



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

Free to members;

Issue 56 Spring 2018

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Annual General Meeting

A FOLK AGM is never just about the all-important business of reporting to members, electing the committee and ensuring that our group is well run. It also provides an opportunity to pull together the achievements of the past year and to look ahead to future endeavours. The 2017 FOLK AGM was no exception.



Chairman John Harvey's report noted some very positive new developments, including FOLK's involvement in Cheltenham's Heritage Open Days, with Dr Ray Wilson leading a walk to explore Leckhampton Hill's industrial archaeology. In another new initiative FOLK has been working with the Gloucestershire Bat Group to find out more about bats on the hill. Meanwhile the two-year study of the possible impact of grazing indicated that, while there was a dramatic increase in the abundance of flowers in the exclusion area, there was no evidence that this increased the numbers of invertebrates.

Work continues to find an effective way of mapping the Hill and Common, with the latest development being the exploration of the use of drones through a firm which specialises in aerial photography. The Chairman

gratefully acknowledged the good working relationship FOLK enjoys with Cheltenham Borough Council and also extended his thanks to those elected members of the Council who support FOLK by serving on its executive committee.

On a more personal note, John Harvey was very pleased to report that the work of long-serving stalwart of FOLK, Mike Donnelly, had been honoured when he received the 2017 Mayor's Medal of Honour for his outstanding services to the community. The award was presented during the Inauguration of the Mayor of Cheltenham, Cllr Klara Sudbury. Cllr Sudbury said, *"The medal of honour is an important way of recognising those who have volunteered their time and energy to make a real difference in our communities."*



The Secretary, Andrew Ross, reported that in the past year FOLK had contributed 1,676 hours of voluntary work. The majority of these hours had been spent on practical contributions to preserving the Hill and the Common. The meeting also received an update on membership, which had fallen from 194 to 175 over the course of the past year. Despite this, however, the executive committee's various efforts to reduce costs have resulted in the balance of FOLK's funds increasing by just over £200 in the past year.

The Work Parties continue to make a significant contribution to the conservation and management of the environment and Geoff Holt was commended for his successful leadership of the past year's sessions. FOLK's six-monthly work plans are drawn up to complement the wider plans formed by Cheltenham Borough Council and Natural England. The work parties' extensive work includes clearing scrub, improving grassland and enhancing the many paths and open spaces enjoyed by the public – all of which have a conspicuously positive effect on the quality of this precious landscape. This year the FOLK members of the work parties have welcomed a number of enthusiastic volunteers from numerous local organisations keen to lend their support.

The meeting also learnt of wider developments over 2017 on the Hill and Common, including the “Magnificent Meadows” re-seeding project, improved fencing, drystone walling and new stiles on Hopkins Field, improved drainage at Daisy Bank car park, the installation of owl boxes and the benefits of the continually evolving use of the land for grazing the Dexter cattle. It was reported that Natural England inspected the site in March 2017, and were generally content with developments and with the impact made by Cheltenham Borough Council and FOLK.

With the formal business meeting being completed, members were treated to an excellent talk by John Heathcott, a highly experienced and extremely knowledgeable member of the Cotswold Wardens. John began with a fascinating insight into the history of the Cotswolds, the variety of landscapes found in the Cotswolds and the many changes seen across the Cotswolds over the past four hundred years. His talk also gave us an overview of the huge range of tasks the Cotswold Wardens undertake, including guided walks, training, education, monitoring ancient sites for Historic England and, of course, a great deal of practical work including drystone walling, hedging, tree-planting, coppicing and all that is involved in maintaining the Cotswold Way. It was a truly uplifting end to the evening.

Quiz Night



Following the success of last autumn’s skittles evening, our Social Secretary Pete Niblett arranged a **Quiz Night** at The Wheatsheaf towards the end of March. In a new development, invitations were also extended beyond FOLK to other local voluntary green space groups. On the night, we were joined by volunteers from the Friends

of Pilley Bridge Nature Reserve, Churchill Gardens, Naunton Park and

Hatherley Park. Around sixty people took part - pitting their collective wits and enjoying delicious food and good company.

The choice of The Wheatsheaf was inspired. The pub itself is close to our hearts as it played an important role in the history of Leckhampton Hill. Back at the turn of the 20th century it was where the Stalwarts used to meet to plan their campaign to keep the Hill open for all Cheltenham residents. This time we were grateful to The Wheatsheaf for providing the room at no cost and also for serving up an excellent supper.

We must also offer sincere thanks to Gill and Mark Douglas for compiling a marvellous quiz and presenting it to the teams in such an engaging manner. Of course, even a friendly quiz like this has winners and losers - and so we are also very grateful to Chris Ryder for generously donating the prizes.

Congratulations to all involved!

Introducing Alex Chalk MP

In this edition we are sharing with you some thoughts from our local MP, Alex Chalk and the reasons why Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common and work of FOLK are all so important to him. Alex's family have been based here since the last war and Alex himself grew up in Foxcote, just by The Kilkeney pub. He was first elected as Cheltenham's MP in 2015 and now lives with his wife and two children in Charlton Park. Alex became a member of FOLK in the summer of 2015.



Alex does not keep his enthusiasm about FOLK to himself. In January this year, during a House of Commons debate on the fifth report of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Forestry in England, Alex specifically cited the contribution of FOLK in his question to the committee's chair, Neil Parish, *"Does my hon. Friend agree that as we seek to select the correct species mix in certain areas it is important to take account of local knowledge? In my constituency, the Friends*

of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common has a huge number of volunteers who help to maintain local woodland and up on the Cotswold escarpment. Their views should be taken into account; does he agree?" It is pleasing to note that the chairman did, indeed, agree with Alex.

* * * * *

When did you join FOLK? We joined in 2015.

How do you (and your family) enjoy the Hill? In the past I've enjoyed cycling up the Hill, but nowadays it tends to be walking with the family. I confess it can be a challenge to persuade my six-year old daughter to walk, but the trick is finding something to capture the YouTube generation's imagination. At the moment, identifying tree species is working.

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? As a child I spent many hours up on the Cotswold scarp, mainly over towards Lineover Wood, out towards Dowdeswell, where I was brought up rather than up Leckhampton Hill specifically. I used to walk to a huge field (the second highest point in the Cotswolds I'm told) known as Siberia - because it's huge and cold.

What changes have you noticed over the years? The key change is that the gorse and scrub to grassland management is now so much more effective. It was also wonderful when the Leckhampton Camp hillfort banks and ditches were made fully visible.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? If I had to pick one it would probably have to be standing on the Trig point and by the Round Barrow. It's a breath-taking view, and children (and even adults...) enjoy picking out places they normally only see at ground level.

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? That's easy: Spring. There is so much birdsong from so many nesting birds. There's a wonderful variety locally - goldfinches, nuthatches, bullfinches, long-tailed finches.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? I think it's the fact that so much of what we see from the scarp has a marine heritage. I enjoy thinking of what the view must have been like when the area was covered by warm tropical seas.

What does membership of FOLK mean to you? I'm tempted to say 'a big society' but I wonder if that is on message any more... I value FOLK because it is a brilliant local example of a community coming together in the public interest to enhance our environment and safeguard it for my children's generation.

What would you hope that FOLK would have achieved on the Hill by its 25th anniversary in 2025?

Discovered a new species of Gloucestershire orchid!

2017 Butterfly Survey Report

Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common

Once again, a stalwart band of 8 surveyors spent in total approximately 100 hours undertaking 67 surveys on 48 different days between 3 April and 27 August 2017. Because of the range and scale of these expert observations we are able to have a good understanding of the diversity of butterflies seen and also the trends in their numbers.

Generally, the season got off to an early start, though with notable exceptions for some species namely Large and Dingy Skippers, Small White and Small Heath which emerged about 7-10 days later than previous years.



Dingy Skipper



Large Skipper

Only once, however, did a surveyor fail to record a single specimen on their route.

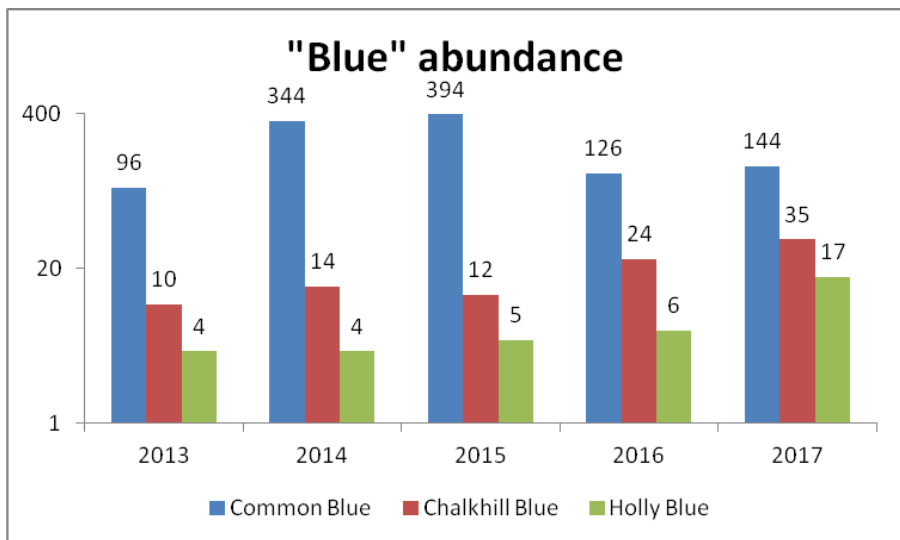
The total number of butterflies recorded was 4354, which whilst more than 2016 was still considerably fewer than 2014 (6902), also bearing in mind that at that time the Hopkins Field was not included in the area surveyed.

Migrant Red Admirals had a particularly good year (57 in 20 sections), in contrast to Painted Lady (2 only) and no Clouded Yellows were seen.

Dark Green Fritillary numbers continued to fall from 49 (in 16 sections) in 2013 to just 7 (in 5 sections) in 2017, though Silver-washed Fritillary have risen from 0 in 2013 to 20 (in 3 sections) in 2017. Dingy Skippers reduced from a high of 95 records (in 16 sections) in 2014 to just 14 (in 9). Never very abundant, just 9 Green Hairstreaks were spotted.

Only 144 Common Blue were seen, from a high of 394 in 2015. Holly Blue, whose numbers are well known to fluctuate due to parasitisation, seemed to have started its revival and Chalkhill Blue fared better with an all-time high of 35, all concentrated in one relatively small area of Leckhampton Hill. (See chart 1.)

Chart 1.

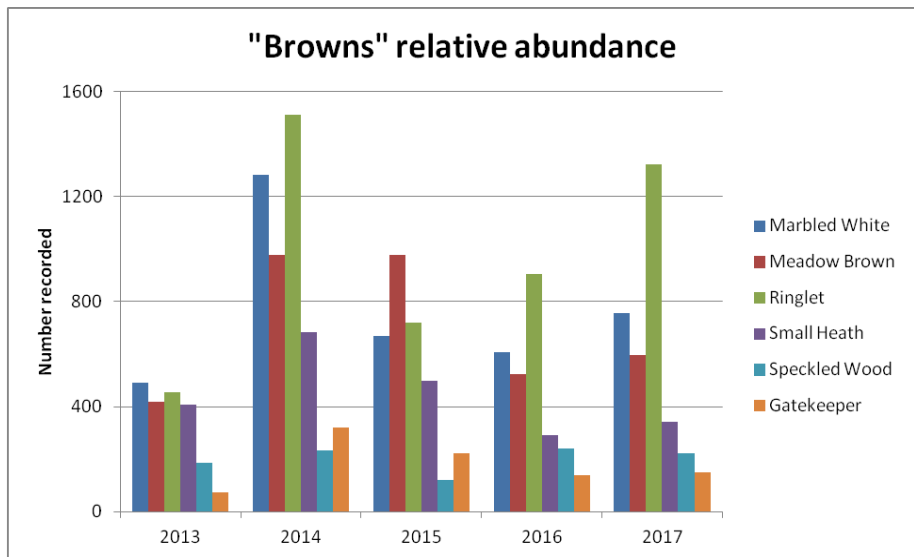


Small Tortoiseshell was more common than Peacock, but neither was abundant, whereas Commas had their best year in both numbers (34) and distribution (16 sections).

No Wall were seen (for the 3rd successive year) so they are probably now extinct at this site.

The numbers of Speckled Wood though have remained relatively constant over the 5 years, possibly due to the fact that the generations overlap and the offspring develop at variable rates. 1324 Ringlets were recorded in total, the highest number of any species recorded in the year. Whilst more common than in 2016, generally the 'Browns' (Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Small Heath) were at about half their 2014 levels. (See chart 2.)

Chart 2.

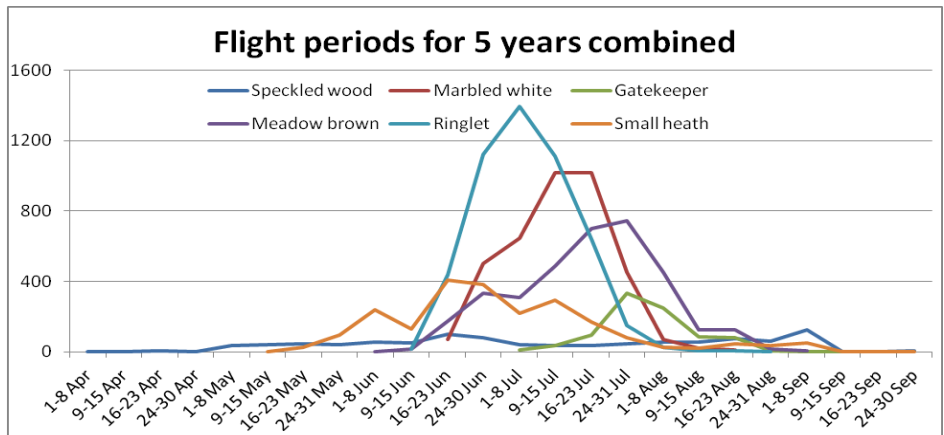


For the first time since the extensive grazing regime was introduced, most of the cattle were not present on Charlton Kings Common for part of the early summer, but instead were confined to the recently fenced area (adjacent to the Cirencester Road and the golf course) known as Hopkins Field. This had a considerable effect on the numbers of butterflies seen in that field, not only whilst the cattle were present, but for the rest of the season as well, due to the almost complete absence of flowering (nectar) plants. For instance, the

numbers of Ringlets reduced from 133 to just 5 (in marked contrast to the increase nearly everywhere else), Marbled White 62 to 7 and Meadow Brown 32 to 17. Ringlets tend to have a much shorter, more concentrated flight period (see chart 3), with similar rates of increase and decline so were probably impacted more by the intensive grazing. This seemed to have had less of an impact on the species with a longer emergence period with a subsequent more gradual decline because the recovery of the sward from July onwards.

It remains to be seen whether in the longer term butterfly numbers increase on the Common itself due to the reduction in grazing pressure, whereas the increase pressure in Hopkins Field noted above clearly made a considerable difference, to the detriment of populations. The small area on the Common itself from which the cattle had been excluded for two summer seasons failed to show any marked difference in invertebrate numbers in general (butterflies were not counted separately), though the increase in inflorescences (flower heads) was noticeable.

Chart 3.



Much is made of the attraction to butterflies of Hemp Agrimony, a plant found mainly on the eastern side of Charlton Kings Common, and there are numerous recommendations to include this in any butterfly garden. However, casual observations made whilst undertaking my own surveys showed that the grassland and hedgerow butterflies such as Common Blue,

Marbled White and Gatekeeper used bramble, scabious and knapweed flowers in preference. However, the same was not true of the more common garden species (Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock) which did tend to favour the Hemp Agrimony (pictured left).



It is anticipated that surveying will continue for the 2018 season, although at a reduced rate, unless new recorders can be recruited to help. If you are interested, please get in touch with me: details are shown at the end of this report.

Last but not least, I once again extend my thanks to (in no particular order) Peter Whalley, Peter Sands, John and Jenny Palmer, Pete Niblett, Pat Raddon and Andrew Bishop. Without their

help and enthusiasm, we would know much less about the butterflies on Leckhampton Hill, Brownstones Quarry and Charlton Kings Common and the two adjacent fields now included in the grazing regime owned by Cheltenham Borough Council.

I am also grateful to all the work party volunteers, who help to maintain the habitat and keep the survey routes clear of scrub, and to the contractors engaged by CBC to do the heavy work needed to enhance the site for the wildlife in general.

Serena Meredith

Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator

Contact details: Phone 01242 524138; email: gmeredith308@btinternet.com

Anne North - Dexter Herd Awards

FOLK is delighted to report yet more success for Anne North and her herd of Dexter cattle.



Each year the Midlands Dexter Society judges the quality of Dexter herds in our area. The 2017 Herd Competition winners were announced in January 2018 and Anne won three of the four categories which the size of her herd enabled her enter. In short, she won:

- 1st Prize for the Best Small Herd
- 1st Prize for the Best Senior Cow
- 1st prize for the Best Steer

FOLK would like to congratulate Anne for this magnificent achievement, made all the more impressive by the fact that in the Senior Cow and the Best Steer awards, Anne's Dexters won against all the other entries regardless of the size of their herds. Well done Anne!

FOLK Work Party Report - spring 2018

Most of our work over the winter involved cutting gorse, but before we started that task we spent a few work parties on less prickly stuff.



Brownstone Quarry Scrub Clearance

In October we spent some time around Brownstone Quarry which we hadn't visited for a while. As with anywhere on the Hill, turn your back on an area and, before you know it, it has been encroached by scrub and other undesirables! We started fighting back by pulling up and removing some thick patches of Golden

Rod and Michaelmas Daisies that had grown alongside the start of the footpath we know as Judy's Ride. We then moved over to the area behind the car park and opened it up more by removing scrub and hawthorn trees.

Also in October we were fortunate to have a group of 7 volunteers from Kohler Mira who came and spent a day litter picking on the Hill. We are very grateful to them for their efforts, but not to those who drop the litter in the first place! Please take it home with you.

We next made our regular visit to the ruins of the Limekilns and gave the area its annual haircut. We also cut back quite a few overhanging branches from the entrance to this area which were blocking the view into it from the top of the incline.

From November and through to February we have been focused mainly on gorse removal. Gorse is a particular nuisance on the site, especially on the Charlton Kings Common side. It is very dense over a large area, has spread widely and is having a damaging effect on the limestone grassland which we are trying to preserve.



Trimming the Limestone Kilns Area

We have therefore spent quite a few work parties cutting down and burning gorse at various places and levels on the site. For example, we have removed a length of thick gorse on top of the hill alongside the Cotswold Way which was so tall that it was blocking the view.



Removing Gorse alongside the Cotswold Way

Although gorse could be classed as one of our enemies, it does have some value for nature and so we don't want to get rid of it all (probably an impossible task anyway!). We would like to clear it from some areas and here, when we cut it, we do treat the stumps with chemicals to prevent regrowth. In other areas we are happy to retain gorse, but we don't want it to

get too old and leggy, which has little value for nature, and hence here we will do rotational cutting.



Removing Ash saplings

As a small respite from the prickly stuff we had the occasional break and cleared ash saplings in a couple of areas. Ash is another one of those species we are happy to have but, being a prolific seeder, we need to try to control its spread. Again we do apply a controlled use of chemicals to prevent regrowth.

Finally, the snow we have had this winter caused some damage by bringing down branches from trees and weighing down scrub. As a result we spent one work party wandering around the site clearing this damage and re-opening tracks that had become blocked or restricted.

Now that spring is nearly upon us (supposedly – difficult to believe with the amount of snow outside my window as I begin to write this!) we will be moving on to other tasks, but before that, we will need to revisit a few recent work sites to burn the cuttings we left there. But it's all good fun. Why not join us sometime in our own local green gym.

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 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 Summer 2018

May 2018	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
June 2018	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
July 2018	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
August 2018	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
September 2018	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd

SMOKE SIGNALS

News from the Hill and Common and the wider conservation scene.

Bats on the Hill

As reported in the previous edition, FOLK initially contacted the Gloucestershire Bat Group because of the potential bat interest associated with the old quarry faces on Leckhampton Hill. Bats often use features such as these for hibernating or for swarming during the autumn when mating and other social behaviours take place.



Lesser Horseshoe Bat

The Bat Group deployed two automatic bat recording devices: one near the car park quarry face and another within scrub further up the hill, near the trig point. These detectors switch on during night hours and record ultrasonic activity. After a week the kit was collected in and the recorded files downloaded for analysis.

Whilst there weren't noticeably high levels of bat activity recorded, we now know at least some of the species present: lesser horseshoe bats, long-eared bats, noctule bats, common pipistrelle and some bats of the *Myotis* genus. The initial analysis of this work indicates the presence of lesser horseshoe bat, noctule and common pipistrelle at the top of the hill, while near the car park were found lesser horseshoe, long-eared, noctule and *Myotis* bats, as

well as some calls which could not be pinned down to a precise species. The work done so far only represents a snapshot of what is likely to be present and there is certainly scope for lots more investigation of bats' use of the area, which is of high value with its species-rich grassland, woodland and scrub areas.

All “Friends” Together

In January, FOLK was delighted to be able to attend a special event for green space volunteers arranged by Cheltenham Borough Council. The aim of the event was to celebrate the work of the many voluntary “Friends of . . .” groups which contribute so much to everyone’s enjoyment of Cheltenham’s green spaces, as well as to say “Thank you” to the groups and, of course, to give us

all the chance to find out more about each other’s projects. A very welcome part of the thankyou was a very enjoyable light lunch, complete with excellent cakes.



Among the “Friends”

groups attending were those supporting Montpellier Bandstand and Gardens, Pittville, Sandford Park, Pilley Bridge Nature Reserve and the Winston Churchill Garden & Honeybourne Line. FOLK had a strong presence, with an excellent display about our work. This was of particular interest to many of the groups, not least because so many people are familiar with Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, but often know very little about its history or indeed its flora and fauna.

Representatives of the Borough Council (Tracey Crews - Director of Planning and Adam Reynolds - Green Space Development Manager) addressed the

gathering and were full of praise for the work of all the town's green space voluntary groups. Those of us who represented FOLK were pleased to be involved on such a positive occasion and we are grateful for the Borough Council – and especially Janice Payne and Wayne Sedgwick - for all the work which went into making the event such a success.

Ash Dieback Spring 2018

Two recent studies have shed further light on the nature and spread of various threats to ash.

Red List



Ash dieback

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world's main authority on the conservation status of species and its “Red Lists” assess the risk of extinction to species. The first IUCN Red List of *Fraxinus* (ash) assessing wild populations, shows that most of the world's 53 species are doing well, but that even abundant populations are under threat from non-native pests and diseases. Of the ash species designated as “under threat”, 11 are native to North America. The report, of course, notes the increasing prevalence of ash dieback in native European ash. At this stage the IUCN categorises it as “near-threatened” meaning that it is close to qualifying as a “threatened” species in the near future.

The report is published by *Botanic Garden Conservation International* (BCGI).

Read more at bgci.org

Ash dieback in Europe

In a separate study, undertaken by the John Innes Centre and the Forestry Commission, the authors report that the latest thinking indicates that ash dieback originated in East Asia and first arrived in Europe on imported timber and plant material. The fungus probably arrived in the UK during 2003-11 when around 5 million ash trees were imported, some of which were infected. Ash dieback has subsequently spread in the UK via wind-borne spores and through infected plants.

The report, however, does suggest some cause for a slightly more optimistic prognosis than may at first have been feared. Among the many genetic variations of the fungus, around 90% cannot hybridise and therefore cannot create new strains. Because of this, there is a possibility that the fungus may simply evolve to live with the host trees rather than killing them: what the report describes as “a sort of armed stand-off” which means that the fungus may eventually merge into the background as a parasite of only moderate importance.

Finally the report notes that about 5% of UK ash trees show resistance to the fungus and it recommends that these be grown in nurseries to supply seeds for future planting.

The full report was published in the journal *Plant Pathology*.

Read more at jic.ac.uk

Stop Press: Ash die back has recently been spotted on the Hill, more information to follow in future issues of FOLKtalk. Ed

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 Summer 2018 please contact Martin Wood on 01242 231230 or email to: martinwood360@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

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Malcolm Geddes, Treasurer: 01242 514602

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.