

Fruit Forage Walk

This year's fruit forage was again well attended with 21 participants and 1 well behaved greyhound joining in. We were fortunate with the weather for although the previous day had been exceedingly wet, the Sunday of our walk remained dry all day. The route of our leisurely stroll started in Aldershot Park, proceeded along part of the Blackwater Valley Path to reach nearby Tongham Community Woods, and then returned via Tongham Pool – a total distance of 2.6 miles. Tongham Community Wood was once part of larger woods in the area. It was purchased by Surrey County Council, during the construction of the A331 Blackwater valley relief road, in the 1980s, and was then improved by the planting of extra trees to alleviate the impact of the road and improve the landscape. Today the woods are under the management of the Blackwater Countryside Partnership with conservation undertaken by a band of local volunteers. Amongst the many attractions of this small site can be included a small wild growing orchard of apple, plum and greengage trees. The wild orchard of Tongham Woods seemed a little more overgrown than when we visited it last year, but those who persevered and braved the stinging nettles were rewarded with successful forage of the wild growing apples and plums found in the woods. Part of the walk followed the course of the old railway line that once ran through Tongham connecting Guildford to Alton. Although this stretch of the line has long since vanished (closed for freight in 1961) it's interesting to note that when the Aldershot Camp was under construction in the 1850s and before the railway came to Aldershot in the 1870s, Tongham Station was an important military railhead for the construction material used in building the camp.

It is interesting to learn of the ammunition train incident of 1940, when an ammunition train stationed at sidings near Tongham Station was attacked by enemy aircraft and set on fire. Two brave local railway workers, George Keen and George Leach, observing the incident gathered up a party of helpers from local firemen and members of the home guard, and then organised the separation and man-handling of the untouched wagons away from the rest of the train. For their bravery in avoiding what could have been a serious catastrophe, both were awarded the George Cross. After walking around Tongham Woods we next strolled beside Tongham Pool, which was once a site for gravel extraction during the building of the A331 but has now been restored as a nature