

FOLKtalk

Issue 59 Spring 2019

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you

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NEW MEMBERS' WALK - October 2018



Wayne Sedgwick leading the New Members' Walk

This autumn - and blessed with a fine day - we held our first "New Members' Walk", led by Wayne Sedgwick (The Cheltenham Borough Council Senior Ranger) and Peter Whalley. It was well attended by an enthusiastic group, comprising twelve adults, four children and a dog. Wayne provided an excellent commentary

and the itinerary included Area 16, the Iron Age site, the Devil's Chimney and the Limekilns. There was lots of interest and the children did the things that small children inevitably do: went on rope swings and generally larked about. Other walkers on the Hill expressed interest in a joining future guided walk round the Hill should more be arranged. Look out for our walks in future editions of FOLKtalk.

> FOLK QUIZ NIGHT – 7:30pm on Friday 10th May at The Wheatsheaf Do come along! More details to follow.

FOLK AGM 2018

FOLK's annual general meeting had a new venue for 2018, The Wheatsheaf on the Old Bath Road. As many readers will know, the pub has strong historic connections with the Hill as it was a frequent meeting place for the "Stalwarts" and indeed all those who campaigned for free access to the hill early in the 20th century. It also proved to be a very pleasant place to meet and the committee is very grateful to the landlord for generously offering us the function room at no cost.

Our chairman, John Harvey, began the meeting by paying tribute to the work of Anne North who has now stepped down from the role of Membership Secretary. Ably supported by her daughter Annette, Anne has been taking care of membership matters for 19 years and, as the local farmer whose herd of Dexter cattle graze the Hill, she has also brought her huge knowledge of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common to the many discussions about our work. In recognition of their enormous contribution, both Anne and Annette were awarded certificates of Life Membership.

John also noted FOLK's gratitude to Peter Whalley who had stepped down from his role as Newsletter Editor after five years. Peter has overseen significant improvements in both the content and the presentation of the newsletter over recent years and has also been an energetic committee member across a wide range of FOLK activity. The new editor is Martin Wood.

Tony Duffin has recently become the group's Membership Secretary and Ken Brennan has also joined the committee, bringing, in particular, a high level of IT skills which are already proving useful in the complex work of processing the data from the recent drone survey which FOLK commissioned. Finally, Julius Marstrand has stepped down from the committee having made a major contribution to the life and work of FOLK over many years.



FOLK at Charlton Kings Summer Fayre

2018 saw a number of important developments for FOLK. Once again the group had a presence at both the Midsummer Fiesta in Montpellier Gardens and the Charlton Kings Summer Fayre. These events saw the introduction of free membership for a trial period of three years – a move which brought in more than eighty new members in two afternoons. So

FOLK plans to be present at both of these events again in 2019. We had held a very successful Quiz Night to which a number of similar "Friends" groups were invited. It was great to get together with others who also give so much time for their own community spaces and projects. Peter Niblett was thanked for his work in organising all our social events.

FOLK played a significant part in the management of the Hill over the course of last year, with the number of hours of volunteering rising sharply from 1,600 in recent years to more than 1,900 in 2018. As many as 34 different volunteers worked up on the Hill during the year and we have, from time to time, been joined by volunteers from local firms and organisations as part of their community outreach. The work parties have undertaken a wide range of tasks including controlling gorse, bramble and ash, removing ragwort and hemp agrimony, and supporting both the grazing programme and activities such as butterfly monitoring. FOLK's deep knowledge of the Hill and Common has also been valuable in meetings with Cheltenham Borough Council and Natural England. All this effort has enabled FOLK to make a major contribution to the conservation of the unique environment of the Hill

The business of running FOLK was, of course, discussed. An amendment to the constitution was presented – designed to help ensure continuity of governance by altering the terms of office for committee members. This was approved.

The meeting also received a report from the Treasurer which confirmed that, despite the introduction of a three-year trial period of free membership, FOLK has reserves which are more than adequate to support its activities for at least the next five years.

In wrapping up this phase of the meeting John Harvey made clear that FOLK remains positive and ambitious about the future, with plans for:

- expanding membership and member involvement;
- refining the management of the hill using data from the drone survey;
- helping Cheltenham Borough Council make the Hill more accessible and more frequently used; and
- participating in projects to understand and support the sustainability of our local wildlife.

With the formal stage of the meeting complete, John Harvey took great pleasure in introducing our guest speaker, Julian Bendle from the **Back from the Brink** project – a venture which FOLK actively supports. This nationwide project, supported by £7.7 million of Lottery funding, brings together a number of national organisations in a coordinated effort to conserve those species of flora and fauna judged to be most at risk. This includes twenty species under greatest threat of extinction as well as approximately two hundred other

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Adder basking on Leckhampton Hill

endangered species. Locally, the very individual nature of the Cotswolds was recognised as this specific Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty holds more than 50% of the nation's unimproved limestone grassland. On the Hill the two species prioritised for support are Adders and the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly. More news about Back from the Brink will follow in later newsletters as the project progresses.

MAPPING PROJECT

For some time, FOLK has been investigating a number of options for mapping the Hill and Common so that we can, for example, record which species are found and precisely where they are observed and then use this information to



help with planning any necessary work. For obvious reasons we started by looking at options that wouldn't cost us any money, but for various reasons these eventually proved unsuccessful. In the end joined with we Cheltenham Borough Council to hire а

The "photomosaic" map produced from the drone survey

professional drone survey company to fly over the site taking a series of photographs.

Drones are increasingly being used by a wide range of conservation organisations and research projects, but we believe that FOLK will be among the first UK voluntary groups to undertake such detailed mapping using data from a drone survey. This survey, undertaken by drone specialists Steady Hawk, has already helped us to produce a very detailed "photomosaic" of the site which can, for example, be mapped onto and aligned with an Ordnance Survey map of the area.

FOLK has been able to acquire some free-source computer software (QGIS) to enable us to work with the photomosaic. (GIS stands for Geographical Information System, which is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage and present spatial or geographic data.)

This is very sophisticated software which we are slowly learning how to use, but it is already proving very effective. We have for example, as a trial exercise, mapped the position of all the benches on the Hill and linked these to their photographs and details.



Section of map showing detailed information for one memorial bench

We have also used it to map out all the areas of gorse on the Hill and Common



and recorded the age and density of each area. These areas are shown by red outlined polygons on the image (left). The next stage is to analyse this information to allow us to plan the future work on gorse, e.g., to identify what areas need to be worked on

first and even, perhaps, to provide an approximate estimate of the work time needed for clearing each area.

We still have a lot of work to do to map and record everything that could be of interest and this will take us some time but, from the experience so far, it does appear to be a potentially very valuable tool.

DO TAWNY OWLS BREED SUCCESSFULLY ON THE HILL AND THE COMMON?

Help is wanted in monitoring the possible nesting performance of Tawny Owls the Hill and the Common. During 2016 the Southam and District Owl Society erected a number of Nest Boxes for owls on the Hill and the Common. Eight for Tawny Owls were placed close to Daisybank Road between the main car park and the start of the Gallops. Most are within 10m of the track, whilst the furthest is less than 100m from it. All are attached to tree at about 12 feet up. The boxes were not occupied in their first year, which was only to be



expected. However, it would now be good to know whether the effort in putting these boxes up has been worthwhile.

Monitoring involves opening the boxes, from a ladder, and discovering what is inside. If the nest of an owl, then records are taken. Other species, such as Grey Squirrel or Jackdaw, are either evicted or left. Risks, other than those working from a ladder, include being pooed on by an owl or jumped on by a squirrel.

This work all has to be done between mid-April and early May, but not when it is wet. This could take two or three visits of a couple of hours towards dusk or early in the morning. John is hoping to do the monitoring, but it is not something that can be done alone.

If you are interested in helping, then please get in touch with John Harvey at <u>henry.harvey1@btinternet.com</u>, or on 01252 520053.

2018 BUTTERFLY SURVEY REPORT Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common

Last year a stalwart band of seven surveyors spent in total approximately 85 hours undertaking 57 surveys on 51 different days between 14 April and 27 September. I thank them all for their time and dedication to the task. Due to their efforts we are now beginning to get a much better idea of the effects of the management on the site, though of course the weather probably plays a greater role in the short term as to the butterflies' abundance.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the season got off to a slow start as the temperature at the start of April remained too low to encourage the emergence of hibernators. Even the first day on which the temperature in Cheltenham rose to 15°C proved not



good enough for any butterflies to be recorded; and on two later occasions the same unlucky recorder drew a blank. The total number of butterflies recorded this year was 4048, (see Chart 1) down by 305 (7%) from 2017. At first glance this would seem rather disappointing given the

high summer weather conditions when most people had the impression of it being a good butterfly year. However, this number was observed despite ten fewer surveys being undertaken. The average number of butterflies seen during each individual survey was 65 in 2017, but this rose by 9% to 71 per survey in 2018. As not all survey routes cover the same distance on the ground and the number of surveys undertaken on each route is not the same year on year, these factors could have affected the average number recorded this year as butterfly densities vary greatly between the different routes. So maybe the figures are a little more encouraging after all, although perhaps not strong enough to indicate that the active management of the site has yet achieved a marked improvement in the habitat for invertebrates. As well as the smaller number of surveys undertaken, the drop in the observed butterfly total for 2018 may also have been affected by:

- the late start and early finish to the season;
- a couple of periods in peak flight time when no surveys were completed¹;
- the weather.

The latter affects the counts in two ways: the high temperatures can make butterflies so active that positive identification of very similar butterflies is difficult and so they are excluded from the counts. This is particularly true for species such as Skippers (Large and Small/Essex), Whites (Small, Large and Green-veined) and Browns (Meadow/Ringlet). Conversely, some will avoid flying in the very highest temperatures.

For a more detailed analysis of the weather effects, please see the article at <u>https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/cold-comfort</u>.

¹ i.e., the end of May and mid August. In all other years, missing weeks have occurred earlier and/or later in the year. It should be noted that three butterflies were noted in 2018 in mid August, although these were casual records of Chalkhill Blues seen during a walk rather than a survey.

MAIN FINDINGS

Three species (Brown Argus, Common Blue and Small Heath) have over-lapping flight periods with two generations a year: mid May to start July and mid July to start September. Here you might expect some correlation in their numbers

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Brown Argus

year on year. However there is clearly more to it than this. Whilst Common Blue and Brown Argus generally have larger 2nd generations than 1st, this is not always the case as in 2015 and 2016 for the Common Blue, when there were some of the coldest daytime temperatures in June and July. For 2018, it does suggest that the good conditions during and after the first flight period (the warmest May to July in all years) did influence the breeding and survival rate resulting in the largest 2nd generation populations so far recorded. However 2014 was also a numerous year



Small Heath

for 2nd generation Common Blue, even though this was not so clearly influenced season bv early conditions which were not as hot. Small Heath only has a partial 2nd generation, with some eggs laid in the 1st developing quickly and emerging as adults the same year, but others delaying to emerge the next. Even so, more than normal seem to have completed their life cycle in weeks rather than months. It will be interesting to see what effect that has in terms of numbers in the first generation in 2019.

The main winners in 2019 were Small White, Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Orange Tip, Small Blue and Silver-washed Fritillary, albeit with the last three still in low but increasing numbers. Numbers of Duke of Burgundy were the

highest so far recorded, but this was due to additional effort with timed counts undertaken slightly away from the normal survey route and through prime habitat, undertaken as part of the Back from the Brink project. Records of Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Dark Green Fritillary continued to decline or stay at reduced levels in line with national trends.



Common Blue

In my report for 2017, I expressed some concern as to the long term effects of that year's heavy summer grazing in the area known as Hopkins field. I am pleased to say that apart from Small Heath, and the Dingy and Small/Essex Skippers, numbers have recovered slightly though not up to pre-grazing levels. Unfortunately, there is no obvious increase in numbers on Charlton Kings

Common as yet, something to be hoped for in the future with continuing reduced grazing pressure during peak flight time.

* * *

Further analysis will be completed shortly, including the consideration of factors such as management regimes, habitat types and grazing. The results will be posted on the FOLK website in due course.

Surveying will continue in 2019, and only then will the effects of the 2018 summer drought and unusually high temperatures be revealed. Because of the aspect of much of the site, it did not suffer quite the same desiccation as some other local commons. So hopefully the larval food plants survived long enough to sustain the caterpillars to pupation. Only time will tell.

If you would like to help with the 2019 survey, please get in touch.

Serena Meredith Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator Contact details: Phone 01242 524138, email: gmeredith308@btinternet.com

Editor's Note

A full version of this report, with all the tables and charts will shortly be posted on the FOLK website.

WILD FLOWER SURVEY: 1957-TODAY

In the last edition of FOLKtalk we published an article by local historian Eric Miller featuring the brief findings of a survey of wild flowers/plants found in Leckhampton by members of the WI in 1957. Alongside this, we published our Chairman's detailed article on some of the key reasons for changes in the local flora and fauna. However, this prompted the next obvious question about which species may still be found here. By comparing the 1957 WI article with more recent wild flower surveys a refreshingly encouraging picture has emerged.

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The WI found eight species of orchids and twelve other plants, some up on the Hill and others on the fields below.

 Of the eight orchids found by the WI, six are still found on the Hill: Bee, Fly, Twayblade, Musk, Pyramid and Spotted, while the other two (Green-winged and Fragrant) are found widely across our area of the Cotswolds. Interestingly, the WI did not report finding another common orchid, the Early Purple, but this may have been because it was misidentified as the common but very similar Green-winged orchid.





- Of the eight plants which the WI found on the Hill all are still present: Thyme, St John's Wort, Viper's Buglos, Centaury, Rock Rose, Carline Thistle, Perfoliate Yellow Wort and Old Man's Beard.
- Of the four other plants referred to by the WI, Bogwort was already believed to have become extinct by 1957 and has not been found here since, while another, Moonwort, had disappeared by 1986. Both of these would have been seen only on lower fields in Leckhampton rather than on the Hill. The other two plants (Adders Tongue Fern and Herb Paris) are both still found up on the Hill.

The considerably more exhaustive surveys undertaken in 2002 and 2012 revealed as many as 132 varieties of flora on the Hill and its immediate surroundings – sign of just how diverse our precious local environment actually is.

FOLK is grateful for the expert help of Guy and Serena Meredith in comparing the results of these surveys.

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TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

Everyone knows that Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common are popular spots for walking, running, dog-walking, mountain-biking or riding horses and ponies. It is surprising, though, quite what a wide range of other people also use this site. Many of us will occasionally have seen paragliders wheeling around the sky over the Hill, having used its height as a great take-off spot. A couple of chance encounters, however, have given us a further insight into the life of the Hill.



Not long ago, as the Work Party was just getting started on burning a vast amount of cut gorse up near Windass, we spotted a couple of chaps walking along the nearly footpath. Nothing odd there perhaps, except that they were carrying enormous radio-controlled model planes. Despite the blustery conditions they enjoyed three-

quarters of an hour or so of flying time before heading home.

On another occasion, just before setting off from Daisybank Car Park on a Work Party, we came across a number of people with dogs obviously about to carry

out a planned activity. It turned out that they were from **Serve On** – a charitable organisation which provides help to local and international communities. Serve On has around ninety volunteers, including many "first-responders" such as fire, police, ambulance services and the RNLI as well as a range of skilled ex-military



personnel. They specialise in International Rescue and "Community Resilience" (a programme to provide local volunteers with training and support for their own communities in the event of a disaster). Their work includes a busy dog rescue team - hence their fairly regular training sessions on Leckhampton Hill.

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To find out more about Serve On, go to Serveon.org.uk

FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT Winter 2018-Spring 2019 Newsletter

As usual, our main winter tasks have been to remove gorse and ash saplings in various areas on the site. These are both fast growing species and if we don't try and control their spread they will potentially take over the site and spoil it for the public and the diversity of nature that use it. We don't want to eradicate these species – it would be impossible anyway unless we had hundreds of people at each work party! In some areas we are happy to retain gorse but it still needs cutting back occasionally to get a nice mix of ages and sizes which maximise the potential benefits to nature.



Brush cutter with new circular saw blade

with herbicide. There is one area on the top of Charlton Kings Common where gorse has been blocking the views from the Cotswold Way. We started clearing some of this last winter and have continued the work this winter. We have had some wellattended work parties and have managed to clear and treat quite an extensive area. This winter we have done some of this 'rotational cutting' as it's called on an area at the top of the Windass footpath. On one session we tried using a circular saw blade fitted to a brush cutter which we found to be a very effective method of clearing a large area quickly.

There are some areas of gorse we would like to clear permanently and here we cut it and treat the stumps



Burning huge piles of cut gorse



Clearing ash saplings

As well as the gorse, we have cleared a number of areas where ash saplings were getting a little too prolific. This has included in the open area above Bridge Car Park on Daisybank Road and on the banks alongside Hartley Lane. It was quite noticeable that a lot of these saplings have been affected by ash dieback.

Some of the other jobs we have done in the period have included removing the temporary paddock in Daisybank Field, raking up grass cuttings on the top of Leckhampton Hill after

it had been mown by a contractor tidving up around the limekiln ruins and working with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens to give the open area above Bridge Car Park (which has been extended significantly over the last few years) its annual cut and clearance.



Raking cut grass



Clearing out the open area near Bridge Car Park

As you can see, there is always plenty to do. So, if you, or anyone else you know, would like to join in, please do join 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 three 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 Holt on 01242 244165, go to the 'Work Party' page on our website <u>www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk</u> or send an email to <u>folk.workparty@gmail.com</u>.

February 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	14 th	19 th	24 th
March 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	14 th	19 th	24 th
April 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	11 th	16 th	28 th
May 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	9 th	21 st	26 th
June 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	13 th	18 th	23 rd
July 2019	Thursday	Tuesday	Sunday
	11 th	16 th	28 th

Work Party dates to July 2019

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

Work is due to begin shortly on preparations for the trial of a "gates-open" accessible route on the Hill for "trampers" (i.e., all-terrain mobility scooters). The plan remains to lock open up to seven gates in an area accessible to trampers so that users are able to make progress on their walk without the often very awkward task of opening stiff gate catches from a sitting position. The route will give access to some of the higher areas of the Hill and offer good viewing areas. While gates within the trial area will be open, users will need to open one gate on the route leading into the grazing compartment of the site, to ensure the secure grazing of the Dexter cattle is not compromised.

The Dexter herd itself is thriving with approximately 40 head of cattle, now in their winter pastures. Those able to calve have been in the lower field with a visiting bull, while the rest are grazing in land adjacent to the Cirencester Road.

Preliminary work is under way for the **Back from the Brink** programme to support our local Adder population. This will involve placing "Adder mats" in suitable, safe locations. Adder mats provide adders with a surface which absorbs the sun's heat and offers a good place for basking. In this way the mats both support the adders' survival and helps with the surveying of local populations.



We are pleased to report continued work on a project to create a new drystone wall on the Hill. This will eventually run alongside a long stretch of the Cotswold Way reaching from Hartley Lane up to the hill fort. The Cotswold Wardens have made great progress and have already completed 40 metres of the wall.

Finally, in the open grassy area close to Daisybank car park, further work is planned to make this a pleasant space for visitors. In addition to the work already completed to clear scrub, plant wild flowers and open up the view across Cheltenham, planned improvements for 2019 include further work to open up the views and the installation of some picnic benches.

GUIDED WALKS THIS SUMMER

The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens will be leading a walk on Leckhampton Hill on the afternoon of 22nd June, the day after the summer solstice. Everyone is welcome - just turn up and join in, but please be aware: no dogs (unless guide dogs or hearing dogs) and no unaccompanied children. The walk is free, but the Cotswold Wardens – who do a wide range of amazing work on the Hill and Charlton Kings Common - are all volunteers and so donations to support their work will be most welcome at the end of the walk.

Arrangements

Please meet at the main door of St Mary's Church in Charlton Kings at 1.30pm and make yourself known to the leaders. The route will go through Old Bafford to Sandy Lane via the golf course. Then there is a steady climb to Daisybank Road and upwards onto the scarp and the Cotswold Way at Hartley Hill. After enjoying views from the topograph, the route will descend below the Devil's Chimney to the old limeworks and then all the way down to Southfield Manor and back through Bafford to the church. This is about 5 miles and the aim is to complete it in 3 hours.

The Wardens grade this walk as "strenuous" because of the long climbs out of Charlton Kings onto the hills. They advise stout footwear, maybe walking poles and hats/water.

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The Wardens are also leading a linked walk in the morning of about 5 miles, starting from the same church at 10am. This will climb up past Vineyards Farm onto Ravensgate Hill and then descend through Lineover Wood. From the reservoir there will be another long climb up the Cotswold Way to Colgate Farm and then a return down to Chase Avenue and back to the church. Again everyone is welcome to just turn up and join in.

Details of these walks – and indeed all walks run by the Cotswold Wardens across the whole of the Cotswolds – are available at <u>www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/visiting-and-exploring/guided-walks/</u>.

COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD Saving wildflower grasslands

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has been awarded a grant of over £200,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation¹ for a project which will conserve, restore and create wildflower-rich limestone grasslands across the Cotswolds. The project, Glorious Cotswolds Grasslands, aims to create the largest network of wildflower rich Jurassic limestone grassland in the country – around 100 hectares in total, over three years. The project hopes to secure the long term management of these precious grasslands through farming and community engagement, alongside practical and educational activity.

The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) contains just over half the UK's wildflower-rich Jurassic limestone grassland. These grasslands are fragmented and vulnerable, and in urgent need of intervention to maintain, restore, and most importantly, to expand and connect them by creating new wildflower-rich grassland.

The central aims of the project are to:

- collect seed from existing wildflower rich grasslands, and sow them on sites to restore or create new grasslands;
- provide advice and guidance on managing grasslands to maximise their benefit – for wildlife and people;
- provide practical assistance such as managing scrub and invasive species;
- work with communities and highway authorities to improve road verges to create a network of flower-rich corridors; and
- establish a sustainable service to deliver advice, equipment, and advocacy beyond the life of the project.

If you or your organisation is interested in finding out more about this valuable project, please contact Mark Connelly (Cotswolds Conservation Board) at mark.connelly@cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

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¹ The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation aims to improve the quality of life for people and communities throughout the UK both now and in the future. It does this by funding the charitable work of organisations who are building an inclusive, creative and sustainable society. www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

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. There is currently no fee for membership.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition please contact Martin Wood on 01242 231230 or email to: <u>martinwood360@gmail.com</u>. 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 <u>http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/</u> 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

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

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