



# FOLKtalk

Issue 67  
Autumn  
2021

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

*Conserving and improving the Hill for you*



Ravensgate (Photograph, Rob Williams)

## **MAJOR GRANT SECURED TO ENHANCE CHELTENHAM'S SPECIAL LANDSCAPES**

Almost £175k has been awarded by National Grid's *Landscape Enhancement Initiative* (LEI) to develop and enhance Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common and Ravensgate Common. The three year landscape and nature restoration project will encourage wildflower growth, provide richer food sources for wildlife, reveal views not seen since the 1960s, and rebuild the original dry stone wall along the Cotswold Way, off Hartley Lane. (cont p4)

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## **FOLK Annual General Meeting and Special Lecture**

**Wednesday 10th November 2021, 7.00 - 9.00pm**

**The Wheatsheaf (hall at side), Old Bath Road, Leckhampton, GL53 9AJ**

**Non Members Welcome – Free Entry**

**Come to the AGM to find out about FOLK, what we do and the new projects to be undertaken in the next three years on the Hill and Common.**

**The AGM will be followed by an interesting talk on**

### **Nature Recovery in the Cotswolds**

**By Simon Smith C.Env M.C.I.E.E.M**

**Nature Recovery Lead, Cotswold National Landscape**

**For further information about FOLK and the AGM**

**please see [leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://leckhamptonhill.org.uk)**

**or contact the Secretary, Tony Duffin - [leckhamptonhill@gmail.com](mailto:leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)**

# Annual General Meeting 2021

Notice is hereby given of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of  
The Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK)  
to be held at “The Wheatsheaf”, Old Bath Road, Leckhampton  
at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

## AGM PAPERS

**If you receive your newsletter by email**, the major papers for this meeting (Agenda, Minutes of 2020 AGM, Annual Report and Accounts) can be accessed from the e-mail that accompanies this newsletter. The up-to-date Elections List showing the names of individuals either already sitting on FOLK’s Executive Committee or nominated for election this year can be found on the FOLK website by following this link

<https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/files/2021/10/FOLK-Committee-Member-Status.pdf>

**If you receive your newsletter as a paper copy**, the major papers for this meeting are enclosed with this newsletter, along with the current version of the Elections List showing the names of individuals either already sitting on FOLK’s Executive Committee or nominated for election this year.

## COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

If you are a member of FOLK, you may nominate yourself or any other member. Acceptance of a nomination implies that the nominee agrees to act in the interests of FOLK.

Should you wish to submit a nomination, please download the Nomination Form using the link in the covering email and send the completed form by e-mail to the Secretary using the details given below **by 27<sup>th</sup> October**.

If no further nominations are received, the election of those presently incumbent or nominated will be assumed.

Apologies for absence should be sent by e-mail to the Secretary at [leckhamptonhill@gmail.com](mailto:leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

# NATIONAL GRID GRANT-FUNDED PROJECT

The funding from the National Grid LEI scheme is designed to reduce the possible visual adverse impact that major power lines may have on the landscape. The independent conservation body for the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Cotswolds National Landscape, submitted bids on behalf of the applicants. This project's funding was successfully secured through partnership working between Charlton Kings Parish Council, FOLK and Cheltenham Borough Council.

## **Cheltenham Borough Council's**

**Victoria Atherstone**, Cabinet Member for Culture, Wellbeing and Business, said,  
*"We're thrilled to have received this funding from National Grid LEI. The efforts from all parties is an example of partnership working at its best."*

## **Chair of Charlton Kings Parish**

**Rob Williams**, said,  
*"We are hugely grateful to National Grid for giving us the opportunity to restore the most treasured landscapes and biodiversity hotspots in our parish. We will make the best use of every pound we have been given."*

Benefits of the project are plentiful, for both nature and people. They include:

- restoring beautiful and inspiring views;
- encouraging an increase in butterflies and other insects;
- reducing the likelihood and severity of accidental fires that can destroy wildlife such as the Roman Snail;
- rotational cutting to open up vistas and enhance other wildlife interest;
- selective felling of trees to encourage native species and open up the views from parts of the footpaths;
- selective tree planting to restore native, disease-free, tree species;
- selective retention of deadwood/standing dead trees to encourage bats to roost and rare insects to breed.

This project demonstrates the positive effects of partnership working between parish councils, our borough council, community groups and environmental or conservation organisations. The resulting works from this project will benefit nature and people well into the future.

**As John Harvey, Chair of FOLK,** explained: *“FOLK has worked with the Borough Council for twenty years to manage the nationally important Limestone Grassland that provides an impressive backdrop to Cheltenham and offers an area that is rich both in wildlife and in opportunities for enjoying the countryside.*

*The generosity of National Grid offers a one-off step-change in our joint ability to deliver the vital works that will improve the valuable landscape, wildlife and recreational features of the site and guarantee their enjoyment and use into the future.”*

## **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?**

**This substantial grant from National Grid means that we can start getting all the proposed works under way and make a huge difference to this precious landscape.**

**The pylon line:** The Cotswold Conservation Board selected the pylon line running between Coberley and Alderton as its first priority for bids within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This grant will fund projects on ***Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common and Ravensgate Common*** – all of which fall within the area affected by this pylon line.

**What does the project aim to achieve?** In particular, the bid was motivated by a strong collective desire not only to arrest any current deterioration in the landscape but also to improve some of the key characteristics which make it so rare and valuable.

These include aspects such as:

- restoring a more open landscape;
- the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity;
- protecting the area’s history, geology and local distinctiveness; and
- improving access and recreation for local people and visitors.

**How will these aims be achieved?** The project has set out seven key objectives:

- Restore the characteristic and important landscape of our Common Land, including its nationally important nature conservation and cultural heritage, by the selective removal of invasive scrub and scrub woodland, and by establishing conditions for long-term sustainable cattle grazing.
- Enhance, or where necessary restore, traditional limestone grassland flora and associated fauna across the project area and measure success by applying Natural England's *Site of Special Scientific Importance tests of 'favourable condition'* across the whole project area.
- Improve the surface of 500m of footpaths of existing public access to enhance public enjoyment of the hills.
- Enhance public understanding of the hills and their history by careful interpretation, especially of quarries and their artefacts.
- Prolong the life of important veteran boundary trees through re-pollarding and selective tree surgery.
- Rebuild approximately 120m of traditional Cotswold dry stone walling as traditional boundary fencing.
- Maintain two local cattle herds of traditional breeds.

**Why is this grant so important?** The existing annual funding, drawn from the national *Higher Level Stewardship* scheme and local government revenues, has successfully enabled Charlton Kings Parish Council and the Borough Council with its voluntary partners to slow down the worst of the year-by-year deterioration. With the additional National Grid funding we can obtain the extra materials and hire the skilled contractors needed to make a step change in the scale and speed of the work. Alongside this professional involvement, though, there will still be plenty of tasks for our many volunteers to tackle.

See **The Word from Wayne** (p7) for news of developments already under way.

**We congratulate all who were involved in the submission of this comprehensive and aspirational bid and we very much look forward to keeping you up to date with progress as the project is rolled out.**

# THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

## PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL GRID GRANT

### Cotswold Way Improvement

One previously very muddy and eroded stretch of the Cotswold Way is set to become much more enjoyable thanks to extensive surface improvements. The length of path from the start of the drystone wall round to Windass Hill and on to Cowslip Meadow has already seen the start of major work.



Through the efforts of an expert contractor – who has engineered a piece of specialist equipment precisely for this sort of terrain (See left) – the first stage involved levelling the path to take out the sort of dips which regularly became waterlogged, muddy and slippery. Then increasingly fine layers of local stone were added. The flat paths retain a coarse appearance while the ramps have had an additional finer layer added for increased safety and accessibility. Both appear a little raw right now, but will soon weather into the landscape.

In a separate but associated development, if you walk through the gate at the start of the drystone wall towards Windass Hill you will notice that the route has been changed. The actual route of the Cotswold Way at this point officially leads down the tricky narrow slope (shown on the left in the photo) and



then through a small group of trees before emerging onto grassland. Over recent years, however, walkers have, understandably, opted to avoid the steep drop and

just follow the direct line along the drystone wall. This stretch of ground has, in turn, become badly worn. The contractor has now made the official route down through the trees into a smoother, safer descent. This not only enables walkers to return to the old route of the Cotswold Way, but will also allow the area of ground by the drystone wall to be fenced off and the grass may re-grow.

Even at this stage, walkers passing the works have been very enthusiastic about the new paths and it seems certain to help more people enjoy the Hill more often – whatever the weather.

### Tackling gorse



Robocut in action

The removal of gorse and other scrub from our grasslands is central to the improvement of the landscape. In this case different terrain and circumstances have prompted a couple of different approaches. On Ravensgate, Charlton Kings Parish Council have decided to speed up the gorse cutting by using a special piece

of kit called Robocut. This “driverless” machine is operated remotely by the qualified operator allowing its use in terrain which would be too dangerous for a driver to tackle.

As you may see from the “before and after” pictures below, the Robocut certainly makes short work of the cutting, though of course there is still plenty of work for





volunteers to do in clearing and disposing of all the cut material. Most importantly, though, it is plain to see how the removal of unwanted gorse opens up the landscape.

On Charlton Kings Common, on the other hand, the Borough Council is trialling an alternative strategy. Here, in three specified trial areas in the area between Windass Hill and Cowslip Meadow, there is real potential for good limestone grassland to re-establish and for wild flowers to flourish. So contractors are being hired to cut the gorse and treat the stumps with an approved herbicide to prevent re-growth.

### **A new grazing regime**

For the past twenty years Ann North's Dexter cattle have been a familiar sight, grazing extensively across the Hill and Common. Over this time, though, the knowledge of how grazing can complement other aspects of managing such a significant piece of land has seen the development of some new thinking. So it is time for a change.

Later in the autumn two different historic breeds of cattle will be introduced under the stewardship of new heritage graziers. The new cattle will be slightly larger than the Dexters, but are equally docile. They will also appear in slightly different areas of the Hill and Common, for example, avoiding places which the Cotswold Way passes through. Another advantage will come with the management of their territory as this will employ the latest technology to enable "No-Fence Grazing" (recently featured on BBC's The One Show).

More news of this new regime will follow, but for now it is only right to thank Ann North for the significant contribution her grazing of the Dexters has made to the site's management.

### **OTHER NEWS**

**More wild flowers:** With the support of the National Trust, as much as 15kg of wildflower seed has been harvested from Cowslip Meadow. When the time is

right, this seed will be spread in suitable locations across the site, including where the old Cotswold Way route has been restored, where some gorse has been cleared and also in Area 16, where a previous project introduced Yellow Rattle to the grassland.

**Walkers and Mountain-bikers:** the signs highlighting places where walking routes and mountain-biking routes cross have now been manufactured. Expect to see them starting to appear on the Hill during the next weeks and months.

## IN THE NEWS

### HOVERFLIES USE “COMPASS” TO MIGRATE

We are constantly amazed by the migratory journeys of birds, but hoverflies make similar trips. We now know that, despite their tiny size, these summer visitors also use a combination of their body clock and the sun to stay on course.



Pied hoverfly

Both pied and yellow-clubbed hoverflies leave the UK in the autumn and head for the Mediterranean and North Africa.

A recent study by the Centre for Ecology and Conservation at Exeter University has confirmed that they use a “time-compensated sun compass” in their brains, keeping the sun to their left in the mornings and gradually adjusting as the day goes on. It is hoped that this knowledge will not only add to our ability to predict their movements, but also perhaps contribute to conservation measures.

## BRITAIN'S LONGEST SNAKE

**The Adder may be our most easily recognised – and feared – snake, but the harmless Grass Snake is actually longer.** Although sightings in gardens have been rising recently, the Grass Snake remains an endangered species and is protected by law. It has no venom and does not bite.

A Grass Snake may grow to about one metre in length and is grey-green in colour with a distinctive yellow and black collar and small black markings along the full length of its body. They are often found near water as their preferred prey include frogs, toads, newts and fish, though they will also catch small mammals.

The Grass Snake is the UK's only egg-laying snake, with nests in sheltered sites such as rotting vegetation and compost heaps. Being cold-blooded they hibernate over winter in warm and humid places like tree root systems, fallen trees, compost heaps and even rabbit burrows.



The best time to spot a grass snake is usually early in the morning when they need to bask in the sun to generate the warmth they need to become active and hunt for food.

Just as the Grass Snakes seek out prey, they can also be predated. However they have developed a “play dead” response to such threats. This involves bunching up in coils, lying completely still and even rolling their eyes into their skulls – a skill which takes some practice and is far more common among adults than their more callow offspring.

## FOLK AT CHARLTON KINGS AUTUMN FETE

For the first time since 2019, FOLK was able to have a stand at a local fete. Usually we attend the Cheltenham Midsummer Fiesta and Charlton Kings Summer Fete, but because of Covid 19 these events had been cancelled. So it was nice to be at the Charlton Kings Autumn Fete in September and update people on our ongoing work and care of the commons.



We had a completely new display for the fete highlighting the projects that will take place in the next three years, funded by the National Grid grant and some match funding by volunteer hours. Two of the projects have already started. One is to improve access to Charlton Kings Common and to resurface 600 metres of the Cotswold

way; another is to rebuild a dry stone wall from Hartley Lane towards the iron-age fort. This is a three-year project to be completed by the Cotswold Wardens with local stone, purchased with money from the National Grid grant

We were lucky with a dry day for the Fete. The event was well attended with a large number of stalls and fair amusements for the children. We had a steady flow of visitors to our gazebo and display, and there was a lot of interest in the new projects that will take place over the next three years.

*FOLK is very grateful for the huge effort made by Mike Donnelly and all who contributed to FOLK's presence at this important local event.*

*The new FOLK display boards will be on show at our FOLK AGM on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2021 at the Wheatsheaf, Old Bath Road. Do come along and see how we plan to look after the Commons and improve the views and the landscape.*

## FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

It has been nice again to have a period without any significant Covid-19 restrictions and being able to run work parties normally.

We reported in the last newsletter that we were working on cutting back the growth along the back side of the main Cotswold stone wall along the Western end of Charlton Kings Common. We continued this work in the latest period and managed to clear as far as the gate in the wall leading to the footpath to Hartley Farm.

In addition to clearing the back face of the wall we also removed growth, particularly gorse, obscuring the front face. This lovely wall is much more visible now which is quite satisfying. A job well done!



The next main task we did was similar. The post and wire fencing running up from the gate at the top of the Sandy Lane extension and along the Gallops to the

Eastern end of Charlton Kings Common was also very overgrown. Some of this entangling growth was threatening to pull the fencing down and so we spent a few work parties clearing this away.



We next moved on to some of our regular summer jobs such as removing Ragwort and Hemp Agrimony.



Pulling Hemp Agrimony (above)

Ragwort in flower (left)

We also gave some areas their annual 'haircut', for example, mowing the big clearing in Area 16 above Bridge car park (illustrated below).



Towards the end of the period we started some of our Autumn/Winter scrub clearance. We thinned out a block of gorse at the top Western end of Charlton Kings Common where it was encroaching on an area where Fly Orchids grow.

We were also lucky to have two groups of young people joining us to do some volunteering work. They were from Cheltenham College and a local church group. They did a good job of clearing gorse in a couple of areas on top of Charlton Kings Common. In one area this work helped to open up the long distance views from the Cotswold Way as can be seen from the before and after photos below.



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, normally 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.

The planned dates for work parties for the next 6 months are:

October 2021	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup>
November 2021	Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup>
December 2021	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>	
January 2022	Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 23 <sup>rd</sup>
February 2022	Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup>
March 2022	Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup>

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).

# GLoucestershire's Stone Stiles

## THE PROJECT MOVES ON

The project to build a record of all of Gloucestershire's stone stiles continues to make great progress. These important features of Cotswolds agricultural history, some of which are well over 200 years old, had never been catalogued before. The project leader, Peter Wilson, has been delighted with what has been discovered, and with local support for the project; already more than 250 people have contributed at least one sighting.

More than 700 stone stiles have already been identified and recorded across the county, from St Briavels to the west, Chipping Campden to the north, Fairford to the east and Abbots Hanham to the south. Although so many stone stiles have already been reported, Peter expects more to be discovered in the autumn when hedges and vegetation in general die back. This is mainly because:

- stone stiles are being found in undergrowth in locations where currently there is no right of way but in the past there was probably a path; or
- where there is currently a wooden stile, the old stone stile may be hidden in the nearby hedgerow, either because the route of the path has been moved or because the old stone stile was dumped close to the path when it was replaced.

**If you'd like to help** Peter to form a record of all Gloucestershire's stone stiles - or indeed other items from our county's agricultural history - there's even a special form to use. You can get this from Peter Wilson, using the email address below, or simply enter [CPRE Stone stiles](#) in your search engine and download it from there. All you need to do is:

- Photograph the stile
- Make a note of its location (a description and a map reference)
- Jot down anything else which might be of interest, such as the name of the nearest village, where you were walking to and from, name of path if known (e.g., Cotswold Way)
- Complete the form and email it to [Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk](mailto:Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk)



## BIRDS NAMES – ANCIENT AND MODERN

According to the British Trust for Ornithology there are 574 species of birds seen in Great Britain. Most of us, though, would only recognise a tiny proportion of these: the ones we see often enough to have learned their names. What do these names tell, though, and where did they come from?

There are basically six main types of names. The oldest three are based on sound, appearance or habit. More recently names have been based on habitat, area of origin and significant people.

### The Ancient

People in distant ages adopted the more obvious names for what they saw and heard. So many of our oldest bird names represent the sound the birds make. Birds such as cuckoo, chiff-chaff and kittiwake are obvious examples, though some of the corvids – crow (right), rook, raven and chough – all bear names based on early words describing their harsh cries. Distinctive appearance also played a part from earlier times. This is seen in birds such as blackcap, whitethroat, collared dove, hooded crow or redwing.



Equally transparent are names based on habit. It is not difficult to imagine how the woodpeckers, wagtails, divers or the tree creeper got their names. The nuthatch - which breaks open nuts with its powerful bill - may appear a more puzzling example, but “hatch” was an older form of the newer word “hack”.

### The Modern

Setting aside the gradual changes in the English language which occurred over the centuries, the first big development in the naming of birds stems from the eighteenth century when the scientific discipline of ornithology first

became established. One focus of attention for naturalists like Thomas Pennant and George Montagu was the confusion caused by different “country” names for the same bird being used in different parts of Britain. A classic example is the lapwing, alternatively known as the peewit or the pyewit, depending on where you grew up.



One approach taken by eminent ornithologists was to base bird names on their preferred habitat. This thinking spawned names like marsh tit, reed warbler, corn bunting, meadow pipit, sand martin or barn owl (left).

Another tack was to use the names of the area in which the species lived. In Britain, we find names like the Dartford warbler, the Kentish plover or Manx shearwater. Then with the growth in foreign exploration, other birds were also given names based on the wider geographical area in which they live, for example the Mediterranean gull and the Arctic tern.

Finally, there is the seemingly obvious but actually rather tangled emergence of birds named after people. Sometimes this may be reasonably logical. It was, after all, George Montagu who first determined that the so-called hen harriers were actually two separate species: one kept its old name; the other is now known as Montagu’s harrier. Other species appear to have been given names in tribute to people famed for their dedication and scholarship in natural history, but not associated with the bird’s discovery or identification. Examples here include Bewick swan and White’s thrush, named respectively after naturalists Thomas Bewick and Gilbert White.

To find more about this fascinating subject you might be interested in the book *Mrs Moreau’s Warbler* by naturalist and writer Stephen Moss.

## THE MEMORIAL WALL – A PROPOSAL

During 2021 a proposal was put forward by Cheltenham Borough Council to make provision for the erection of Memorial Plaques, similar to those around the 'lone tree' on Cleeve Common.

If implemented, this proposal could raise funds for the maintenance and restoration of the Hill and Common by seeking donations when plaques are installed.

This activity had formerly taken place by the installation of memorial benches but it is agreed that scope for significantly increasing the number of benches is limited.

FOLK were consulted as representatives of users of the Hill.

The Officers and Committee of FOLK were, on balance, against the modification of the wall on the top of Charlton Kings Common, but formulated an alternative proposal, which is believed to be a compromise between various other suggestions.

This proposal is to install memorial plaques on a newly built section of Cotswold dry stone wall near to the Stalwarts memorial.

The Committee of FOLK would welcome your views on this idea.

To see the report that we have prepared, please go to the FOLK website by following this link

<https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/files/2021/10/Memorial-Wall-Review-Report.pdf>

If you would like to comment, please e-mail the Secretary Tony Duffin at [leckhamptonhill@gmail.com](mailto:leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

## 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.***

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)

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**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 if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

### 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*