

# Brent Island Trust

## Newsletter, February 2020



### THE ELEPHANT'S TALE

All good things must come to an end eventually. One of the best loved features of The Island – our fondly named 'elephant' beech tree – has succumbed to the winter gales. Standing on the riverbank opposite the bridge it was a dominant feature overlooking the Meadow, and delighted several generations of children with its trunk bearing a remarkable resemblance to an elephant's head, with eyes, tusks and trunk. We have known for years that it was vulnerable as its roots were anchored mainly on the Meadow side of the tree, while those on the other side had to struggle for purchase on the jumble of stones on the riverbank. We consulted the Dartmoor National Park Trees Officer some time ago who advised that there were no practical measures we could take to prevent it falling eventually, and that when it did it would certainly fall across the river and not pose a danger to people. This is exactly what it did, on the windy night of Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January, after months of heavy rain had waterlogged the ground around its roots. This exceptional rainfall has seen a number of ancient trees succumb, including of course the gigantic cedar tree in St. Petroc's Churchyard, which fell in October. We have had fruitful discussions with contractors who will hopefully be able to remove the tree at little cost. We already have an offspring from our 'elephant' beech growing on The Island, raised from a seedling gathered on the riverbank underneath its parent and raised for a number of years in our Chairman's garden, before being replanted nearby.



The photo shows the massive rootball of the fallen beech and boulders pulled from the riverbank. Below – as it used to be.



***If any members have photographs of the elephant beech when it was standing and especially a close-up of the elephant's face, we'd be grateful to receive them for our archive. Digital files are welcome or we can scan and return hard copy. Contact details are at the end of this Newsletter.***

### Easter Egg Trail – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April

Our now traditional Easter Egg Trail takes place on The island as usual on Easter Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> April, between 10am and 4pm. It costs £2 per child to enter and follow the clues around The Meadow, leading to the reward of a chocolate egg. It's a fun way of encouraging youngsters to get closer to nature and explore The Island, so please encourage families to come down. Youngsters need to be accompanied by an adult. Offers of help on the day would be appreciated. Please contact our Chairman – details at the foot of this newsletter.



Ready for the clue solvers at last year's Trail

## Christmas Stall

Thank you to all those who helped at or attended our Island Christmas Stall in December. For once we were blessed with a dry and reasonably warm day and raised a wonderful sum of £385.25 towards our funds. We are indebted to the many members who baked the highly popular cakes, donated tombola prizes, staffed the stall or sang carols, not forgetting our musicians, the town crier and our 'Saxy Santa'.



## Working Party



Yellow Rattle from last year's sowing setting seed in the Meadow

We held a successful working party at the end of November, having had to postpone the event because of heavy rain the week before. Our hardy members carried out a number of tasks including cutting back the willow growth near the apple orchard and then planting the cuttings on the edge of the riverbank where we carried out the protection work earlier this year. The aim is that these will grow and establish root systems to help protect the bank. The signs so far are encouraging, with buds forming on the cuttings. We also sowed more yellow rattle seeds, kindly donated by the Avon Valley Project, and undertook some of the usual tasks such as filling holes dug by dogs and cutting back brambles from the paths.

## A new path leading .....

One of the factors leading to the erosion of the riverbank above the Linhay has been compaction of the ground caused by the footfall of people using the path which ran right on the edge of the bank. To counter this we took the advice of the Westcountry Rivers Trust and opened up a new path two to three metres further from the bank, and blocked the old path with branches and brash to deter people from using it. Unfortunately these have been moved, with some thrown into the river, but we have plans to strengthen the barrier there, and would ask visitors to The Island to be aware of what we are doing, and why, and please use the new route.



The new path being cleared by member volunteers.

## Contacts:

Website: [www.brentisland.org.uk](http://www.brentisland.org.uk) Guy Pannell (Chairman) 01364 72275 ;  
Phil Dean (Secretary) 01364 649189, [philsue.dean@gmail.com](mailto:philsue.dean@gmail.com).