Comments from DRiPS committee...

Steve Crowley *on Alan Williams' inspirational legacy*

I can't remember how many years I have been involved with DRiPS, but it is more than 10 and perhaps nearer 20.

It was at Alan Williams' invitation that I joined, because both he and I had strong interests in the fishing opportunities provided by the Darent and administrative links with the fishing clubs active in the Darent Valley. He felt that I would be able to support him productively in his endeavours to safeguard the river for future generations.

I am happy to suggest that I think that proved true, but Alan was by far the greater activist. Alan had a comprehensive knowledge of the river and the valley, developed over many years through his central involvement with Dartford & District APS, and his chairmanship of the Darent and Cray Catchment Consultative – a body representing angling clubs. This group, established by the Environment Agency, also acts as a forum for the exchange of views about the health of the river and the lakes in the valley.

Alan was like a dog with a bone where the Darent Valley was concerned: he was absolutely determined to do as much as possible to stop what he (rightly) saw as the accelerating destruction of the river caused primarily by over-abstraction. I shared with Alan great concerns about the River Darent and those worries remain.

The next steps

Raising the profile of DRiPS in the face of climate change and increasing demand for water is extremely important in order to help secure the river's future, and to carry forward Alan's legacy. Having moved far away, I've handed over duties of secretary and treasurer to Stuart Merrylees and Rod Shelton; a move which given the strong interest and already productive activity generated by them has made perfect sense. The benefits can be seen with what they have done already. That is good news for DRiPS, the River Darent, and the future of both.

Stuart Merrylees *on animals, attitudes and aquifers*

We all have a vague idea of how rain trickles down into hidden underground aquifers and we all realise we should cultivate a sense of stewardship of our rivers. Much of the Darent's waters are stored in chalk aquifers and under normal conditions these seep back into the river from springs, making it the perfect place for river creatures and plants. However, in the mid-80s due largely to over-abstraction, the Darent disappeared for months on end and was written about in the national newspapers. The river is no longer is such a dire state, but the flow is still much less than it used to be and with new housing there is no way it will get better.

Understanding where our tap water comes from is as important as knowing how our food is produced. We are all used to hearing that we should drink two litres/day, but on average we use an amazing 150 litres/day, one-third of which goes literally straight down the toilet. We all hope the water companies will find a way to manage our scarce resources, but we can help too by being a bit more careful at home.

Underground solutions

Notwithstanding, one important issue is where we can store water in times of plenty. Why not underground in porous rocks instead of in surface reservoirs? This is the idea behind ASR - aquifer storage and recovery. The aquifers chosen are in the Lower Greensand, about 250m below ground and way beneath the chalk aquifers which supply our drinking water and feed the Darent. The chalk and greensand are separated by an impermeable bed of clay. Just how much can be stored and how easy it is to recover have been the subject of tests which Thames Water started in 2015 with various boreholes and infrastructure at Horton Kirby. By repeatedly putting water into the aquifer, allowing it to rest then recovering it by pumping it back out, the aquifer is cleaned and higher quality water is stored. It is hoped that when the installation is operational it will be capable of producing 5Ml/day.

It's done in the deserts, why not in Kent?



How can I get involved?

DRiPS AGM MEETING 2018

Don't miss our Autumn Meeting in the Library of the **Castle Hotel, Eynsford, at 7pm Thursday 25 October.**

There will be a tribute to the late Alan Williams.

Our special guest speaker, Chris Gardner, South East Rivers Trust, will talk about the Darent and Cray Catchment Improvement Groups and the Darent walkover, both of which DRiPS is involved in.

BECOME A MEMBER OF DRiPS

Membership costs just £10 a year for individual members, or £20 for organisations. You will receive future editions of *News Flow* as well as invitations to events where you can find out more about the welfare of your beautiful and unique local rivers and help to preserve them.

For more details, see our website: www.darent-drips.org.uk

Darent River Preservation Society
Founded 1985

NEWS FLOW

No 34 Autumn 2018

Major homes plan could put Darent under pressure

Plans to build thousands more homes in and around north-west Kent could pose a threat to the Darent and its catchment.

A new 2,500-home town is among 79 possible sites put forward under the Sevenoaks Local Plan.

Reports indicate that the Government wants the Sevenoaks Region to build up to 13,900 homes in total over the next 20 years.

DRiPS has pledged to monitor developments in order to help minimise any possible impact on the river and its ecology.



New homes could put extra pressure on precious water resources

Aquifers

"That equals an extra 5,225,000 litres of water required every day," says Stuart Merrylees, acting chairman of DRiPS. "Another 5 Megalitres/day is enormous."

"If that amount was withdrawn from our aquifers without regard for the consequences, then before long there will be no River Darent nor, for that matter, no River Cray either."

Stuart continues: "Government, Ofwat and Thames Water have to provide us with solutions – for example, more reservoirs – or our environment will change forever.

"In the coming years that will be among the major roles for DRiPS and the many others who care about the river and its surroundings."

DRiPS mourns loss of Alan Williams



The Darent River Preservation Society ('DRiPS') regrets to report the passing of one of its most distinguished and longest-serving committee members, Alan Williams.

Alan, pictured left, held office in the society since the 1990s and was its chairman for the last 18 years.

Alan was a lifelong angling enthusiast as well as a tireless champion of fishermen and their interests along the Darent Valley and chairman of countless other angling organisations.

More details - centre spread

Date for your diary: Annual Meeting of DRiPS. 25 October. See back page.

Three Kent parishes elect river wardens

Chevening, Otford and Horton Kirby have all elected river wardens as part of a new initiative to help protect the Darent.

As reported in the last issue of *News Flow*, the wardens will be keeping an eye on the river across 12 parishes and reporting any concerns they might have, either with its flow or the fish.

DRiPS meanwhile continues to act as a go-between to ensure wardens' feedback is passed on to the appropriate authorities.

William succeeds Guy as president of DRiPS

Flags flew at half-mast at Lullingstone Castle following the death of DRiPS president, Guy Hart Dyke, at 90.

William Alexander has agreed to step up as president of the society.

William and his family live at Castle Farm, Shoreham. His family has farmed the valley for four generations and will continue to promote DRiPS as a guardian of the Darent.



William Alexander - president of DRiPS

Volunteers clear areas of Himalayan balsam

Nine keen volunteers took to the banks of the Darent recently to participate in a clearing operation in two areas of South Darenth. Under the guidance of Mark Gallant, North-West Kent Countryside Partnership, the group worked to tackle the problem of invasive Himalayan balsam, a non-native plant that plagues many rivers in the UK and causes damage to native species, as well as eroding riverbanks and blocking waterways.

"It's great to find volunteers prepared to give up a few hours for such vital work," comments Malcolm Dunn, DRiPS committee member.

The local working group in Horton Kirby and South Darenth intends to meet again soon.

Farewell to chairman Alan Williams, long-time champion of the Darent

We are sad to announce that Alan Williams, chairman of Darent River Preservation Society (DRiPS) from the mid-1990s, died in June. He lived in Eynsford. Outside of his work at the BBC, he was an ardent fisherman and environmentalist. He served on the Angling Trust, the regional Fisheries Advisory Committee and many other organisations.

DRiPS was established in 1985, when there was often a dry river bed for weeks on end between Eynsford and Dartford, where visitors often parked their cars on the river bed itself. Whilst there had been consecutive years with dry winters and hot summers, the water's disappearance was largely the result of over-abstraction, and the problem wasn't confined to the Darent. The river that was renowned for its brown trout and once used to drive 29 mill wheels from Westerham to Dartford, was later said to be top of a list of 20 UK rivers most likely to disappear by 2000. The national press picked up the story and one of the people to take an interest in the Darent was Lord Crickhowell, head of the National Rivers Authority – until its role was taken by the Environment Agency we know today.

Derrick Attwood, the first chairman of DRIPS, enlisted the help of a consultant hydrologist, Michael Mansell Moullin, who represented us at meetings with Thames Water and Southern Water and with the NRA and the EA. Together they drew up a scheme to close or reduce abstraction at some pumping stations and to evaluate other schemes to help restore the river. This brought about the Darent Action Plan (DAP). The plan was to have two phases. One key decision was to utilise floodwater being pumped to waste into the Thames from the old Blue Circle works at Northfleet. It was established that it could be intercepted before it reached there and a 10-mile pipeline was laid to deliver it back to the Bean Well field. The output of those wells goes to Green Street Green treatment works and on to Horton Kirby and Farningham reservoir for distribution, thus allowing abstraction to be reduced from other aquifers that feed the natural springs that are part of the Darent. In addition, six artificial springs were proposed, of which three were eventually built.



Alan, right, with hydrologist Jamie Riches, Thames Water, at the Horton Kirby ASR site in 2015



Devastation: flashback to 1990 when scenes such as this were commonplace

Current Darent plan "not enough to secure its future"

Earlier this year, Alan Williams reminisced about the Darent Action Plan in the 1990s:

"The DAP has improved the river but not enough to secure its future. After the recent rainfall the river looks quite good, I suspect this is due to runoff. On hard dry ground heavy rain will quickly run off the surface to drains or the river. It will make little or no difference to the aquifers until SMD (the soil moisture deficit) improves. I should point out that all runoff is not good, for it can carry all sorts of rubbish from the road networks and fertilisers washed off from farmland. With the ever-expanding population more water will be needed. Building more homes and infrastructure will concrete over more rain-gathering land, less water will reach the aquifers for it will run off into drains."

Alongside his lifetime holding office on regional and national angling associations, Alan's personal commitment to the Darent continued until the end of his days. As good indicators of the water levels in the aquifers, he continued to provide Thames Water and the EA with updates of the weekly levels of the DDAPS lakes at Horton Kirby and Sutton until his passing. DRiPS is indebted to his enduring commitment and his many achievements as a steward of the Darent.

DRiPS and SERT join forces to audit the Darent



Led by Chris Gardner, pictured left, catchment manager for the South East Rivers Trust (SERT), DRiPS committee members have been walking the bed of the river, in conjunction with the Environment Agency and the North-West Kent Countryside Partnership.

The project, to walk the bed of the Darent from Westerham to Dartford, has so far reached Chipstead and explored the flood meadows at Otford.

The team is taking pictures and making notes on water depth, silt, fish, plants that grow in the water (macrophytes) and their habitat, invasive species and noting signs of pollution. This 'audit' of the Darent will allow for patterns to be tracked and will help inform judgements about the overall health of the river.

Much of it is not open to the public and access is only possible over private land. Some parts of the river through Sundridge and Brasted have become heavily shaded. SERT has applied for funding to do some remedial work, and will seek permission of the local landowners. SERT has created a new website for the Darent and Cray at: www.darentpartnership.org.uk

Our website is always growing; we want it to record a full history of the river, especially the story of how it was rescued in the 80s and 90s.

For more news, or to learn about the history of the Darent, visit our website at: www.darent-drips.org.uk

Also, please email any comments or photos to: darentdrips1985@gmail.com and you may be featured in the next issue of *News Flow*!