



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

Issue 8 Free to members, non members 25p

June 2002

www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

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Work Party Report

Since the last Newsletter a considerable number of work parties have concentrated on clearing up in the Limekilns, Deadman's Quarry and adjoining footpaths after the Geo-Conservation work. We will await the recommendations of the site management plan before any further tidying-up work is done in these areas. It was disappointing that FOLK work parties were left to clear up after the geo-conservation work and it is hoped this will not happen in future.

English Nature has agreed that there were shortfalls in management of the project and the guidelines now agreed as to timing and consultation with all interested parties should avoid future problems.

Most FOLK members will be aware of the current problems with our insurance cover, in that new terms and conditions imposed by the Underwriters, not just on our group but unilaterally across the whole country, did not meet the requirements of many Council landowners, and consequently work parties had to be suspended temporarily. If these are resolved soon then the work parties will resume as follows:-

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday July 11th 2002
Thursday August 8th 2002
Thursday Sept. 12th 2002
Thursday Oct. 10th 2002

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday June 23rd 2002
Sunday July 28th 2002
Sunday August 25th 2002
Sunday Sept. 22nd 2002
Sunday Oct. 27th 2002

All work parties meet in Tramway Cottage car park at 9.30am.

Allan Wood

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Committee of F.O.L.K.

News, views and general comments are always welcomed and should be addressed to:-

The Hon. Secretary, Mr Jack Shepherd, Rainbow Cottage, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

- FOLK interest walk - Spring Birdsong 4th May
- FOLK interest walk over the hill 27th May
- Executive committee continues to meet monthly.
- The Council have appointed Nortoft as the Management Consultants who are preparing the new Site Management Plan.

WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

- Work Parties continue on a regular basis.
Second Thursday each month - 9.30am
Fourth Sunday each month - 9.30am
Meet Tramway Cottage Car Park

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Ancient Ridge & Furrow at Daisybank

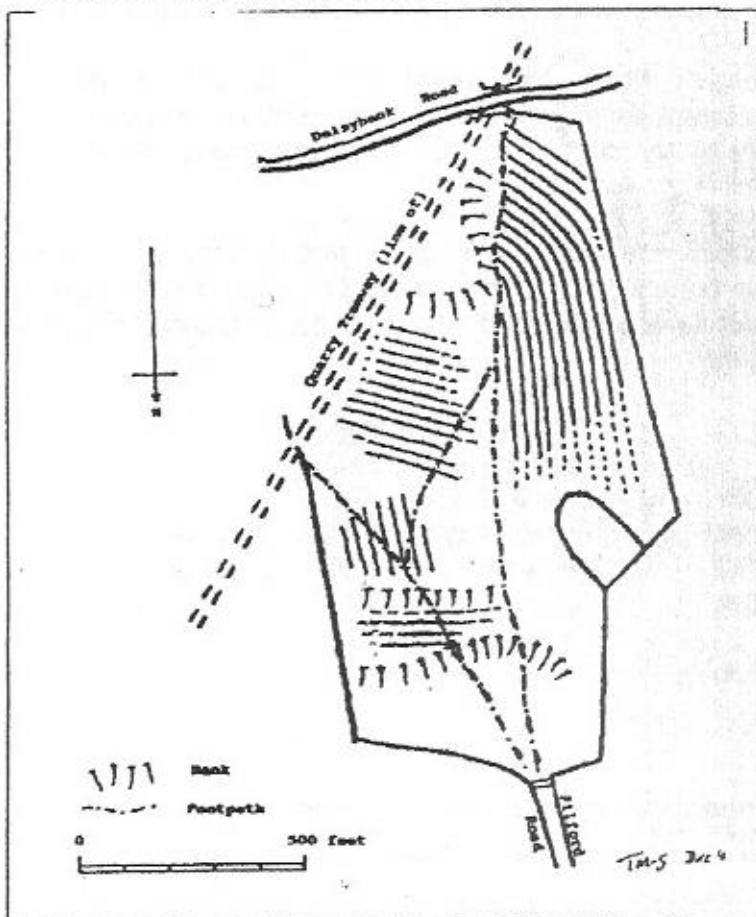
By Terry Moore-Scott

I wonder how many winter-time revellers, while tobogganing down the slopes of the field below Daisybank, have stopped to think how the regular undulations they shoot over came to be there and what they tell us about how this particular part of the hillside was once used? I am, of course, referring to the remnants of the old ridge and furrow ploughing that criss-cross certain parts of the field. This field is by no means unique in having such remnants of past arable farming activity. The same distinctive parallel ridges, formed by centuries of ploughing are still visible in a number of fields around Leckhampton, most clearly on the nearby slopes above Leckhampton Court. No doubt they would also have existed in the field on top of the hill, but quarrying, and modern farming methods, have effectively obliterated all traces.

The ridge and furrow results from individual strips of land having been ploughed in times past when teams of oxen were used to pull the plough. The effect of dragging the plough to and fro across the land was that the soil became ridged up in the centre of each strip and sloped down into a furrow on either side.

Over long periods of ploughing in this way, the ridges became quite high and the furrows correspondingly deep. Sizes varied but, in this part of England, with the width of a single ridge and furrow strip tending to be around 7 metres and the height of a ridge at its centre about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a metre.

Daisybank Field: Traces of Ancient Ridge and Furrow



Modern ploughing methods, introduced during the 19th century, have obliterated much of the old ridge and furrow but where fields were converted to permanent pasture in the early 19th century (mainly to provide more dairy produce for a growing population) the ridge and furrow, despite natural erosion, has been preserved. The sketch map, which was produced partly from aerial photography but mostly from my own field walking, shows the approximate distribution of ridge and furrow in the field below Daisybank. The scrub that covers much of the field today makes it difficult to detect every trace but a number of the ridges are visible to even the most casual observer using certain footpaths going up the hill.

In places, the ridge and furrow occurs on quite steep and irregular slopes where the going would have been difficult for both the oxen and the ploughman and here the lengths of the strips are shorter (although note the ridge and furrow in the upper eastern corner of the field is terminated by the quarry tramway, possibly indicating that the ploughing in this sector continued on beyond). The presence of several banks, particularly in the lower east corner of the field (see sketch map), may simply have been caused by land slumping, but there does appear to be a correlation with the ridge and furrow, suggesting that the banks may, perhaps, have been deliberately created to form less steep areas for ploughing.

The ridge and furrow that we see today almost certainly dates back at least to before the land enclosures of the late 18th century and may well have much earlier origins, in some cases as far back as medieval times (the medieval ploughing having been preserved by later farmers using traditional methods). From old records, we know that this particular field was known by the fieldname "Upper Pilford" (so called after the Pilley Brook which rises in the vicinity). And, for a time up until the late 1800's it was a part of the manorial estate of Charlton Park. It is due to the efforts of successive generations of tenant farmers, or plough hands serving that estate, that we owe the continued existence of this interesting feature of the landscape on this part of the hill.

MANAGING THE HILL'S INDUSTRIAL PAST

by DAVID BICK B.Sc., M.I.Mech.E., F.S.A.

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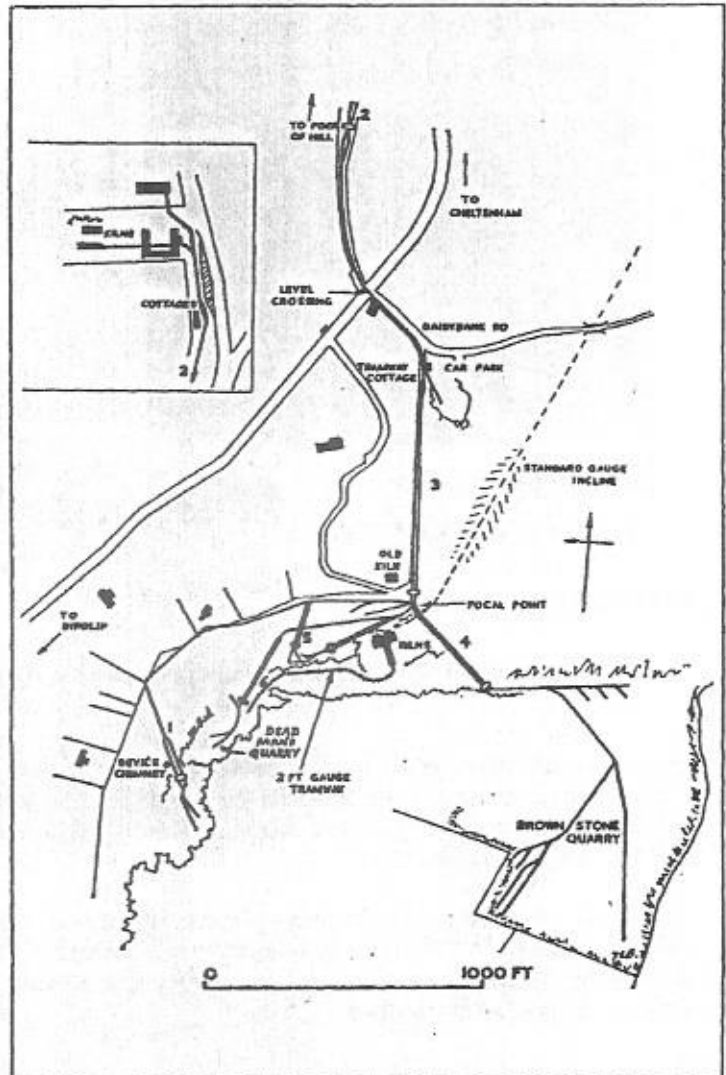
The great cliff-like quarries extending half a mile give Leckhampton Hill its unique character, and huge tonnages of stone went to build Georgian and Regency Cheltenham. It was conveyed down the hill by a very early network of tramroads and inclines, the first being installed about 1800 by Charles Brandon Trye of Leckhampton Court.

In 1810 the original line was linked to two longer inclines to a tramroad running to Cheltenham, and in 1811 as far as the River Severn at Gloucester, horses being the motive power. The quarries and their ancient tramroads were still working in 1921, when the quarry company began a great expansion utilising cheap Government loans. Four gas-fired limekilns nearly 80 feet high were erected, to which a full-sized branch railway ascended under Daisybank Road via a long incline. This incline now serves as the main access for walkers. At its top, the 'focal point' where the tramroads converged, the massive concrete bases of the kilns are a reminder of this short-lived final enterprise which came to an end in 1926.

In 1968 my book 'Old Leckhampton - its Quarries and Railways', was published, with a new enlarged edition in 1993, and its sales, running into thousands, reveal the extent of public interest in the subject. This lends weight to the importance of including the industrial archaeology of the hill in a management plan, which would add much to its amenity and educational value.

Quarries and Tramroads

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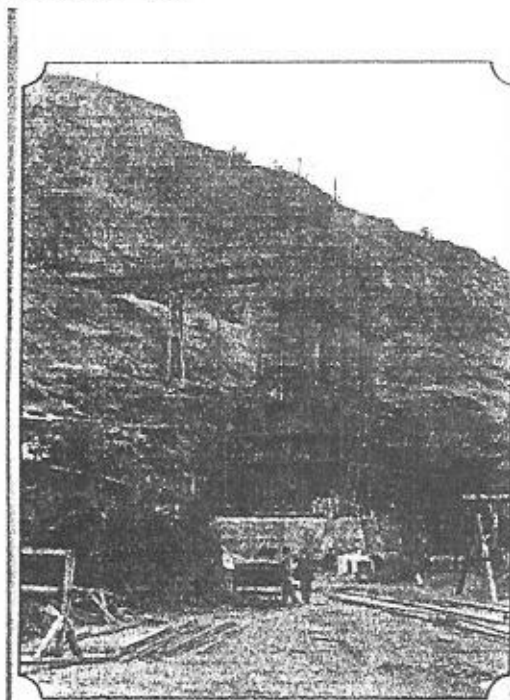


The basic railway developments on the hill, with details of the depot inset; the full story will probably never be known. The numbers refer to the tramroad inclines



The old tramroad and incline routes could be cleared of scrub, improving the footpath network at the same time, and also revealing the original stone sleeper blocks, many of which were laid down nearly 200 years ago. The limekiln area could also be cleared and consolidated, and altogether the potential for adding to the hill's attractions is very great. The opportunity will not come again.

You can obtain a copy of this book by contacting / writing to: *Stephen Mourtou of Runpast Publishing at 10 Kingscote Grove, Cheltenham, GL51 6JX.*



ISBN 1 870754 27 1 £R.95

RUNPAST PUBLISHING



OLD LECKHAMPTON Quarries-Railways-Riots-Devil's Chimney BICK

New Enlarged Edition

OLD LECKHAMPTON

Quarries-Railways-Riots-Devil's Chimney



DAVID BICK

NEWS SNIPPETS

Two moth-trapping sessions on Leckhampton Hill are planned in the immediate future, to which FOLK members have been invited.

1. Saturday, June 15th (National Moth Night) Meet in the turning circle at the far end of Daisybank Road(SO 958185), after 2130h. If weather conditions are suitable, A demonstration light trap will be set up in the turning circle, and one or two light traps on the face of the escarpment. Lighting up at about 2215h, finishing at about 0100h. Anyone interested should phone Jonathan Brock on 07763 339790 before travelling any distance.

2. Saturday, July 13th or 20th. A demonstration for FOLK. Activities and timings similar to the 15th June, but slightly earlier - 13th: start at 2145h / 20th: start at 2130h. Please let Jonathan know which date you would prefer ? Jonathan will also be recording on other nights this summer, when weather conditions are suitable. Any local FOLK members would be welcome to "drop in" on the sessions.

All records will be available to FOLK, with a report on any conservation implications. All species records are supplied to the County Moth Recorder, Roger Gaunt, who passes them on to the National Recording Scheme.

Peregrine Falcon spotted on the Hill

On the afternoon of Thursday 14 March Geoconservation workers on the Hill spotted an unusual visitor to the site - a peregrine falcon. It was working the woodlands over Limekilns and down toward Area 22 for quite a few minutes before moving on - or out of sight at least.

Wouldn't it be magnificent if we were to get peregrines nesting and rearing young on the Hill? The quarries make for perfect habitat for peregrines, they don't build nests as such - they merely clear an area of vegetation - known as a scrape.

The removal of the scrub will further enhance the quarries suitability for peregrines as they will be able to sit high on the faces - watching out for woodland bird species below - their preferred food source. Swooping at an estimated speed of 200 mph - a peregrine falcon strike is a fascinating example of wildlife viewing at its very best.

Spring Bird Song Walk - Saturday 4th May 2002

Guides: Frances & Tony Meredith & Mike Freeman of Cheltenham Bird Society.

15 people joined the walk and, in the course of the morning, no fewer than 34 different species of bird were identified and heard and / or seen!

LETTER RESPONSE from Julian Bendle (Sites Warden, Gloucestershire County Council)

I am writing in response to the letter that appeared in the December issue of the F.O.L.K newsletter written by Judy Frazer Holland entitled *"keep the Hill open, no fencing, no grazing"*. As the Sites Warden employed by Gloucestershire County Council for the last fourteen years to help manage both the Crickley Hill and Barrow Wake Sites of Special Scientific Interest [S.S.S.I], I feel I would like to make a few observations/comments on the statement made in her letter that ... *"Leckhampton Hill and common should not loose their open access as has happened recently at Barrow Wake and Crickley Hill and that the latter is now fenced and grazed and so sanitised that even a dog on a lead looks out of place"*.

Both Barrow Wake and Crickley Hill in many ways are extremely similar to Leckhampton Hill, being large areas of unimproved limestone grassland, designated as S.S.S.I's, registered common land and attracting large numbers of visitors. The grasslands on both these sites are of extremely high ecological importance. They support an enormous number of plant and animal species, including the nationally rare Musk Orchid [now confined to less than ten sites in the Cotswolds] and over thirty different species of Butterfly, including three national rarities!

Results from archaeological excavations carried out at Crickley Hill Country Park suggest that parts of the hill have been continuous grassland, with little scrub/tree development, since Neolithic times some 5 ½ thousand years ago! These grasslands have been maintained by centuries of grazing. When grazing ceased at Crickley Hill, some time in the early part of the last century, so the traditional form of management came to an end. Gradually scrub began to invade and by the mid 1980's those areas that still remained as grassland consisted of little more than a great mass of tall dense Tor Grass and Upright Brome. As a result of this the more delicate herbs and flowers were being completely smothered out. In an attempt to halt the loss of grassland to scrub and eventually woodland, in 1985 a scrub cutting programme was started [largely helped by volunteers]. Though successful in halting the spread of scrub [it was always the intention to keep some scrub because of its

wildlife value] the grasslands, choked by a build up of generations of dead grass foliage, were still deteriorating from a wildlife point of view.

With areas like Crickley Hill and Barrow Wake acting like fragmented "islands of wildlife", large scale burning was no longer an option. This is partly due to the disastrous effects burning has on invertebrate populations, but also because if the resulting grass re growth is not grazed, smothering coarse Tor Grass swards develop. The only solution was to reintroduce grazing, the traditional form of management! But like Leckhampton, since both Crickley Hill and Barrow Wake are registered commons, consent to fence these areas was required from the Secretary of State. From the very start however one of the County Councils main objectives was **not to loose the "open feel"** of both these sites, or **restrict access in any way**. In fact if this could not be achieved then consent would not be granted. The lengthy fencing application [years!] required the county Council to consult all interested parties, including local residents, the parish Councils, Open Spaces Society, English nature, the Ramblers Association and British horse society. At both sites no internal fencing was carried out, the sites were effectively ring fenced. In both cases in the region of 80% of the fence line already existed and was merely replaced. Where previously unfenced boundaries were fenced, the fence was carefully sited to keep it off the skyline and cut through dense scrub thickets. Wherever the fence line crossed any path, whether a legal right of way or not, a gate was put in so as not to restrict **any** access. Even these gates are removed when stock is not grazing!

With regards to the recent Barrow Wake fencing application, the Ramblers Association wrote in support and said they *"applauded"* the Councils intention to graze the area; and thought the fencing was well sited, and stated that *"the aspect of openness had not been compromised"*.

In 1995 grazing was re introduced to Crickley Hill, followed by Barrow Wake in 2000. Native hardy breeds capable of tackling near vertical slopes have been used, including

Welsh Black and Belted Galloway cattle and even wild Welsh Mountain Ponies. These sorts of livestock are quite capable of surviving the winter months without shelter or supplementary feeding, and the large numbers of dogs that use these sites [an estimated 70,000 alone at Crickley!] pose no risk to them. The results have been dramatic. At Crickley Hill the increase in flowers, particularly the Orchids, has been most noticeable. Grazing has removed the build up of coarse grasses that would usually have smothered them out. This has had a direct knock on effect to invertebrate populations, especially the butterflies that are so dependent on these flower rich grasslands. Numbers of the nationally rare Chalk Hill Blue Butterfly at Crickley Hill have been steadily rising since grazing was re introduced. This is a species that requires short grazed flower rich grasslands for its survival.

I wish every success to the Friends in the management of Leckhampton hill and Charlton Kings Common. From experiences gained at Crickley Hill and Barrow wake [the successes and failures] I would strongly advise that the re introduction of grazing is the only long-term solution to the problem of the management of the grasslands at Leckhampton Hill. Handled properly, the re introduction of grazing to Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common need not result in the loss of open access, and will secure long term benefits to local residents and wildlife alike. If any F.O.L.K members would like the opportunity to look at any of the work the County Council has been involved in with the re introduction of grazing to its sites, then I would be more than happy to show them around.

GLOWING REPORTS ON THE HILL

If you take a walk on Leckhampton Hill after dusk on a still, warm and humid summer's evening you may be lucky and see dim little glowing lights among long grass or shrubs. The lights may be yellow green in colour. If you're even luckier you may see insects showing two tiny lights flying nearby. The flying lights belong to the male glow-worm searching for a female who remains stationary but emits a relatively stronger glow to aid the male find his target. When they meet up they douse their lights and get on with serious business of mating.

Glow-worms are not worms at all; they are beetles (with the apt scientific name *Lampyris noctiluca*) and are rather drab in appearance. The male is smaller (up to 12mm) and looks like a beetle but the larger (up to 18mm) female has no wings and is more larval in appearance. She does not fly and after mating lays her eggs in low vegetation.

The young emerge after a month or so as larvae and immediately begin to track their prey which usually consists of young snails. It is thought that they track snails by following their slime trails. They bite them and squirt digestive juices into their bodies. The snail is reduced to a liquid mass in its shell which the larval glow-worms drink using the shell as a dish!

Since snails are mostly found in limestone or chalky areas, glow-worms are limited to these areas too. They are locally abundant in the southern half of the country. They form a natural part of the food web as carnivores in grassland and woodland habitats.

You may also find glow-worms on quiet road-side verges.

The fascinating thing about glow-worms is, of course, their glow. Usually when we think of something producing light we think it must be accompanied by heat. However the light emitted by living tissue in glow-worms is a cold light and is termed bio-luminescence. The tissue contains a substance called luciferin which the animal can oxidise by secreting a tiny quantity of a special enzyme under nervous control.

The light produced by this process can be turned on and off according to circumstances. If you come too near glow-worms you may cause them to extinguish their glow; especially, of course, if you are a small male beetle with two tiny lights on your head!