



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common **FOLKtalk**

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 54 Summer 2017

Welcome to the 2017 Summer FOLK newsletter. In this issue:

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FOLK member honoured



Mike Donnelly with his Medal of Honour

Many people in Leckhampton and beyond will know Mike Donnelly and will have benefited from his voluntary work in the community. Mike joined FOLK in 2006 giving eleven years of tireless effort to advance FOLK's aims. Recognition has now come to Mike in the form of the Cheltenham 2017 Medal of Honour. The presentation was at the Town Hall on the 15th May 2017 as part of the inauguration of the new Mayor, Councillor Klara Sudbury, who presented the medal as one of her new duties.

The medal is sponsored by Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce and was introduced by Ian Thomas.

Some of Mike's volunteering activities include:

FOLK Working as work party coordinator and Executive Committee member for a number of years, a regular work party volunteer and organiser of FOLK events such as attendance at the Midsummer Fiesta.

Leckhampton Players: Member for over 20 years, working back stage and building scenery for the 3 shows a year



Mike and Monica Donnelly and friends

Richard III Society Gloucester Branch Committee Member

British Gas Retired Employee Association (Cheltenham Branch) serving as Chairman/Secretary and Events organizer for 5 years

Over the years Mike has worked closely with Wayne Sedgwick, the Borough Council Ranger responsible for the site, and their strong, friendly working relationship has played a large part in achieving the improvements to Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common we all enjoy today.

The nomination for the Medal of Honour describes Mike with words like intelligent, pragmatic, practical trustworthy, good sense of humour and kind.

All FOLK members would like to congratulate Mike on his well-deserved award. He has set a standard of commitment to the community for us all the follow.

Introducing Cheltenham's new Mayor Councillor Klara Sudbury

We have a regular item in the FOLK newsletter where we give a profile of individual members based on their answers to a set of questions. Last year we featured Councillor Chris Ryder when she became Mayor. Chris is a long standing member of FOLK. Despite her busy initial period as the new Mayor, Councillor Sudbury has submitted herself to the inquisitors, so it is with pleasure that we now introduce Councillor Sudbury to our members using a slightly different version of the questions as she is not actually a member of FOLK. This does not matter at all because we know that she has a long record of involvement in the local community and we would be interested in her views on our site.

How long have you been involved in the local community? Are you aware of FOLK and the work it does on Leckhampton Hill? I first became active in the community around March 2002. I was living just off Mead Road and there were a few local issues that my neighbours and I wanted to address. We formed a residents association which I chaired for five years. That led me to become very interested in planning matters, not just where I lived but in many parts of the town. I was a Cheltenham Borough Council Representative on FOLK for a number of years and appreciate greatly the wonderful work the organisation does to look after this special area.

How do you (and your family) enjoy the Hill? I am not able to go up the hill as often as I would like as I have a hip problem but we like to take our two dogs for a walk on the hill. My daughter takes her two sons to Leckhampton Hill regularly. All of us find it a special place to enjoy the view and find peace even when there are lots of other people about.

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? My earliest memory of Leckhampton Hill is trying to go sledging in huge snowdrifts. I was probably about seven years old and went up there with my best friend Kasia and her brother John. I don't think I have seen deeper snow in the years since.

What changes have you noticed over the years? I am really pleased that in many obvious ways the hill remains much as I can remember it from when I was small.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? Gosh that is a hard question. The view from the top of the hill is probably the best but I find all aspects very beautiful and interesting. I love to see how the town below has changed over the years and look to spot landmarks.



Councillor Klara Sudbury

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? Springtime probably, before it gets too hot and with the evenings staying lighter for longer.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? I am most interested in the industrial archaeology and the social history of the hill.

How do you see the role of local groups in supporting and promoting Cheltenham's heritage and attractions? The local voluntary groups we are lucky enough to have in Cheltenham are absolutely crucial to supporting and promoting Cheltenham's heritage and attractions. The key is close working with Cheltenham Borough Council officers; partnership working to achieve

shared objectives generates the best results.

Are there any ways that the Hill and its uses could be improved in the next 10 years? I would like our town to be fully accessible for all our residents. Improving accessibility on Leckhampton Hill would be great. I also really enjoyed the walk and talk on the centenary of the Leckhampton Riots, perhaps more guided historical walks would be good.

What are your priorities for your year as Mayor of Cheltenham? This year I have chosen to focus on the town's motto 'Salubritas et Eruditio' – health and education. This is reflected in the two charities I am supporting – the Hospitals Charity's Focus Fund which supports patients at Cheltenham Oncology Centre. Also the Hollie Gazzard Trust which does so much to

educate people about domestic abuse. I am also asking for nominations of teachers, healthcare professionals or others who work in education or health and who have gone the extra mile to help people. I am inviting those nominated to join me for tea in the parlour to hear more about the work they do.

Many thanks to Councillor Sudbury and best wishes on behalf of FOLK for her mayoral year. Ed

The Word from Wayne summer 2017

Grazing of the site is going well again this year including implementing year 2 of the experiment where the cattle are excluded from a fenced area. Growth and flowering of grassland plants and insects will be monitored inside and outside the area to check the effect of grazing. This year's calves have been separated from their mothers to be weaned, the "yearlings" are continuing their work on the Common and excitingly the pregnant cows have been moved to the recently fenced Hopkins' field (described in the last newsletter) at the far eastern end of the site. Mid July, when it is expected that flowers will have seeded, will see the babies moved to Daisy Bank field and all the other cattle back on the main site. The pregnant mums will move to the arable reversion in December for calving. Watch this space for the results of the experiment.



Young cows in Hopkins field

A successful **Orienteering event** was held in April. This is the first time the event, organised by the *North Gloucestershire Orienteering Club*, was staged and it is likely to become a regular event due to its success. Another string to the bow of the Hill and Common. It is rumoured that the Army also ran a similar event in early May and that they are

keen to include the Hill in their list of physical activity and training sites.

An important new initiative to help people back into work who are suffering long term unemployment was started in late May. As part of the “**Going the Extra Mile GEM project**, organisations including: Cheltenham Borough, Cheltenham Community Projects, the Cotswold Conservation Board and the Gloucestershire County Council offered a taster training day in the skills of dry stone walling. During the restoration of the Hopkins’ field a length of old dry stone wall was uncovered. It was decided to restore this wall in cooperation with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. The Wardens had obtained funding of £2500, topped up with £750 from the Borough to purchase 30 tonnes of stone for the project. The Wardens also provided a trainer who is an award winning waller. On the day 5 individuals took part and there was a positive response to the opportunity. Individuals will be able to continue the training towards accreditation and the possibility of work.

The 2017 work plan is rolling out well and an opportunity to do more work has occurred as the Cotswold Wardens are temporarily unable to carry on with their plan and have asked if they can do more work on our site. They



Ready to start building the wall

have established a base at Hill Farm, so are on hand. They have done clearance work in and around Salterley Quarry. It is planned to do improvement works on Incline 4 adjacent to the Lime Kilns, clear the butterfly motorway and carry out improvement works to the Standard Gauge Incline to deal with problems caused by erosion. Further clearance work has been

done in Area 16 uphill from the Bridge car park and consideration is being given to re-seeding cleared areas. Removal of selected trees is to continue to improve the views. The aim is to establish a grassed area that could

accommodate informal picnic sites. The Magnificent Meadows Project ends this August but they will help with harvesting wildflower seed material from the Cowslip Field before they pack their bags and move on to new projects.

The number of **dogs** being controlled by individual and usually professional dog walkers is continuing to be of concern but there are no practical means to regulate this at the moment. Suggestions as to how this could be done would be welcome.

The Daisybank bikers jumps are still suffering from litter and poor maintenance. A long term solution may unfortunately involve their demolition with return of the area to pasture.

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

FOLK Work Party Report Summer 2017

Our main task on the work parties since the last newsletter has been tidying up the Hill! That is removing all the various piles of cut gorse and ash that we had left dotted about the Common and Hill following our cutting surge prior to having to stop this work to avoid disturbing nesting birds. This took us 5 work parties to do, with a little help from one of the local cub scout troops.



Work parties spring cleaning on the Hill and Common

At the end of April we reinstated the cattle 'exclosure' on the slopes of Charlton Kings Common to the East of the Windass path. This is the second year we have used this to keep the cattle off an area of grassland to see if this

non-grazed patch has more flowers than on the grazed area outside the enclosure.

Along the Woodland Walk that runs below the Devil's Chimney we have noticed that ivy is growing in dense patches alongside the footpath. We are concerned that this is slowly making its way up the bank and potentially out-competing the grassland above it, which we need to preserve. Also, in the areas that we have recently cleared of ash saplings we want the grass to grow down into these areas rather than the ivy grow up into them. In order to see how we might be able to control the ivy, and after discussions with Natural England, we have carried out a trial on a small area where we have treated some strips with chemicals, hand-pulled some others and left some comparison strips alone. It will be interesting to see how these develop. To date the ivy that was chemically treated is looking rather sad and there has been little regrowth in the strips hand-pulled. We will keep an eye on them to see what happens over the longer term and whether any form of treatment proves successful or not.



Photo: Geoff Holt



Photo: Geoff Holt

Bending backs to clear the ivy and taming the grass in Hartley Lane

We are also involved in a second trial along with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. This time it is on the grassy banks alongside the Western end of Hartley Lane. These banks, which are quite steep in parts, have never had the grass cut because of the steepness and hence difficulty of access. As such the grass has become rather rank which is not conducive to maintaining species richness. Again, after discussions with Natural England, we have been brushcutting some of the areas that are not too steep and raking up and removing the cuttings. This has been classified by Natural England as

restoration work and hence we can do this cutting in the bird nesting period when we would normally be prevented. Our plan is to return a number of times over the next few years and slowly cut as much of the area as we can access. The photo opposite shows the first area we have cut and cleared. We also pulled up and removed a thick patch of Rosebay Willowherb here.

We have now started on our regular summer task of pulling up Hemp Agrimony and Ragwort. Although we no longer have thick patches of Hemp Agrimony there is still quite a number of more dispersed plants on the slopes alongside the Gallops which we need to keep under control. This may not be the most exciting task we do in the year but it is an important one.

As always you are welcome to join us on any of our FOLK work parties. We are a friendly, mixed group of male and female volunteers. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves. We have three FOLK work parties a month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below.

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or Mike on 01242 238790, or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

July 2017	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
August 2017	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
September 2017	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
October 2017	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
November 2017	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
December 2017	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th

Proposed basic FOLK work party programme April to September 2017

Note that, according to Natural England rules, scrub clearance and grass cutting should be curtailed between 1st March and 15th July (and tree removal between 1st March and 31st August). These restrictions do not apply to footpath maintenance or restoration work which can be done with caution.

Work carried over from previous periods

- Burn gorse cuttings left on top of Charlton Kings Common
- Burn ash cuttings left along Woodland Walk
- Burn ash cuttings left in Area 16a
- Remove Golden Rod from around Brownstone car park and start of Judy's Ride
- Weed-wipe young sycamore/ash seedlings in large cleared area above Woodland Walk
- Scrub management in Brownstone Quarry and along Judy's Ride – Guy Meredith to advise

Routine clearance of year's growth in:

- Area 16: one general area cut per year towards end of period, large weeds (e.g. nettles, thistles, Rosebay Willowherb) can be cleared earlier
- Limekilns
- Butterfly Motorway: two cuts per year (mid-July and end August)
- Barrow
- Sidings

Other routine work

- Reinstate (end April) and later remove (end July) temporary cattle enclosure
- Ragwort and Hemp Agrimony removal
- Raking up grass cuttings in Areas 4/5 after cutting by contractor (Sept)
- Erect temporary paddock in Daisybank Field when requested by Norths
- Footpath and car park clearance/maintenance as required

New work

- Brushcutting and clearing grass on S-W corner of Leckhampton Hill – classified as restoration work. Treat 25% of the area this year in the form of separate blocks, not cutting so close as to expose soil.
- Removal of Rosebay Willow Herb, e.g. at start of track from W end of Hartley Lane

Possible work by Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

- Support with Hemp Agrimony clearance
- Support with brushcutting and clearing grass on S-W corner of Leckhampton Hill
- Brushcutting and clearing grass on the slope in Area 16 above Bridge Car Park
- Completing work on clearing Top Incline

Geoff Holt 3rd April 2017

SMOKE SIGNALS other news from the Hill and Common and the conservation scene.

Fun and games at the Somerset Arms Leckhampton.



Anyone for skittles?

Thanks to Peter Niblett for organising a convivial and successful skittles evening at the Somerset Arms on Friday June 16th. Sixteen or more members enjoyed three rounds of individual skittles with a break for a tasty and very reasonably priced barbeque. The serious business of a round of killer followed with Peter Niblett rounding off the evening by presenting prizes of wine, donated by Rob Reid and chocolates.

Hopefully we will have more social events in the near future and any ideas along those lines would be greatly appreciated.

Butterfly monitoring: progress in 2017



Greenhairstreak pic from internet

Monitoring of butterflies has started and Serena Meredith, who organises the surveys reports that after a promising start in April, the number of species seen has either reduced or remained static. This is disappointing to say the least. However one example of a Duke of Burgundy was spotted in the company of a Green Hairstreak. At this stage there is no obvious explanation as the weather has been suitable for

most species to be active. Results for 2017 will be reported in a future issue of FOLKtalk.

To be part of the butterfly monitoring team please contact Serena by email gmeredith@btinternet.com or phone 01242 524138. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Yet more butterfly matters Meeting report Saturday 3rd June: An Introduction to the Butterflies of Brownstone Quarry

On a fairly bright but cool morning 5 participants and I met in the quarry car park. After a short briefing and a look at some captive specimens (later released) of Common Blue, Small Heath and a day flying moth called a Common Heath, we set off down on to the quarry floor. Unfortunately the ground was wet and little was flying or even roosting on the long grass stems – something the Common Blues tend to do but there had been heavy rain over night, and they must have retreated to more sheltered areas in the base of clumps of vegetation. So for a while, we admired the Bee Orchids which were just beginning to come into flower, and identified some of the butterfly larval food plants such as bird's foot trefoil, horseshoe vetch, wild thyme and strawberry, even though the butterflies associated with the latter two are not present anywhere on site. In brighter interludes, several Small Heath were flying about and the occasional Common Blue, all males, were seen, and eventually Dingy Skipper made an appearance. Several whites were spotted at a distance, but could not be identified. We then moved on towards the Leckhampton Hill side of the common, only finding a single Speckled Wood along Judith's ride. The hill fort failed to produce any further species so we

returned to the car park along the track to Hill Farm, seeing a Red Admiral on route. All in all, this was a disappointing total of both individuals and species, which unfortunately seems to be par for the course for the site this season.

Serena Meredith

Myxomatosis on the Hill



Myxomatosis victim

Reports have been coming in that rabbits suffering from myxomatosis have been seen on the Hill and Common. Myxomatosis is a deadly virus disease of rabbits, which originated in South America. It has been used around the world to control rabbit populations in countries such as Australia where they are viewed as a pest. The virus was introduced into the UK in the early 1950s leading to a very substantial reduction in the rabbit population. It is distressing to see the affected animals as the disease is rapidly fatal and cannot be treated. It appears that natural resistance is increasing so it is likely that we will continue to have the familiar sight of rabbits nibbling the grass on the Hill and Common.

Bluebells.

The FOLK executive has recently had discussions about a suggestion that it may be a good idea to establish a bluebell wood within the site. Coincidentally an interesting email has been received from a FOLK member Martin Kilbey as follows:



Bluebell wood pic from internet

I'm not sure I'm qualified to take this up and would risk offending those with a sentimental attachment to them, but the theme of BLUEBELLS has cropped up in several places lately - on the internet and in the press. It has been suggested that they are Britain's favourite flower - and I do not deny that they are a cheerful and inspiring sight. However, they now seem to be

spreading weed-like far from what is considered to be their "normal" habitat, the woodland floor. Unlike many bulbs which propagate themselves by "offsets" from the old bulb, I just discovered that their seeds are viable and can survive the rigours of winter to an impressive degree - as do the plants - by the depth of their penetration of the soil. Eradication, if necessary, becomes somewhat difficult therefore. According to a recent article in the *i* newspaper, bluebells take up phosphorus from the soil to an extent beyond their needs and deprive other plants of it. Clearly, this inhibits rival species and would account for the carpets of flowers in woods and the absence of other plants. In the context of our local Hills, we should beware of these getting a hold and perhaps make members aware of the risk as we try to get a balance of flora. They do not seem to flourish on steeper ground in my experience - so perhaps this is a non-problem, but perhaps we should be aware. Thank you for all you do. Signed Martin Kilbey.

Martin added in a further email that the bluebells he was describing were not the notorious "Spanish" introduction but our own native specie. Members may have a view on Martin's email

Charlton Kings Village fair



All the fun of the fair.

FOLK joined in the fun and summer sunshine at the Charlton Kings village fair on June 24th, held on the recreation ground near the library. A good number of members of the public were introduced to FOLK's work whilst viewing a display of photos and information. John Harvey, Mike Donnelly,

Alastair McKenzie and Malcolm Geddes worked hard to raise

FOLK's profile and the day was judged a success.

Appeal from member

An email has been received from new member, Sonia Asplen, about the unpleasant subject of dog mess. Sonia is a dedicated dog owner and despairs at the behaviour of irresponsible dog walkers. So in Sonia's words:

"I don't know if this is the correct place (the FOLK newsletter...ed) to raise the unpleasant issue of dog poo but thought I would anyway!

As a regular walker on Leckhampton Hill I have long been concerned about the number of dog walkers, personal and professional, who do not pick up after their dogs, not to mention the number of bags left to 'decorate' the countryside.

Having walked this morning from Brownstones Quarry Car Park towards the hill I was once more disgusted by the amount of dog faeces on the track and adjoining verges. I wonder if there is anyway that FOLK could arrange for signs to be put explaining the health risks of dog poo, to both humans and animals and asking people to kindly 'pick up after their animals. I have raised this issue in the past with various officials but no one seems to want to take responsibility for signage.

Has anybody got suggestions as to solutions to this apparently intractable problem? Ed.

Rare bird spotted on Common



Willow Warbler pic from internet

As reported by John Harvey FOLK Chairman: the item below was on the Gloster Birder website on April 9th Charlton Kings. A Grasshopper Warbler reeling on Charlton Kings Common at sunrise this morning at SO955185. Also three Willow Warblers, five Blackcaps, and five Chiffchaffs seen in the area. (Chris Furley). Good news that birds characteristic of limestone grassland are continuing to visit our site.

Another poem inspired by the Hill

We present here a second poem by local poet Alicia Stubbersfield. The sentiment will no doubt resonate with members.

Another Test

I read the results of my mammogram,
dictated, not signed to speed delivery.
My Amazon breast *shows satisfactory*
appearance with no cause for concern.

The registrar writes he is *happy to tell me,*
I am happy to take the news
into spring sun on Leckhampton Hill.

My dog and I scramble up
a disappearing path, he spots rabbits
while I clutch at stones, clumps of grass.
Violets spread themselves, unexpectedly bright.

I have no cause for concern,
like the Tarot Fool on the brink of something,
stepping out in yellow with his dog and a flower.

I watch light soften the motorway
as it cuts through fields, right across
to the Malverns' dark spine,
below us, Cheltenham glinting like bone.

Alicia Stubbersfield

Alicia is a published author, *The Yellow Table* (Pindrop Press 2013), and has kindly allowed us to publish some of her poetry.

Mentioned in the last issue, Angela France, Cheltenham's Poet in Residence, will launch her new book of poetry entitled *The Hill* on Thursday July 20th 2017 6pm at the Wheatsheaf Old Bath Road. Join Angela at a live poetry show in a venue with local and historic links to the Hill.



A carefully posed photograph showing the destruction of the fences.

The launch event will also feature Angela's multimedia poetry show, which accompanies the book and includes images, maps and voices as well as live poetry reading interwoven into a compelling story of trespass, place and memory.

Tickets free but limited, please book via Eventbrite at: bit.ly/hill-launch or call 07855 308122

And finally



Unidentified flyer over Charlton Kings Common

Picture from Andrew Ross

Thanks as ever to all our sponsoring organisations: Charlton Kings and Shurdington, Parish Councils from whom we have had financial support this year and the Leckhampton and Warden Hill Parish Councils who have promised to provide financial support. Cheltenham and County Cycling Club provide financial support, and Cotswold Conservation Board and a special thanks to Cheltenham Borough Council in the shape of Wayne Sedgwick who gives cheerful and enthusiastic and continuous support for which we are very grateful.

2017 FOLK AGM: advanced notice, make a note in your diary for Wednesday November 15th 2017 the FOLK AGM will be held in the evening at Leckhampton Primary School. Further details to follow.

About FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners, to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land.

We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. Annual membership is £6 per year for an individual or £9 for a family.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition in Autumn 2017 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: norwoodpw1@gmail.com articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time would be most welcome

Why not have a look at what is new on the FOLK website

<http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/> and look us up on Facebook Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received. Contact:

webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman: 01242 520053

Geoff Holt Treasurer and Working Parties: 01242 244165

Mike Donnelly Working Parties 01242 238790

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767

Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common on
www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and on Facebook

The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee