



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton
Kings Common
FOLKtalk

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 55 Autumn 2017

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

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Autumn marks another successful FOLK year



A fine autumn day at the Hill Fort

As the late summer sun highlights the change of colour on the Hill and Common from green to autumn russet, we can look back on another successful year for FOLK. This year will be summed up at the forthcoming **AGM to be held at Leckhampton Primary school on November 15th starting at 7 pm.** All members are

encouraged to come along to the AGM. Our second Annual Report will be published for the AGM and your comments and feedback will be most welcome.

Numbers of people enjoying the Hill appear to be growing with many international visitors tramping the Cotswold Way, dog walkers in profusion and a wide range of outdoor activities being pursued. The FOLK work programme continues as volunteers toil to look after our precious amenity.

Introducing Trevor Smith

In this issue of FOLKtalk we are introducing a FOLK member who has fond memories of Leckhampton Hill stretching back to his boyhood. From being a young man, Major Trevor Smith has followed and is still following a vocation in the Salvation Army. His work has taken him into many parts of the globe and he has worked with the most disadvantaged people in our society including HIV/AIDS sufferers in the 1980s. Trevor has regularly journeyed back to Cheltenham to enjoy the Hill and now lives in Leckhampton. Trevor is a stalwart supporter of FOLK and like many members he cannot take part in

the more energetic work on the Hill and Common but is with us in spirit.



Trevor Smith in earlier days on the Common

When did you join FOLK? I do not recall exactly when I joined FOLK but it was many years ago.

How do you enjoy the Hill? I enjoyed the view of the hill when I was young at a time when I and my parents lived in a house overlooking the rough track that led into Mead Road before the current industrial properties were built. Later on we enjoyed living in a house on the Hill.

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? I remember as a boy being taken to Daisybank to watch “sledding” down the steep bank in the snow. I also remember motor bikes or cars racing up the path by Tramway Cottage.

What changes have you noticed over the years? The fast growth of trees and shrubs by the path along the hill below the Devil’s Chimney (the woodland walk) has been most noticeable.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? My favourite view has been from the top of the hill, looking across the Severn valley to the Malvern Hills and then the Welsh mountains in the distance.

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? The summer when it is dry and the sun is shining is my favourite time.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? I have looked with interest at the history of the hill, reflecting on the times when the quarries operated.



May Hill and Wales beyond from the Hill top

What does membership of FOLK mean to you? Now that I again live in the valley below the hill, the link with FOLK means that I can keep abreast

of developments on the hill and I am glad to be in a small way supportive of those who render practical help in maintaining the hill.

What would you hope that FOLK would have achieved on the Hill by its 25th anniversary in 2025? I hope that those who are involved in its ongoing maintenance will benefit from being better informed and qualified in knowing what should be achieved in 2025 for the best interest of the Hill and its users.

Personal reflections

I was born in the 1930s and I remember looking from the family home facing the rough track that led into Mead Road, across the field where military vehicles were parked (now the site of Travis Perkins) to Leckhampton Hill in the distance, each day often reflecting the type of weather we were to experience.

A local solicitor advised my father that the house *Rockholme* was up for sale at a very low price due to a lot of work needing to be undertaken, both inside and outside. Father and an uncle were good at such practical work, so as a family we moved to the house and the men set to work. The two fellows also

developed a vegetable garden at the rear of the house, mindful of the fact that if the Devil's Chimney fell, it would fall into the garden! A wooden summerhouse was placed by trees at the rear of the property but alas, a huge boulder fell off the hill, bounced over the garden wall and smashed the structure. Thankfully, no-one was inside!

I enjoyed crossing the road and walking in the field opposite our house, where our neighbour kept ponies she had rescued. Walking further down, I would pass a memorial to a racing horse.

In those early years the hill was set on controlled fire in order to burn dry grass before the birds started nesting. In the autumn, mushrooms were found on top of the hill and blackberries from the hedgerows in the area could be garnered for mother to make blackberry and apple tart.



Woodland walk in autumn sun

As a boy I was taken on walks over the hill, encouraged to identify wild flowers and trees, observe the industrial history of the hill and appreciate the views. In later years it was sheer joy to go on walks over the whole length of the hill.

As I approached my eighteenth birthday, I walked over the top of the hill early one Sunday morning, wrestling in my mind with the conviction that I had a calling to be an officer in the Salvation Army. In the early morning quietness I knelt in prayer and committed myself. Later in the day I made my decision known when attending a meeting at the Salvation Army hall in Cheltenham. Next day I received my call-up papers to do my two years' National Service in the RAF, where I trained as a medic!

Inevitably I moved around a great deal as a Salvation Army officer but I have always striven to walk on the hill from time to time, being refreshed by the experience and gaining a better perspective on life. It was always a joy to

stay in the family home but when my parents died *Rockholme* was sold. However, I have continued to enjoy the occasional walk on Leckhampton Hill when opportunity permitted.

Best wishes to Trevor and thanks for his personal reflections. Ed

The Word from Wayne autumn 2017

Contact has been made with the Gloucestershire County rights of way office about **path designation for the Gallops (Old turnpike road)**. They have sent through some information regarding the process of designation. A meeting is to be arranged with Natural England, the Council and FOLK to make progress on designation.



Trainees pose with their handiwork

Work has continued by the Cotswold wardens on the **Hopkins upper field drystone wall**. The training aspect of the wall was completed early August with a positive response from the trainees, some of whom have been inspired to explore training in other rural trades.

Contractual work has been discussed for the forthcoming season with a range of tasks including hazel coppicing, tree work around the Bridge car park and grassland maintenance being confirmed and scheduled.

Meetings have been held to discuss and plan for the proposed **mapping of the Hill and Common**. It is likely that drones will be used to provide aerial photographs of the site. Details of selected contractors have been obtained. A survey is planned for November, which will produce a 3D image of the site and will allow mapping of areas of vegetation eg scrub and will help with the monitoring of the effectiveness of the FOLK work on the site.

The autumn **joint site visit with Natural England** to review the state of the Hill and Common is to be scheduled in early November. Members are welcome to join that visit.

A grant application was submitted by Natural England to facilitate the **inclusion of the golf course part of the SSSI** within our grazing programme and management. Unfortunately this application was not successful but further sources of funding are being explored as the amount of work to be done to fence the golf club land is not large and if completed would allow grazing of the whole of the SSSI to become the main management method for this important habitat.



A nose for fresh grass

It has been a poor year for making **hay** and it was not possible to produce any on the land that is normally used to provide winter feed for the cattle. This seems to be a countrywide problem this year. An experiment has been carried out to make silage/haylage with the grass that was cut. 20 large black wrapped parcels can be seen

in the reversion fields. The quality of the product will be checked out within the next few weeks and if this operation has been successful it will be a useful option for making winter feed in the future.

Plans to harvest **wildflower seed from Cowslip meadow** were abandoned because of the wet weather so it has not been possible to sow seed into area 16 this autumn. Subject to the weather in 2018 the exercise will be repeated.

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

2017 Butterfly Surveying on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

For the 5th year running, surveys counting the number of individuals of each butterfly species seen on set routes on the Commons and 2 adjacent fields have been completed by a small but enthusiast and knowledgeable band of volunteers. Whilst all the records have now been submitted, a full analysis of the results has still to be undertaken, so the following are just some of the things that have struck me from the initial review of the data and my own observations.

The season started early because of the relatively warm March and April, so several of the species that hibernate as adults were on the wing during the first week in April (the start of the survey period), although some had been seen even earlier in the year. Speckled Wood was first recorded on 8th April – 10 days earlier than in 2014, and nearly a month earlier than other years.

Red Admirals, particularly after mid June, were frequently encountered with double the number previously recorded. But there was no great influx of other migrants: Painted Lady (only 2 were sighted) and no Clouded Yellows.

The late frost on 27th April may have been a contributory factor to their scarcity, but Common Blues did not live up to their name, especially during the time of the 1st generation (May to mid June) but seemed to have a more productive 2nd generation (mid July to September). On some warm Cotswold sites, Dingy Skipper had a partial 2nd generation, but this was not observed on the hill.



Common Blue pic Russell Smith

After 3 years of increasing numbers, there was a slump in Small Blue, with only 2 being seen the whole season.

By contrast, it was the best year for Chalkhill Blues, with 35 being seen. The previous highest number had been 24.



Silver washed fritillary pic from internet

Duke of Burgundy maintained their low numbers.

Silver-washed Fritillary could be found in 2 places on a regular basis, and on this evidence, seemed to be doing well. By contrast, Dark green Fritillary numbers have fallen steadily from 49 in 2013 to just 7 this year. However, with the increase in the former and the overlapping flight periods of these

butterflies and similar appearance when in flight, the identity of some individuals could not be determined, so under-recording definitely occurred.

What struck me was that the hottest, sunniest days were not necessarily the best ones on which to record butterfly numbers. Temperatures of mid to high 20C seemed to reduce activity and therefore the visibility of some species whereas others, particularly the Skippers, were hyperactive so accurate identification was impossible!

In due course, a more comprehensive report for the year will be prepared and posted on the FOLK website.

Once again, I extend my thanks to the stalwart recorders: Andrew Bishop, the 3 Peters – Niblett, Sands and Whalley -, Pat Raddon, Jenny and John Palmer who once again have given of their time and expertise.

Serena Meredith, Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator

FOLK Work Party Report Autumn 2017



Photo: Geoff Holt

Pulling hemp agrimony

We have had 10 work parties since the report in the last newsletter but there wasn't a lot of variety in the work we performed.

We spent 4 work parties concentrating on pulling up Hemp Agrimony and Ragwort on the lower slopes of Charlton Kings Common. Where the Hemp had started flowering we removed the flower heads and disposed of these but left the pulled stalks on the ground to decompose or be eaten by the

cattle. With the Ragwort, because it can be dangerous if eaten by cattle, we removed the whole plant and flowers off the Hill. Unfortunately we found that someone had been pulling Ragwort but leaving the pulled plants on site in positions accessible to the cattle so we had to go round trying to find and collect up these. Please pass on the message that if anyone is tempted to pull up Ragwort the pulled plants MUST be removed off site.

As a break from this plant pulling work, and before starting the next significant task, we spent one work party erecting a temporary paddock in Daisybank Field to be used to hold the young calves.

We then spent 3 consecutive work parties raking up the grass that had been cut by a contractor on top of the West side of Leckhampton Hill. This is



Photo: Geoff Holt

Raking up grass cuttings

one of our annual tasks but it seemed to take a lot more time and effort this year to do. We are putting it down to there having been more growth this year rather than us getting older and slower!

The grass is cut by tractor but unfortunately there isn't sufficient access to get a baler in hence why we have to rake it up, but that is to change. Access is going to be improved so that the baler can get in here so hopefully we won't have to do the raking next year.

Our last couple of work parties have also been used to do regular summer annual tasks. We spent one mowing around the historic barrow on top of the Hill – it gets overgrown and partially hidden which is why we cut it to re-expose it. We also did some mowing and brushcutting at the same time in an area nearby which we call the 'Butterfly Motorway'. Our final work party involved giving the clearing above Bridge Car Park (Area 16) its annual 'haircut'.



Clearance work in area 16

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.

Work party dates for Autumn 2017 to Spring 2018

October 2017	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
November 2017	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 ^h
December 2017	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
January 2018	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
February 2018	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
March 2018	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th

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

Heritage Open Day on Leckhampton Hill

On Sunday September 10th 13 hardy souls attended a Heritage Open Day event on Leckhampton Hill.

The event was arranged by FOLK & Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology, and the topic was the industrial heritage of Leckhampton Hill. The group assembled in Daisy Bank Car Park at 2pm and, in spite of a dire weather forecast, they set off up the hill, led by Dr Ray Wilson. The next two hours were spent visiting the numerous sites on the hill



Studying the industrial archaeology

where remains of the hill's industrial heritage can still be found, and at each location Dr Wilson provided fascinating insights into the rich history of the hill. At times it felt as if the group were fighting their way through a hurricane, but in spite of this all 13 attendees made it all the way around and returned safely to the car park. Everyone thanked Dr Ray Wilson for what had been an extremely interesting and informative (and bracing) afternoon.

Ash die back in the news again.

Chris Chavasse Cheltenham Borough's Senior Trees Officer has reported that he has seen Ash Die Back disease in Cheltenham for the first time. This does not bode well for Ash trees in this area. Opposite is a leaflet giving details of the disease so you will be able to look out for it on Leckhampton Hill.

A guide to Chalara ash dieback

www.observatree.org.uk

What is it?

Chalara ash dieback is a serious and usually fatal tree disease caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*. It was first found in Buckinghamshire in 2012 and has since spread rapidly across the UK.

What species does it affect?

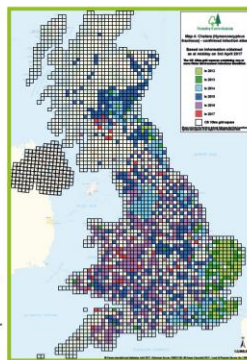
Chalara ash dieback targets ash trees, especially young ones. The common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is very susceptible to infection.

What are the symptoms?

The disease causes leaf loss, lesions on the bark and dieback on the crown (top) of the tree. A younger ash tree will die more quickly than a mature one. An infected tree is also more vulnerable to other pests and diseases. Our free downloadable [Chalara Field ID Guide](#) can provide more information.

How does it spread?

It is believed that local spread of the disease is caused by wind. Moving diseased ash plants around and poor biosecurity is the most likely cause of spread over longer distances. When you are out and about in trees and woodland it is crucial that good biosecurity practices are followed to limit the spread of anything.



Known distribution as of April 2017. Colours indicate year of recorded infection. Red is 2017. White squares have no reported Chalara ash dieback.

© Forestry Commission



Top biosecurity tips

Mud can carry pests and diseases

- 1 Clean your boots and shoes between visits
- 2 Wash down the tyres of bikes and vehicles after off-roading
- 3 Keep to obvious paths
- 4 Keep an eye out for information on notices

Plants and leaves may already be home to pests and diseases

- 5 Avoid taking plants or cuttings from the countryside
- 6 Resist planting out your garden plants in the countryside
- 7 Avoid dumping garden waste in the countryside
- 8 Familiarise yourselves with common plant pests and diseases



For further guidance on biosecurity visit: forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity

© Forestry Commission (England)

What if we do nothing?

Chalara ash dieback is well established in the UK. Millions of ash trees are still at risk of infection and this could have a significant impact on associated wildlife. There may be trees with a natural resistance or parts of the UK where the fungus cannot grow well. So it's important to know where the disease is and when.

50% funded by the EU's LIFE programme



A guide to Chalara ash dieback

www.observatree.org.uk

How can you help?

Chalara ash dieback is now a permanent fixture in the UK. We need to know exactly where it is to help track the spread of the disease. To find out if it is already recorded in your area you can enter your postcode on an [interactive Chalara ash dieback map](#).

Please:

- use the [Woodland Trust](#) or [Forestry Commission](#) tree ID tools if you're not sure you're looking at an ash tree
- familiarise yourself with signs and symptoms
- use the Chalara ash dieback checklist to record details
- submit a report via [Tree Alert](#) or [TreeCheck](#) in Northern Ireland (see the Chalara ash dieback Question and Answer sheet for details)



Have you seen Chalara ash dieback?



Courtesy of Ana Perez Sierra

Leaves turn black and hang onto twigs



© Forestry Commission

Dark, diamond-shaped lesions form where twigs meet the main stem



© Forestry Commission/Thomas Kirilakis

The veins of leaves – usually pale – can turn brown



© Forestry Commission

On a mature tree, twigs and branches die back at the crown (top) with denser growth below

Observation calendar

JANUARY – APRIL	MAY – JULY	AUGUST – OCTOBER	NOVEMBER – DECEMBER
Bark lesions are most obvious whilst leaves are missing	Wilting of leaves on infected shoots	Leaf infections are most visible now	Bark lesions are most obvious whilst leaves are missing

50% funded by the EU's LIFE programme



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Wildflowers return to Leckhampton Hill

As previously reported, an area of Leckhampton Hill above the Bridge carpark on Daisybank Road, known as Area 16, which has been woodland and scrub for a number of years was recently cleared by FOLK volunteers and re-seeded with material harvested from Cowslip field. A recent survey of plants now present, by the Magnificent Meadows project, reveals an encouraging list of wildflowers and grasses including:

Yorkshire fog, Selfheal, Kidney vetch, Eyebright, Hedge woundwort, Willowherb, Greater plantain, Ribwort plantain, Yellow wort, Rose sp, Perforate St John's wort, Tor grass, Ragwort, Mouse-ear, Bindweed, Violet sp, Smooth hawkbit, Black medick, Hop trefoil, Red bartsia, Centaury, Campion sp., Lords and ladies, Cowslip, Hedge bedstraw, Greater burdock, Spear thistle, Harebell, Cranesbill sp., Upright, brome, Cocksfoot, Ribwort plantain, Glaucous sedge, Fescue sp., Red clover, Rough hawkbit, Yellow rattle, Sweet vernal grass, Common nettle, Dock, Creeping thistle,

Finding out about bats on the Hill



Noctule bat pic from internet

As is well known, bats play an important role in various habitats and are indicators of the general state of health of ecosystems. In mid August the Gloucestershire Bat group carried out a preliminary survey of bats on Leckhampton Hill. They used specialised sound equipment located in the Salterley quarry and on the top of the Hill to record the sounds of any bats in the area. At least five species were detected including: common pipistrelle, long-eared bat, lesser horse shoe bat, a nationally rare species, noctule and various species of the Myotis genus (probably including Daubenton's bat as indicated by the calls recorded). These are interesting findings and will be reported on in later issues of FOLKtalk as the work progresses.

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