

Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks

Occasional Titbits, Issue 79, May 2026

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Coldham's Brook litter picks

Abbey People run monthly litter picks in the area surrounding Coldham's Brook to keep the local area clean and prevent litter from entering the chalk stream – the photo shows some of the volunteers. The litter picks are on the fourth Wednesday of the month 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Everyone is welcome at these community litter picks, you can find upcoming litter picks at <https://abbeypeople.org.uk/events/> All equipment will be provided, and there will be 'Nature and Litter

Loot' activity sheets for what litter children might find. These events are open to adults and children of all ages; all children must be accompanied by an adult. The next litter picks are on Wednesday 27th May (meet outside Cambridge United Football Club) and Wednesday 24th June (meet at Dudley Road Recreation Area).

Caitlin Herman



Spring litter pick along Cherry Hinton Brook

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who turned out to help with our spring litterpick on the 29th March (*see photo*). The date coincided with the Keep Britain Tidy 'Great British Spring Clean' campaign. We had a huge turnout of volunteers, even though the clocks went forward that day, and managed to collect lots of bags of rubbish together with sundry large items. Thanks also to everyone who contributed to Kip's film-making process on the day. Look out for posters and emails advertising our next litterpick event in the autumn.

Sarah Bowden

Litter: Are Things Getting Better?

Take a look [here](#) at the litter litany in *Occasional Titbits* No. 9 dated March 2010. Sausages? Underwear? Dirty nappies? Furniture? Wheelie bins? Have things got any better?



A Portrait of a Much-abused Suburban Chalk Stream

Background information relating to the Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks can be found on our website [here](#). Wanton historical damage to the stream system is described, some of which is now being addressed by the GCCSP. Also, the six maps in the Appendix outline a history of Coldham's Brook which sets it apart from the more usual problems faced by Chalk streams. It confirms that one of the GCCSP 'Chalk stream restoration' schemes is being carried out, in effect, on an urban drain.

The Lottery-funded film about the Brooks

In February, Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks learnt that they have been awarded £17,000 in National Lottery funding to make a film about Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks. This resulted from a proposal from local photographer and filmmaker, Kip Loades, whose photos have featured in previous newsletters. Below Kip provides an update

Progress on the film so far has been good; we started with Aquamaintain's environmental enhancement work on the spring at Giant's Grave, and the volunteer work at Tins bridge led by Rob Martyr from the City Council's Greater Cambridge Chalk Streams Project. We've recorded litterpicks on Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks, hearing why volunteers give their time and effort. One recent volunteer is local musician Rachel Watkins (*right*), who played a violin piece inspired by the Brook, that will form part of the film's soundtrack.



We walked the length of the Brooks with local historian Michelle Bullivant, listening to the story of how they have been used by people through time, up until water from their source began being piped into our homes and workplaces. At the end of that day unfortunately we witnessed and reported a fuel pollution incident, which underscored how important it is to protect it.

Most recently we've been collecting footage of some of the Brooks' most secretive denizens, as grass snakes have started venturing out to bask in the Spring sunshine, and water voles are feeding on fresh new plant growth. Much

more material is planned and scheduled to be captured before we wrap up filming in early August and begin editing in September.

Kip Loades

Wildlife reports

American Signal Crayfish confirmed in Cherry Hinton Brook

In March, we received a report of a confirmed sighting of the invasive American Signal Crayfish in Cherry Hinton Brook. There were two sightings in 2014, but no reports since. This new sighting supports the results of the eDNA testing carried out on the Brook at the beginning of the Greater Cambridge Chalks Stream project, which gave a positive result for this species. The burrowing of the crayfish accelerates bank erosion and instability and contributes to the heavy silt load of the Brook. Do let us know if you spot this species - it is mainly nocturnal. It is unfortunately not possible to remove it, but it would be interesting to know more about where it is found in the Brook.

Otters

On 13th January we received a video of an otter. The email said "I originally spotted the otter looking over at the brook where it crosses Coldham's lane. It was swimming up stream (towards Sainsbury's) so I quickly walked over to the next bridge (which is in the car park), where it swam underneath and through, and I could then capture the video." Then in April a different correspondent wrote "I sighted two otters swimming in the Brook behind Forest Road at approximately 11pm on 9th April. They were swimming together from the Giants Grave end, they then separated where the Brook did. One started peeping at the other, which when it heard, swam back from the direction of the Cherry Hinton Hall pond. They both left the water at the small weir and disappeared into the woodland." Peter Pilbeam, who undertook the annual water vole survey in February (see below), found otter spraint on a pipe crossing the brook in Sainsbury's car park. So it seems that otters are definitely around this year.

Water voles

We continue to receive reports of sightings of water voles, which is very pleasing. In addition, Peter Pilbeam, from Cambridgeshire Mammal Group, surveyed both Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks at the end of February. He reported that the signs he saw and recent reports of sightings, indicates that there remains a water vole population in places. He added "However, the number of signs along Coldhams Brook (not surveyed in previous years) were extremely encouraging and represent a very healthy population." In conclusion, he said "No estimation of population sizes could be made from the information obtained. Some shading could be removed in some lengths to let more light in and encourage the bankside vegetation there."

Photo of water vole swimming taken on 7th March 2026 by Alice West



Please do send reports of wildlife sightings to

wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk so we can monitor what is using the Brook and the areas alongside it.

Monica Frisch

Exhibition at Cambridge University Library and Pembroke College

Living Water: Poetry, Art and the Fight for Clean Rivers is based on archive materials, letters and artworks relating to the Anglo-Irish artist Barrie Cooke, who was one of the first to sound the alarm at the growing pollution of Irish rivers and loughs, and to the major 20th-century poets: Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes and John Montague. Further information about the exhibition and the varied events programme, which runs until December, is at: <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/livingwater>

The University Library is organising three poetry workshops at local libraries in association with the exhibition, to encourage people to put their love and concerns about Cambridge's waterways into words. The workshops are facilitated by poet Dr Lucy Durneen of University of Cambridge Institute of Professional and Continuing Education, and Hannah Haines, Participation Manager at Cambridge University Library. Two sessions took place in April, including one at the Clay Farm Centre and Hobson's Brook with young environmentalists. The Cherry Hinton Hub workshop with FCHCB members resulted in several poems (which may be made public if the authors decide they would like to do this!). If you are inspired by Coldham's Brook, do book for the final session at Barnwell Library on Saturday 9th May, 3.30-5pm: *Our living water: a poetry workshop*. *Hannah Haines*

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Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

5th May 2026

Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP) – update

The GCCSP is well underway now, and the FCHCB committee and supporters are heavily involved. Sections of some of the city chalk streams have been transformed by recent restoration activities and data about the quality of the water is being gathered by volunteer teams on a regular basis.

Water Quality Monitoring

Valiant volunteer teams are going out to specific locations on Cherry Hinton and Coldhams Brooks on a weekly basis to collect samples for laboratory-based analysis (at ARU) of phosphates, nitrates, ammonia and E. coli. At the same time, they measure parameters such as dissolved oxygen, electrical conductivity, pH, and temperature, with a Hanna meter which send the results directly to a mobile phone app, and thus to the GCCSP staff. On a monthly basis, the teams also measure the sediment in the water with a simple device called a Jackson Turbidity Tube. Perhaps not surprisingly, episodes of heavy rainfall, which cause sudden increased flow of water into the brooks from drains and road run-off appears to be the main influence on the water quality. However, we will get a much fuller picture once the full year of data is available.

Hanna meter being used on Cherry Hinton Brook, at the Tins Bridge



In-channel and bank restoration activities

The river restoration consultants, Aquamaintain, and willing teams of volunteers put in a huge amount of work in February and March, and have transformed sections of the Cherry Hinton and Coldhams Brooks watercourse.



Restoration work on the East Cambridge Main Drain/Coldham's Brook near Abbey Pool

On Cherry Hinton Brook, immediately upstream from Sainsbury's, a previously dark and highly silted stretch of channel (*right*) has been modified to give it the features characteristic of a Chalk stream. The channel has been significantly narrowed and made as sinuous as possible by installing pre-planted coir rolls, brush bundles and log flow deflectors. Carefully graded gravel and marginal plants have been added, and the far bank will be stabilised with hessian matting, seeded with native plants, to reduce silt being washed into the channel.



By the time the flowing water of **Coldham's Brook** reaches the area by Abbey Swimming Pool it has all more or less seeped into the East Cambridge Main Drain (which is in effect a straightened course of the historical meandering Brook). Despite the pollution, particularly during rainfall, it still has some characteristics of a typical Chalk stream. The section of the drain, from the play areas, all the way the Common to the edge of the Newmarket retail park (where it is joined by another drain, has now been restored using the same approach as that used on Cherry Hinton Brook. The channel has been narrowed, the banks strengthened with coir rolls, and it is impressive to see how the now faster water flow is already starting to remove the silt, with a gravel bed appearing in places.

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Giant's Grave has undergone a dramatic transformation, and the shape of the springhead (*right*) is now visible. There has been extensive planting of native chalk stream planting around the edge. The road drain from Cherry Hinton High Street which runs through a pipe and was previously discharging polluted road run-off directly into the spring now flows in a specially excavated pond, planted with vegetation which will help to remove pollutants from the water before it reaches the spring.



For an overview of the project, and links to the monthly newsletter, see:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/greater-cambridge-chalk-stream-project>

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