

ELTHAM AND AVERY HILL GARDENS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2026

Here we are again, well into another year and waiting for spring, I have just moved house and am eagerly looking forward to seeing what comes up in my new garden. I can see an interesting variety of shrubs, most of which I can identify, some bulbs appearing and a lot of perennial weeds enjoying this wet, mild weather – so some surprises to come and lots to keep me busy!

There's not a lot to report from our gardens and allotments at this time of the year but I hope you will find these items from Sally Simmons and David Burnie make interesting reading.

LOCAL HISTORY

You might recall a paragraph in the autumn newsletter "**Protecting Pippenhall**" from *Greenwich Time* 2015. Sally Simmons, one of our allotment holders at Pippenhall, generously responded to the item with the following email:

"I noted with interest your item on 'Protecting Pippenhall' in the newsletter. As a local historian it is a part of Eltham that has particularly interested me as it is a unique survivor of mediaeval times. The field layout has changed little in 700 years. Field names in this area found in 19th century maps and documents can be identified in 14th century manorial documents.

The hedgerow on the western boundary of the allotments is of particular interest; probably dating from the middle of the 14th century when the field was enclosed. The field's 'S' shape boundary indicates that the hedge was planted on the line of a plough ridge. When ploughing with oxen the furrow shape was determined by the area needed to turn the plough team.

Ridge and furrow is very uncommon in Kent so should be preserved. However, I have a vague memory of being told about trenches being dug as part of the 'Stop Line' to defend London in the event of a German invasion in 1940 but still part of our history too. The concrete base of a swivel gun still remains at the entrance to Gravel Pit Lane.

Our allotments occupy the western half of a field named 'Brandons' which is mentioned in Eltham manorial documents, now in the National archives, dated 1383-84. The same name is found in surveys carried out in 1605 and 1749 as well as the Tithe Map of 1840. Pippenhall Meadow, on the western side of our plots, is named as 'Nelles or Stockwood' in 1319-20 in documents in the Westminster Abbey Archives. The same name is found in the surveys of Eltham in 1605 and 1749.

Together with our hedgerow, we toil in an ancient landscape.

As to whether the Conservation Plan was ever implemented, I do not know, but perhaps John Webb and the Friends of Avery Hill Park may be able to help.

Preservation of such an historic and environmentally rich area is important for the future."

DAVID'S POND LIFE Chapter 4 (Winter Edition)

Following on from the previous three seasonal reports on the delights or otherwise of maintaining a pond in the garden, in the interests of completeness, this is the final report – winter.

To be absolutely honest it is a bit of a struggle to say anything! Following the recent rainstorms of almost biblical proportions the difficulties of keeping the pond topped up over the summer are but a distant memory.

The pond has flooded a couple of times but, as I write, has returned to a reasonable level. I have cut down most of the dead vegetation but left a little on the ground which I am hoping will provide cover for my newt population although my last newt sighting was many months ago.

Efforts to keep leaves out of the pond to prevent them rotting and dirtying the pond have been successful up to a point. The water in the pond is relatively clear and there is evidence that as ever some leaves have escaped capture and are now scattered through the pond. Efforts to remove them with a net have proved difficult so I have resorted to picking them out by hand – a task that you can only continue with for a short time before heading indoors to thaw your fingers out.

The best advice seems to suggest that any major clear out of the pond should be carried out in late Autumn before the first frosts so as to avoid disturbing the eco-system that will have built up, so I'm afraid that boat has definitely sailed for me. I am hoping that the pond will be OK for another year – a large scale clean out is only advised once every five years for a small pond so fortuitously I seem to be following best practices.

Although there remains little sign of any frogs or toads hiding in the depths – and perhaps you should not expect to see them this time of year anyway – in carrying out my tidying there did seem a reasonable population of small creatures lurking under stones and leaf cover. I have my fingers crossed that they will provide a food source for the amphibians which seem so reluctant to colonise the pond. I am assuming that the pond is supplying a drink for the local fox population and hopefully some birds – although the local cat population make any birds very nervous about coming to the water's edge. The pond did not freeze over during the very cold spell which suggests it is deep enough at the centre for it not to be a problem.

So – are the myriad of gardening and wildlife programmes right to say that a pond is the key to a diverse population of animals and birds in your garden? From my observations it seems a little exaggerated, but I can't deny the pleasure that I have got from seeing the newts, and even if the pond doesn't quite look like those that you see on the TV, it provides a welcome distraction from having to explain why your dahlias have failed to bloom, or your vegetable patch seems more like a slug farm.

Perhaps 2026 will be the year of the frog.

MEMBERSHIP

To those of you that have not yet renewed your membership for 2025/26, the best way to do so is to call in at the Pippenhall shop on a Sunday morning between 10.00am and 12.00 noon, since the shop is reopening this Sunday, 1st February. If this is not possible for you, please contact our Membership Secretary, Brian Greenwood (brian@eahgs.org.uk) (tel 020 8850 6714) to sort something out. Membership remains at £5 pa for regular members, £3 pa for seniors.

TRADING SHOP

The shop re-opens on 1 February. We are well stocked again for the new year ahead but unfortunately some prices have had to be increased.

The seed potatoes will hopefully be delivered in early February, so please check the website or noticeboard at Phippenhall for when they are available for collection. Early collection is appreciated. There will be a small amount of some varieties available to buy.

As always, we ask you to

*****PLEASE SUPPORT THE SHOP*****

LOOKING AHEAD IN 2026 HERE ARE SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

AGM: The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held at 7pm on Monday 30th March 2026 at the Scout Hut in the lane off the roundabout near B&Q in Footscray Road (where it was held last time). The business of the meeting won't take longer than half an hour and will be followed by refreshments and a talk by John Webb on Avery Hill Park and its History.

The **annual show will take place on SATURDAY 5th SEPTEMBER 2026**, at St Mary's School, our usual venue.

To keep in touch with all the Society's news, shop price lists, and many other items of interest, log on to:

www.eahgs.org.uk