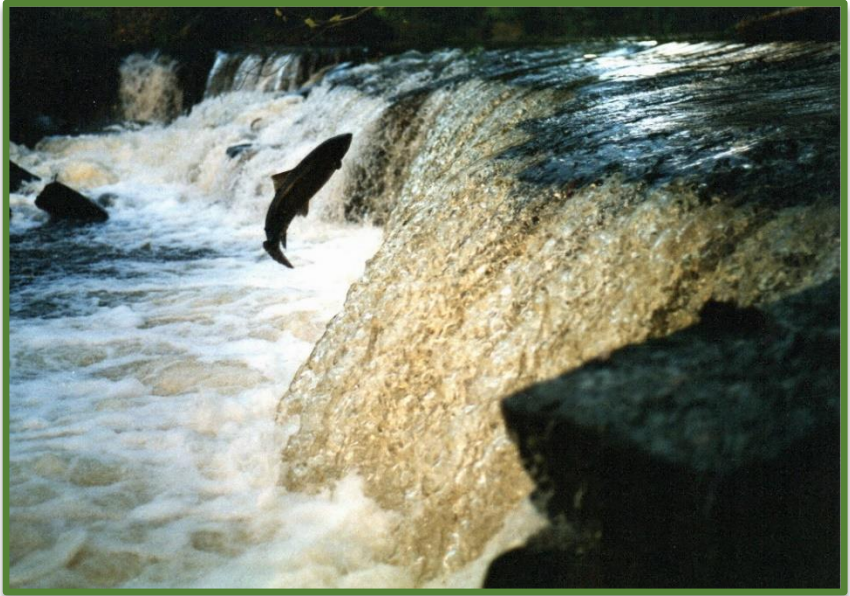


**The Brent Carnival Street Fair 2017**





**'Birds of The Island' one of four panels by Elise Willison. More of her artwork may be seen on the display in the Linhay**



[www.brentisland.org.uk](http://www.brentisland.org.uk)