



# FOLKtalk

Issue 62  
Spring 2020

## Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

*Conserving and improving the Hill for you*



Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common from Ravensgate

## FOLK – PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE

This year FOLK celebrates its twentieth anniversary. Much has been achieved in that time, but far from resting on its laurels, FOLK has ambitious plans to continue this vital work.

Over the last twenty years members of FOLK have tirelessly supported local councils and the Cotswold Wardens in maintaining and improving the rare “limestone grassland” and helping ensure that visitors can enjoy the many footpaths, bridleways and viewing points. Inside this edition our Chairman, **John Harvey**, sets out some of the issues we face and how we intend to go about the challenging task of managing a valuable and complex site which is fully open to the public. *Continued on page 3.*

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## VERNACULAR NAMES for places on the Hill

### Can you help us?

Many of the individual areas and features of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common have charming and sometimes quite mysterious vernacular names, but these are not shown on official maps. So FOLK is working on the creation of a graphic document which will show all that we can identify.

We already know a good number of these vernacular place names, listed below:

Judy's Ride	Butterfly Motorway
Hopkins Field(s) and Cowslip Meadow	Five-Ways
Lonesome Pine	Woodland Walk
Tramway Cottage	The Sidings
Hillfort/Leckhampton Camp	Main Incline, Standard Gauge Incline
The Gallops	Middle Incline and Top Incline
Windass Hill	Strawford's Piece, Barn Piece and
The Limekilns	Office Piece
Mountain Knoll Wood	Devil's Chimney

In addition, thanks to the work of local industrial archaeologists, we know the names and locations of up to fifteen separate stone quarries on the Hill.

**If you know of any other vernacular names of places on the Hill or Common, or know of any documents which show other such locations, please let us know.**

Please contact our Secretary Ken Brennan on 01242 528067 or email us on [leckhamptonhill@gmail.com](mailto:leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

## FOLK – PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE cont

In the last edition of FOLKtalk (No 61, Autumn 2019) we told the story of the circumstances which led to the formation of our group, and explained why the landscape of Leckhampton Hill is so precious. Now, John Harvey, describes some of the many challenges.

**Scrub and Gorse Management** The highest threats to such valuable grassland are a lack of grazing and the spread of scrub (particularly gorse and bramble) which, despite considerable efforts by FOLK, continues to encroach, reducing the amount of grassland and limiting the area's biodiversity. 70 years ago 40% of the Cotswolds AONB was covered in wildflower-rich grassland a habitat that supported a huge diversity of wildlife. Today, much of that grassland has been lost and now only some 1.5% of the Cotswolds is still designated as "unimproved grassland".

Grazing is part of the strategy and there is a locally-farmed herd of Dexter cattle which grazes sections of the Hill and Common, but this is not in itself enough to tackle the problem. So we work continually to control scrub by selectively cutting and burning gorse and any other invasive species. Mindful that scrub may also be home to nesting birds and provide shelter for amphibians such as the adder, we never cut gorse in the summer months. Our overall aim is, after all, not to remove it completely but to maintain a balance between the needs of different species.

**Tree Management** – A recent survey of the Hill has identified a number of significant and veteran trees; like ourselves these trees need careful maintenance and even surgery if they are to have a long and healthy life! We also have a serious and growing problem with Ash Dieback. (See separate article on page 19.) There is no way of reversing this disease once a tree has become infected and ultimately some of these trees may become dangerous. So it is likely that the borough council will have to institute a programme of selective felling to ensure public safety.

One final tree of note is the Larch. There is a large plantation of these on Leckhampton Hill and the recent survey identified that they are coming to the



**1970s Larch plantation**

end of their lives. More significantly, this planting was entirely inappropriate. Not only are they not a native species but they were relatively recently planted into what were species-rich grassland and as they have matured, they have also blocked vistas to the west of the Hill. So it is likely that a programme of felling of these

will be started and it is hoped that a number of native species will be planted to replace some of them.

All this means that you may see us from time to time, alongside our contractors, carrying out a variety of work on these trees over the next few years.

***Trees on the Common and Hill - a benefit and a problem*** - A major benefit, which has only recently been identified, resides in the number of veteran trees along the boundary with Lilleybrook Golf Club. Such trees, in this case perhaps 300 years or more old, are valuable both as record of the past history of the site and as a habitat for rare beetles, which rely on the dead wood that they contain.

Inevitably such old trees face many threats, including ivy and shade from other trees, both of which need to be removed to extend the trees' lives. Also, as the trees age, some limbs need to be shortened or even removed if they become too heavy or too weak and threaten the survival of the whole tree.

Some trees that are less old offer beneficial habitats for wildlife, for example for birds or bats, but at the same time present a concern if they begin to shade out grassland or if they produce large numbers of seed that contribute to the development of scrub. Such trees may also therefore need to be managed, perhaps by felling, by removing limbs, by converting them into pollards, to produce a new generation of veteran trees, or by converting to coppice.

Finally, a particular problem of concern in an AONB emerges when mature trees begin to interfere with views that we may value. Such views may be of distant features, such as over the Severn Vale, or of local features of possible historic importance, such as the relics of quarrying. In some cases the trees may be native species that have colonised naturally, in other situations they may have been planted.

Examples of where some will consider trees to be in the “wrong place” are the Larch plantations which have grown up to hide views to the west, and the Main Incline (the principal historic railway line from the Hill’s quarrying days). This particular incline was an impressive engineering achievement that has few parallels in other quarrying sites, but the view of it is increasingly being hidden by invading Ash. Here again, some intervention may be needed.

**Limekiln protection** FOLK is also committed to the preservation of what remains of the Industrial Archaeology of the hill and hopes to undertake further work at the Limekilns to prevent their further decay.

**Footpath Restoration** – Each year it is estimated that some 100,000 people walk the Cotswold Way across the Cheltenham Hills and in addition to this there are huge numbers of local walkers, cyclists and other users.

You may have noticed that our friends from the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have installed steps down the muddy bank from the top of the Common down to Hartley Lane and in the future we hope to lay stone chippings on some of the other muddy areas on top of the hill. Incidentally, the stone has to be specially treated as it is not permitted to use any old stone in a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.



**Drystone Wall** – last but not least, the Wardens have also been busy reconstructing the dry stone wall along the edge of the Cotswold Way leading up from Hartley Lane. One of the objectives of the Cotswold Conservation Board is to protect local landscape character and dry stone walls have been identified as part of that character - hence their involvement in work such as

this. FOLK hope to add their support to this initiative in the future and see the repair of additional lengths of wall on the hill, as and when funds allow.

***All this provides a broad and continuing programme of activity for FOLK to address in its partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council. So, if you are ever on the hill and encounter one of our work parties please do stop and say hello - and perhaps ask about the work we are doing. We are always pleased to speak to the many, many users of the hill, to explain what we are hoping to achieve.***

## CHELTENHAM LOTTERY

### Supporting Local Good Causes



In the last edition of FOLKtalk we announced that FOLK was participating as a local good cause in the newly-launched **Cheltenham Lottery**. Cheltenham Borough Council has joined a growing number of local councils supporting community-centred online weekly lotteries. **FOLK wholeheartedly supports this initiative and will be one of the beneficiaries of the regular income which it generates.**

Thanks to the goodwill of our loyal supporters who have signed up to play, FOLK has already received more than £75 since the start of the Cheltenham Lottery last November. ***The income from this lottery is especially important now that we are not charging a membership fee, but still have costs to meet.***

#### How does it work?

Put simply, players choose six numbers per entry at a cost of £1 per week. Prizes range from £25 to £25,000. Of the income generated, 60% goes to local good causes, including FOLK.

***If you would like the proceeds of your ticket purchase to go directly to FOLK, please buy your tickets via the FOLK webpage within the Cheltenham Lottery site, by following this link:***

<https://www.cheltenhamlottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-leckhampton-hill>

# FOLK AGM

## Much success to report - and an ambitious future

### A busy and successful year

On a chilly night in November, around forty FOLK members gathered in the relaxed and comfortable surroundings of The Wheatsheaf for the Annual General Meeting. Our Chairman, John Harvey, began the evening with a presentation summarising the past year's progress and achievements. In particular he set out a number of key points.

- There has been important work carried out on the Hill and Common in support of the two species identified for attention here under the national Back from the Brink project: Adders and the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.
- The established accessible route across the top of Leckhampton Hill for all-terrain wheelchairs has been further improved by a scheme to leave some of the gates permanently kept open – a move which has been welcomed by wheelchair users.
- Good progress has been made with the Cotswold stone wall being built by the Cotswold Wardens beside the stretch of the Cotswold Way which runs from Hartley Lane up to the hillfort, including the creation of steps on a particularly steep section of the path.
- We continue to develop detailed mapping for the hill using the images from the 2018 drone survey and detailed observations on the ground. This, for example, helps to plan and monitor the effectiveness of scrub clearance.
- The continuous efforts of the work parties to clear scrub, extend grassland, open up views and improve footpaths is showing clear benefits for the flora and fauna and also for the thousands of people who visit the site each year.
- Membership is now up to 400 and FOLK is keen to find ways to increase the numbers of members actively involved in our work.
- Funding has already been boosted by income from the Cheltenham Lottery and members are encouraged to take part in this venture, especially as membership is now free.

In closing this section of the meeting John Harvey noted the sharp rise in volunteer hours contributed by FOLK last year, up by 12% to an impressive 2,240 hours. John thanked all those volunteers, on behalf of FOLK, but took the opportunity to pay especial tribute to two people, Serena Meredith and Jennie Stephens, who have both been extraordinarily consistent and generous with their time and effort for FOLK from its very start. They were presented with flowers and received warm and enthusiastic applause for all they have done. At the same time, John Harvey also noted the tireless work of Chris Ryder (former Borough Councillor) who has now left the committee after being a strong supporter and advocate of FOLK from the very start.

### **Funding Bid - Restoring Cheltenham Grasslands**

**FOLK** has been a leading player in a combined venture by Cheltenham Borough Council and Charlton Kings Parish Council to bid for a large sum to help improve key areas of Cheltenham's precious limestone grassland. These are spread across Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common and Ravensgate Common. The funds will be made available to successful bids from a pot set up by the National Grid following agreement for improvements to be made to nearby powerlines.



**Ravensgate Common**

John Harvey gave a presentation setting out the core elements of the bid: the reasons why the work is needed and what would be done to achieve the scheme's goals. This includes widespread scrub and gorse clearance, addressing issues with trees, restoring drystone walling, improving woodland walks, opening up views and installing more information boards.

OFGEM is currently evaluating all the applications – a process which is taking far longer than originally expected – but if our bid were successful it would enable rapid and very significant progress to be made. Not only would this funding help save crucial grassland and boost its fragile biodiversity, but it would also preserve and improve features of geological, historical and archaeological importance and, of course, enhance the enjoyment of this



wonderful landscape by its many visitors. So we are hoping against hope that our bid will succeed.

### **GUEST LECTURE: *Countryside Management in Open Access Sites***

To round off the evening, **Ian Stevenson** (Head of Land Management, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust) gave a fascinating talk on the trials, tribulations and undoubted rewards of managing Crickley Hill.

This is a well-loved and complex local site jointly run by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the National Trust. Here the GWT is involved in a wide range of work to protect all the wildlife to be found on the hill, a task made all the more complicated by the presence of significant archaeological remains and the fact that the site is fully open to the public. Like Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, Crickley Hill is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Its valuable features include:

- beech woods and limestone grassland on poor, thin soil low on nitrogen
- steep, North-West and South-West facing scarp slopes
- 5,000 year-old human habitation, with a fort likely to have been the site of a substantial battle
- rich wildlife, including ground-nesting birds like skylarks and endangered species like Adders and the Duke of Burgundy butterfly

Crickley Hill also faces some of the same challenges as we do: the spread of gorse and scrub, land which is hard to graze and increased visitor numbers, many with dogs. Grazing at Crickley is undertaken by a small herd of Belted Galloway cattle which, like our Dexters, can cope with steep slopes and will flourish on relatively poor grassland. Similarly the GWT is working to boost the numbers and spread of butterflies by creating “corridors” of suitable ground between separate areas which specific species favour.

Visitors are, of course, very welcome. However the last ten years has seen a 25% national growth in dog ownership and this presents its own challenges. Freely roaming dogs, even when carefully supervised by responsible owners, naturally tend to disturb both adders and any ground-nesting birds. One initiative tried recently was “Paws on the Hill” – a campaign to encourage owners to keep dogs on a 2 metre lead in open grassland (ie not in the woods) from March to July. Even though not universally followed by visitors, this campaign did have some positive benefit.

## WALKING FOR ALL ON LECKHAMPTON HILL

We can only imagine the frustration felt by wheelchair-users young and old who want to enjoy country walks but find it hard to discover manageable routes. This is why Wayne Sedgewick (Cheltenham Borough Council's Senior Ranger) has been working with others to make the existing accessible walk up on the top of Leckhampton Hill even better by padlocking open most of the gates.



So it was heartening to hear from a visitor to Cheltenham, Jo Harris, about a recent walk using this very path. Jo and her parents, Diana and Laurence McCurrich, found this walk on the website Walks with Wheelchairs which we flagged up in our newsletter at the start of last winter. As a family they had always been keen walkers, but now Jo's mother uses a wheelchair.

So, as Jo says, "it is a challenge to find somewhere exciting and beautiful out in the countryside that we can all get to."

They were delighted with their experience and Jo took the trouble to contact Wayne and congratulate all concerned. She added, "We wanted to write to thank you for removing the gates to make the path accessible for wheelchairs. It enabled me to have a lovely walk with my parents . . . and [we] hope that the gates can remain open for us to walk there again, and for others with mobility issues to have the freedom to go up on the hill. Being out on the Cotswold Way has many beneficial psychological and physical benefits and it is so wonderful if it can be accessible to us all."

Jo's final comment was to recommend the café/bistro at the nearby National Star College which has a full range of accessible amenities.

You can find the walk here

<http://walkswithwheelchairs.com/UK/Gloucestershire/Cheltenham/949>

## FOLK'S FIRST CROSSWORD

It is always a bit of a shot in the dark introducing a new feature to the life and work of FOLK, but the crossword seems to have been a real hit. Nearly 140 members had a go at the crossword and some of you have been kind enough to email us to say thank you.



One message of thanks really took us surprise. Not only did the member herself enjoy the crossword, but at one stage, during the post-Christmas lull, three generations of her family sat together in a great team effort to solve it!

Our member wrote “Three generations (two from Australia) trying to do the crossword. Brilliant post-Christmas idea! They enjoyed it.”

We think her picture says it all.

# 2019 BUTTERFLY SURVEY – PRELIMINARY REPORT

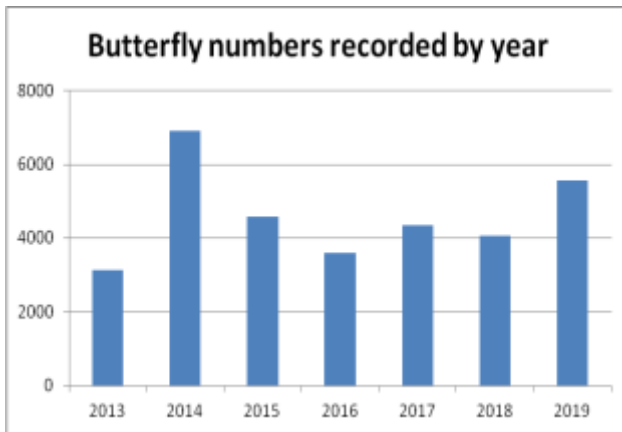
Early indications suggest a mixed picture, with many species declining but others showing welcome signs of good recovery. As ever, the numbers of each species recorded last summer may well have been strongly influenced by weather conditions and by changes in habitat.

We will be able to form a clearer view of the spread and abundance of each species after further analysis of the data. In this edition, **Serena Meredith** (Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator) presents an overview of what has been learned so far.

## The surveys

Despite unfavourable weather conditions, especially in April, on the whole each of the species emerged in line with the average date from the last 7 years.

The season started early with the first survey being undertaken on 30th March when a single specimen each of Brimstone and Peacock (both of which hibernate over winter) emerged into the warm spring sunshine. In April,



however, only 2 brief periods proved suitable for the surveys and further difficulties arose during the week or so of cold and inclement weather in June. For all these challenges, surveys (with some covering more than one area) were completed on 48 different days. In all,

5559 butterflies were recorded. The best year surveyed was in 2014 (6902 sightings) and the worst (3129 sightings) was in the year of our first survey, 2013, when shorter routes and different methodology applied.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These figures have not yet been adjusted to account for the differing number of surveys actually undertaken each season.

## Good news for the Duke of Burgundy

The 2019 total of 5559 butterflies sighted includes the additional number (35) of Duke of Burgundy recorded about 20 to 50 yards from the usual survey route.



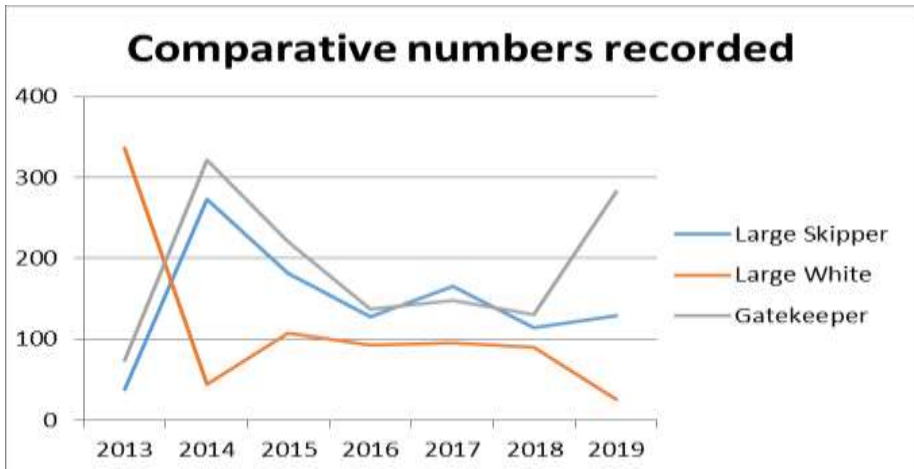
Duke of Burgundy butterfly

There is some evidence that this butterfly, which is part of the Back from the Brink project, is doing well on our site. When the first surveys were done in 2013 it was only recorded in one section of the designated route. That increased to 3 sections in 2014, 7 in 2018 and 9 in 2019, showing that they are now seen more

widely across Charlton Kings Common. Moreover, instead of the singletons often counted in the earlier years, 3 or 4 at a time are now likely to be encountered.

## General observations

Whilst there were winners and losers, most have varied year-on-year over the seven years for which these records have been compiled, with no obvious



correlation between species. Examples such as the Large Skipper have fluctuated from a low of 28 (2013) to a high of 273 (2014) with 129 in 2019. Large White in contrast has gone from 336 in 2013 to 25 in 2019 with the average in between of 85, and Gatekeeper 73 to 283 for the same years.

## Headlines

- Green Hairstreaks have risen from a low of 3 in 2016 perhaps reflecting poor early season weather to 29 in 2019 possibly because of the observers' increased experience of their likely locations.
- The influx of migratory Painted Ladies has been well documented elsewhere, and was reflected in the results – 70 being recorded against the previous high of 9.
- Numbers of Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock continue to give cause for concern, being just a quarter of the number sighted in 2014.
- Generally, the 'Browns' did well, with 1379 Meadow Brown (highest recorded), 1262 Ringlet (3<sup>rd</sup> highest) and 874 Marbled White (2<sup>nd</sup> highest).
- After an absence of four years, it is heartening to report that 1 Wall butterfly was seen and photographed, though not in any of its previous haunts. As this was away from what might be considered prime habitat for the species, it begs the question – was it resident or a captive-bred release? Sadly, there is no way to be sure - unless someone owns up to the latter.
- After three lean years, the Dark Green Fritillary fared a little better, and was seen more widely over the whole site, albeit in low numbers.
- Small Blue numbers are holding up at a low level, but there has been a small and gradual increase in the number of Brown Argus, up from 11 in 2013 to 39 in 2019. As it can be difficult to tell the difference between Brown Argus and female Common Blue unless they are very co-operative, this could just be down to the increased experience of the recorders.
- One curious result among all our records is the almost total absence of the Small Heath from the grassland above Bridge car park (1 seen in 2016) and in the top section of the Hopkins Field (1 in 2018). It is possible the key grasses (Fescues and Bents) which are favoured for breeding do not appear in these areas. A full botanical survey would be needed to confirm this was the reason. This is a butterfly in decline in the wider countryside as the habitat it favours (well-drained soil where the sward is sparse, fairly short and dominated by fine-leaved grasses) is becoming scarcer. On our site,



Small Heath butterfly

though, it seems to be holding its own, with numbers in the last four years fluctuating between 292 and 416 with a high in 2014 of 682.

- The Marbled White is however recorded in the two areas mentioned above, though one might have expected it to have been absent for a similar reason, as its larval foodplant is also a fine-leaved grass - Red Fescue - that is thought to be essential to caterpillar development. It is probably the most accurately counted butterfly on the site, due to its unmistakable appearance and thus is seen throughout almost all the rest of the site.

### **Looking ahead**

National data makes clear that, over time, there has been a worrying decline in UK butterfly numbers and that positive human action is needed to halt or even reverse this trend. Various studies have indicated that the spread of butterfly populations is greatly assisted by linking pockets of ground in which endangered species are likely to thrive. So, as I write, the planning of our management work is being strengthened to achieve a further increase in the connectivity of individual patches of suitable habitat in the hope that this will encourage and enable the butterflies to spread ever more widely across our site.

Further analysis of the 2019 records will be completed in due course, and a full report will be published in FOLKtalk and posted on the FOLK website. That said, the 2020 season has already started; a butterfly was seen in our garden as early as the first week of February. So please keep a look out for the early flyers – a sure sign (along with the frog spawn in my pond on 9<sup>th</sup> February) that the spring is on its way!

Finally, thanks must go to all those who helped with the recording, despite the frustrations inherent in the process due to weather and ground conditions.

Surveying will continue in 2020. So if you would like to add your records to our count, or help in any way, please get in touch.

**Serena Meredith**  
**Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator**

01242 524138 (Please leave a message if no reply.)  
gmeredith308@btinternet.com

# THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

## Grazing by the Dexter Cattle

The cattle are in their winter pastures and are generally doing well. Sadly the autumn saw a handful destroyed after routine screening detected bovine tuberculosis. The rest of the herd (some 30 head of cattle) have already passed clear in two further screening tests and it is hoped that the third test, scheduled for later in the spring, will enable the whole herd to be declared free of the disease. After that, when the grass has started to grow well enough, they will soon be a familiar sight once more when they are turned out onto the Hill for grazing.

## Drystone Wall

The Cotswold Wardens have made tremendous progress with the drystone wall they are building between Hartley Lane and the hillfort as one of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary projects. It now stretches for around 75 metres up the slope, which means that they have already skilfully placed around 75 tons of Cotswold stone.



The wall climbs up from Hartley Lane, just past the entrance to Quarry Car Park, and marks a field boundary which runs alongside the Cotswold Way. Here, the footpath is steep and has always been treacherous, especially in wet conditions. It is now greatly improved thanks to a long flight of steps, also created by the Cotswold Wardens. If you are nearby, do stop and look at the section under construction, which gives a marvellous insight into the complexity and skilfulness of the Cotswold Wardens' work.

## National Funding

The area of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common which FOLK helps to conserve is subject to a rigorous ten-year management plan agreed with Natural England. Because of the exceptional nature of the Hill and Common,



part of which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), this management plan is set at the highest available level, known as Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). Unsurprisingly, along with this higher status (and correspondingly higher funding) HLS entails a much greater level of intervention and scrutiny.

In 2021 the current ten-year HLS agreement will come to an end. So the next twelve months will bring a good deal of work for FOLK, Cheltenham Borough Council and many other organisations to ensure that we can secure a new funding agreement and so maintain the vital work of preserving this precious environment for another ten years.

We will keep you up to date with developments as the year progresses.

### **Extra litter bins**

We all know how dispiriting it can be to arrive at a countryside beauty spot only to find the litter bin overflowing and more rubbish piled up around it. To try to prevent this eyesore, Cheltenham Borough Council has recently installed additional bins at two popular car parks on the Hill: Daisy Bank and Brownstones. Hopefully this will help ease the problem.

### **Historic quarry rail line**

Anyone who has taken the main, broad path up from Bridge Car Park towards the Devil's Chimney has (as many of you will know) been walking along the route of the main rail line used for quarrying Cotswold stone. Known as the Main Incline, this wide track is now popular with walkers and riders alike but its popularity, combined with natural weathering, is causing erosion.

At the moment this is a nuisance, with mud and stone washing down the slope and large muddy puddles often covering the gateway from the lane. In the long term, though, it may turn into a more serious problem with the route becoming increasingly degraded. Unfortunately it is neither easy nor cheap to stabilise such terrain. A few options are being investigated and we will keep you posted on developments to maintain this much-used and historically important route.

### **Robocut**

Regular readers of FOLKtalk - and especially Geoff Holt's *Work Party Reports* about our collective labours up on the hill – will be more than familiar with the challenge of scrub, including gorse. Unchecked, this would take over the fragile

limestone grassland and we know that we need to keep this invasive vegetation under control, but that is far easier said than done.

One innovative method under consideration is the occasional hire of a fearsome piece of equipment called Robocut. This is an all-terrain, remote-



Robocut remote control mower in action

controlled slope mower which boasts the capacity to undertake safely and quickly work which would otherwise be completed by hand. In November FOLK arranged a demonstration. As it turned out, the day offered not only the challenge of our very steep slopes and hard-to-cut scrub, but also perfectly vile

weather, with heavy driving rain. Robocut certainly cut a lot in the time allowed, though the gathering and burning of the cut gorse and bramble still has to be completed manually by FOLK volunteers. So a full evaluation of the advantages, disadvantages and value-for-money of a day's hire is still ongoing.

## **Orienteering**

Among the many groups which enjoy the Hill and Common are the North Gloucestershire Orienteering Club. Orienteering is basically a competitive sport in which runners have to find their way across rough country with the aid of a map and compass. The North Gloucestershire club organises events across the whole county and last year two events took place on the Hill. Around two hundred competitors took part each time and the events were a great success. For more information visit the clubs website at <http://www.ngoc.org.uk/>

## **The Lido: The Devil's Aquathlon**

The Devil's Chimney may be visited by thousands of people and dozens of groups in the course of a year, but it may surprise many readers to hear that one of these organisations is Cheltenham's outdoor swimming pool, The Lido. The Devil's Aquathlon is a tough swimming and running challenge organised by The Lido to raise funds for two charities. It is designed for competitors aged 17 and above who enjoy a personal or team challenge. The event starts with a 2km swim in the lido's 50m main pool (in September when the heating has

been turned off) and competitors then run up to the Devil's Chimney on Leckhampton Hill and return to finish in The Lido grounds, a gruelling round route of 10km. The event is managed in partnership with Sandford Lido Ltd (Registered charity #1052203) and Cobalt Unit Appeal Fund.

For more details contact The Lido on 01242 524430

or follow this link <https://www.sandfordparkslido.org.uk/events>

## ASH DIEBACK

There can be no doubt that this devastating disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, or *chalara*) is rapidly spreading. For this reason Ash is already on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. The Woodland Trust estimate that as much as 95% of the UK's Ash trees may be killed.

This not only means as great a change to our landscape as Dutch Elm Disease caused in the 1970s, but also represents a profound threat to any species which depend on Ash for food or habitat. However, striking a balance between the conflicting demands of addressing the disease, keeping people and livestock safe and preserving our woodland is particularly complex.



Typical evidence of Ash Dieback disease

Tackling the problem on Leckhampton Hill is further compounded by the local terrain. An obvious solution might be to cut down and then remove and/or burn any affected leaves or branches. Sadly, in many remote steep and/or unstable locations, this is

physically impractical. The local priority, therefore, is to focus effort on diseased trees which pose a threat because they overhang or are very close to paths and tracks.

Even then, unless the diseased trees are away from tightly packed woodland areas, tackling Ash Dieback is not straightforward. Thanks to the advice of tree

experts we now know that even where it looks safe to take down diseased Ash trees in the middle of predominantly Ash woodland, this may actually endanger other currently healthy trees.

The very nature of tight woodland means that the trees naturally protect each other from harsh weather conditions, especially gales. So as the trees in a wood grow and mature, they do not need to become as individually robust as lone trees in an open site. This means that felling one large diseased tree in the middle of a patch of woodland will inevitably increase the extent to which surrounding, previously sheltered trees are exposed to the elements. That, in turn, creates a secondary risk of harm as branches on these surrounding trees, or even whole trees themselves, are at increased risk of being brought down in high winds.

The Woodland Trust has published technical advice on managing Ash Dieback (<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/46523/managing-ash-dieback-on-woodland-trust-sites.pdf>). In this document, the Trust considers “the potential for tolerant trees to exist and for the ability of trees to recover from disease to varying extents”. They recognise that “diseased trees may lose a considerable proportion of their crown one year but then recover the next year with healthy and vigorous growth”.

Of course some trees may continue to deteriorate over the ensuing years before dying, but during that time the Trust notes that “they may produce seed which could form the next generation of Ash with more tolerance to the disease”. For all these reasons, the Trust concludes that pre-emptive, wide-scale felling of Ash could be detrimental to the species long-term recovery and should be avoided wherever possible.

***We will keep you posted about both the local spread of this disease and any new developments in tackling its potentially devastating effects.***

# WORK PARTY REPORT



Ancient Barrow after mowing

Before we started our winter 'scrub-bashing' programme we had a few summer/autumn tasks to complete. This included doing our annual mow around the ancient barrow which always makes it stand out and be more obvious to passing walkers.

Earlier in the year we removed the saplings and other woody growth in the old quarry tramway sidings which are near to the barrow. Since then it had become overgrown with grasses and so we did what we intend to be an annual mow to keep them open and more easy to see. Whenever we work here we get people stopping to ask why we are working there. They are very surprised when we tell them they used to be railway sidings!



Sidings before and after mowing

While we were working in this area we took the opportunity to also mow the footpath we call 'Judy's Ride' which runs from the Brownstone car park and had been getting a bit overgrown.

Our winter tasks have involved removing gorse, hawthorn and bramble in a number of areas. All very prickly as the volunteers will confirm! Although the weather has not been too good this winter, and we had to cancel two work parties because of the rain, we have managed to get quite a bit done.

We started in a new area at the bottom corner of Charlton Kings Common alongside Daisybank Road. This had quite a bit of gorse, but not as densely growing as other areas. The main concern was that there was quite a bit of youngish hawthorn growth that, if not removed, would potentially grow into a thick hawthorn copse and destroy the grassland we want to preserve. On one of our work parties here we were joined by members of the Gloucester Vale Conservation Volunteers. So, a big thanks to them for all their help.

Another new area we have worked on this winter was further along Daisybank Road between the pull-in and the turning circle. Again in this area growth of both hawthorn and gorse was getting a bit too much, and needed to be cut back.



Work Party enjoying view of Cheltenham

On one work party we were initially in the cloud, but when this eventually dropped, we could look down over Cheltenham which itself was still shrouded in mist. All we could see was Cleeve Hill peeking out in the distance. It was an unexpected but truly wonderful sight . . . So we all stopped work to admire the view.

Gorse is one of our main bugbears right across the site and each winter we attack it with gusto. This year we have worked in two areas. The first is at a lower level alongside The Gallops. We had cleared this about 5 years ago, but it had grown back quite vigorously and thickly. We have now learnt our lesson from this and are much more rigorous, and hence successful, in our application

of herbicide on the cut stumps to stop regrowth. We have managed to clear quite a large area over a few work parties here and burnt the cuttings which the cattle seemed to appreciate.

The second area we have worked on is on the top of Charlton Kings Common alongside the Cotswold Way. This is a very dense area of gorse where some fires were started earlier in the year, though fortunately they didn't spread too far. We have now cut a number of large fire breaks through this dense growth.



Cutting firebreaks through large areas of gorse

On one work party we were joined by volunteers from SHS-Sales, a local company, who were hard-working and very productive, and we were extremely grateful for their help.

As you can see, there is always plenty to do. So, if you, or anyone else you know, would like to help, 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, Daisy Bank 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](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk)) or send an email to [folk.workparty@gmail.com](mailto:folk.workparty@gmail.com).

### Work party dates to July 2020

March 2020	Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 22 <sup>nd</sup>
April 2020	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup>
May 2020	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup>
June 2020	Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup>
July 2020	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup>

## 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: [martinwood360@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

### Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman: 01242 520053

Geoff Holt, Work Parties: 01242 244165

Malcolm Geddes, Treasurer: 01242 514602

Tony Duffin, Membership: 01242 529240

Martin Wood, Newsletter: 01242 231230

Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common on [www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://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.*