



FOLKtalk

Issue 69
Summer
2022

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

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



SUMMER PASTURES FOR THE HERITAGE CATTLE

After spending time grazing on the Hill and Common late last year, the mixed herd of English Longhorns and British Whites are now on organic farmland until the early autumn. The cattle themselves are very content, but it is a far from relaxing time for their owners James and Katie Allen, pictured above with one of their British White cows.

[More about James and Katie Allen and their heritage cattle can be found in **Meet the Graziers** on page 4.](#)

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Read all about the progress of the National Grid funded improvement plans in **The Word from Wayne** on page 8

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THE CHELTENHAM LOTTERY

FOLK regularly benefits from players who have signed up to the local lottery and then nominated FOLK as their chosen charity.



Earlier this year, however, we were delighted to receive an added bonus when one supporter - Jez Sullivan - not only won a cash prize but immediately donated the whole sum to FOLK.

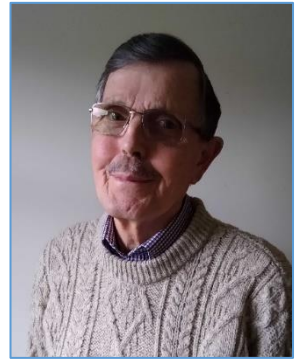
So we say a huge Thankyou to all our Cheltenham Lottery players – but especially to Jez!

To take part and help support FOLK you can log into www.CheltenhamLottery.co.uk and search for “**Friends of Leck**”. Or you can follow this link and go straight to the FOLK page at <https://www.cheltenhamlottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-leckhampton-hill>

You can then sign up and buy tickets for as little as £1 per week.

THE FOLK executive committee has been looking at how we can keep the public better informed about activities and conservation work on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

On our website www.leckhampton.org.uk we now have a link to Conservation Work where we list the work to be undertaken in the next six months by FOLK and contractors. Major works are also listed, and put on both the Cheltenham Borough Council website and the Charlton Kings Parish Council website.



We have general information including work party dates on our **four main noticeboards** on the Hill and Common, and of course this regular FOLKtalk newsletter. This year as detailed in this FOLKtalk we had display stands at the Charlton Kings Summer Fayre and at the Cheltenham Midsummer Fiesta. The displays highlight the ongoing projects for **Restoring Cheltenham`s Escarpment Grassland** - the National Grid Grant three year project - and the improved disability access with the resurfacing of the Cotswold Way on Charlton Kings Common.

A recent project on Leckhampton Hill was to **cut down dead ash trees** (due to ash die back) on the standard gauge incline. The project was driven by Cheltenham Borough Council based on health and safety, because of the possibility of dead wood from the trees falling on the incline footpath. This work caused a lot of inconvenience to walkers. So to help with the smooth running of the project FOLK volunteers were on site for the first two days, explaining the reason for the works and the alternative routes. More work is planned on the standard gauge incline to improve safely by laying a footpath surface similar to the one on the Cotswold Way. This work may have been completed by the time this article goes to print.

FOLK volunteers were also on site providing information to the public when the **new cattle** first came on site. We always try to provide as much information as possible to the general public on this very well used site.

If you have any questions or feedback on public relations, please contact us by email at leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK

MEET THE GRAZIERS

Introducing James and Katie Allen

James and Katie Allen are the proud owners of the cattle which now graze on the Hill. The cows themselves are on their summer pastures now, while the grassland and wildflowers on the site re-grow. For James and Katie, however, the work never stops. They are first-time farmers, but have a deep commitment to heritage breeds and to farming in a responsible, organic and landscape-friendly style. The fact that they don't actually have a farm, though, makes this principled approach even more demanding.

They have travelled different paths to farming. James grew up in an extended family where all his uncles and aunties farmed but, crucially, his own parents did not. So while he spent many school holidays helping out on the extended families' farms, and developing a deep love of farming, there was no farm for James to inherit and he pursued a career in IT. Katie, by contrast, started her career in graphic design with no family background in farming. An interest in the environmental impact of both the food she was eating and the clothes she wore encouraged Katie to learn more about organic farming methods - and eventually to purchase her own starter flock of sheep. So when James and Katie got together there was a shared love of farming, but crucially, there was no farm.



Katie with her flock

Somehow this daunting situation did not deter them. In part their simple love for the land drove them forward. More importantly they hold a passionate belief that farming should be done responsibly. This means more than just halting the decline of soil health and biodiversity. It means continuous improvement - for their own animals, for the land and for wildlife.

To make their dream a reality, however, they needed the right animals with the right heritage, and the right sort of land on which to work. Katie already had a

mixed flock of two breeds of heritage sheep, both of which are hardy and capable of thriving on rough grassland. They produce good wool for textiles and high quality meat. Her Castlemilk Moorits are a one-hundred-year-old breed while the Portlands are a small primitive breed dating back to at least the 18th century. In choosing their heritage cattle, James and Katie quickly settled on British Whites and English Longhorns. Both breeds are placid; they produce excellent beef and are content grazing wild and sloping grassland.

Finding the right land was a far tougher challenge. From the outset their business plan was built on the concept of conservation grazing, but this always requires time for the cattle to spend off site. For James and Katie this meant finding spring and summer pasture each year. Over their first seven years this couple of first-time farmers had a very bumpy ride in their search for secure land on which to grow their farm business. In fact they regularly found themselves managing stock on land forty minutes from home.

In the past year, however, things have started to fall into place. When the cattle are not grazing Leckhampton Hill they join Katie's flock on a farm near the couple's home. The farm itself has been certified organic for over ten years and the current owners need graziers like James and Katie on site to help them manage the grasslands.



A British White with her new calf
rich high Cotswolds pastureland. In one field are found the cows with calves, while the younger cows and those not in calf graze separately. Higher up still, the sheep

Tucked away up a steep winding track between Cheltenham and Cirencester, it is a tranquil spot with glorious views of the surrounding Cotswold hills, its pastures flanked by rich mixed woodland. It provides the perfect opportunity for James and Katie. They now have an agreement to graze the land, but with the cattle also spending some time each year away from the farm doing our conservation grazing.

Right now the cattle and sheep are very well settled - spread across three fields on their

enjoy good grazing and, like the cattle, seem perfectly content as Katie strides across the fields making sure that all is well.

Thousands of small farmers have to diversify to survive and James and Katie are no exception. Already they are supporting the improvement of our own precious grassland on the Hill and Common as well as selling their own beef and lamb/mutton, both online and at local food fairs and farmers' markets. Meanwhile Katie continues to design and make beautifully crafted woollen garments and accessories, which have recently been featured in Liberty's famous Regent Street store and are also available on her website.

This energetic young couple are totally committed to organic farming and to making a positive difference to our landscape. Their cattle will be returning to the Hill and Common in October. It will be fascinating to see how James and Katie - and indeed the grassland on the Hill - flourish over the coming years.

To see the **beef and lamb for sale** follow this link

<https://www.heritagegraziers.co.uk/shop>

For **Katie's wool business** click here <https://www.loopyewes.co.uk/>

IN THE NEWS

GORSE ON THE MENU?

Any FOLK volunteer who has spent a morning cutting, dragging and burning unwanted gorse, might be forgiven for steering well clear of the stuff when treating themselves to a meal out. However, the prospect of seeing a gorse-based tofu-like protein on the menu is not quite as outrageous as it sounds.

Proteins like tofu, which are made from soybeans, are already popular. So in the ongoing search for non-animal sources of protein Wendy Russell, a professor of molecular nutrition at the University of Aberdeen, is looking into the potential of invasive species such as gorse. This plant contains 17% pure protein which can be recovered with a high degree of purity. Crucially, this would use processes which contribute only 6% of the carbon dioxide taken to create the same quantity of meat protein.

THE HARTLEY LANE WALL

The new wall from Hartley Lane, alongside the Cotswold Way is being built by volunteers from the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. The stone is purchased with grants from various sources such as the Cotswolds Wardens Countryside Fund; the work for the next three years is being funded by the National Grid with money from their Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

In each phase the old wall will be dismantled and the old stone will be piled up on the far side. Any of the old stone which remains usable will either be included on the side that people won't see or will be used as "filler". Any remaining debris will either be left or, ironically, dropped into holes on the hill that were created by . . . stone extraction!



New stone now stacked on the "right" side of the wall

Things don't always go to plan. The photo (left) shows where a new section of the wall is to be built. The Wardens wish to work from the side from where the photo was taken, but unfortunately the new stone was delivered in random piles on the other side of the old wall.

The situation was rescued by a one-man work party, a member of the committee, who spotted the recently delivered stones, threw them over the wall and then stacked them neatly by size so that the Wardens could more easily select the individual stones that they wish to use. This spontaneous piece of volunteering was especially important as it is said that a good wall builder will only handle any stone once, knowing exactly which stone to pick up next and where to put it.

See **The Word From Wayne** (overleaf) for more information about the new wall.

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL GRID GRANT

Cotswold Way Improvement

Work continues on the drystone wall that leads up from Hartley Lane. Already nearly two hundred metres have been rebuilt. At the moment, though, the Cotswold Wardens are switching their focus to a slightly different length of that wall, close to where a memorial stands to George Price - one of the “Stalwarts”. It will be here that the newly rebuilt wall will be discreetly modified to include some stones with a flattened surface. These stones will offer a place for people to commemorate their loved ones by commissioning memorial plaques.



Memorial plaque for George Price

Cheltenham Borough Council will run the scheme. The size of memorial plaques will be stipulated by the council but the wording and choice of material will be made by the families themselves. Then, for a fixed fee, the Council will allocate the space on the wall and install each plaque. Once complete this site will offer great views of a much-loved landscape and a tranquil place for reflection.

Elsewhere, the return of the Cotswold Way to its historic route near the western end of the drystone wall above The Gallops is already allowing the grassland to recover. The addition of a carefully chosen mix of wildflower seeds will eventually see this former pathway become far richer in biodiversity.

Tackling gorse

As part of the ongoing programme to improve the natural grassland by clearing gorse and scrub, the Council, in partnership with FOLK, is preparing the specification for a contract to deal with gorse across approximately 1-2 hectares (3-5 acres) of the Hill and Common. This is challenging work and the opportunity to use the grant funding to make a rapid increase in the rate of gorse clearance will be very welcome. No doubt, though, FOLK volunteers will continue to

undertake the essential support work such as the removal and burning of the cut gorse.

Better Safety, Better Views

Work has now started on a tree project being undertaken by contractors. This has been designed to make Leckhampton Hill a better place to visit by both making it safer and also opening up views of the surrounding landscape. Both of these goals were key requirements of the National Grid grant.

Safety comes first and to this end there has been a selective programme of tree-felling along the Main Incline (also known as the Standard Gauge Incline). This path was once the route for the standard gauge track which led to the quarries and limekilns, but it has become a popular footpath. However, it is now very much a woodland path where there are many diseased ash trees.

To remove the risk of weakened branches or even whole trees falling on somebody, the contractors have taken out affected ash trees up to 10 metres from either side of the incline. FOLK volunteers helped to chip many of the branches, with the chippings being used on the pathway itself. Some of lighter material has been added to the borders of the incline to make a deadwood fence. At the same time the contractors also removed some of the trees on the steep bank by the Devil's Chimney to improve the view.

Plans are already in place for some repair work to the most badly eroded sections of the Main Incline. Here there will be new additional stone surfacing similar to that now in place along the stretch of the Cotswold Way above The Gallops. This will not only make the path safer but also significantly slow down the erosion caused by increased footfall.

As part of this project improvements will also be made to Bridge Car Park, at the foot of the incline. By filling in dips and generally raising the height of the parking surface it is hoped that the troubling flooding issues there will be tackled.

The new grazing regime

For a few months over the late autumn and early winter we were all getting used to the sight of the new herd of cattle brought in by graziers James and Katie Allen. A key change in this new regime is the decision not to graze the Hill and Common during the main flowering season for wild plants. This will give butterflies, moths

and bees the maximum chance to feed and to pollinate. So the cattle are now on other pastures and will return to our site in October.

We are hoping to see some improvement in the variety and abundance of wildflowers as early as this summer, but it will probably be summer 2023 before we see the full benefit of this conservation grazing.

In the meantime, the grant has enabled the Council to arrange for a range of works to be undertaken. One of the two new “cattle crushes” is already in place - the one on the Reversion Field - and the other will be installed later this year down on Hopkins Meadow.

The next stage will be to complete some necessary repairs on the long perimeter fence which surrounds the whole grazing area. This boundary fence has been in place for ten years now, and so - what with weathering and natural wear and tear - a good many of the fence posts need replacing by contractors.

OTHER NEWS

Re-wilding the Hill and Common

As well as taking out gorse and scrub to let the existing natural grassland recover, we have been doing much over recent years to increase its biodiversity. In particular the practice of harvesting wildflower seed and spreading it in new areas is already having an impact.

The glorious show of flowers from Yellow Rattle in Area 16 (just above Bridge Car Park) is one fine example. There is also a wide range of orchids across the Hill and Common.

Now, the team at Cotswold National Landscape (formerly Cotswold AONB) have taken a keen interest in the impressively wide range of plants in Hopkins Meadow. Indeed they are hoping to gather seed from there this year as part of a wider project to enhance local meadows.

As well as helping the wider landscape of the Cotswolds, half of what they gather here will be returned to the Council for use across the Hill and Common, and in other suitable wild spaces.



Bee Orchid found near Brownstones car park

Engaging young people

With the passing of the stringent restrictions brought about by COVID-19, we have now been able to re-start projects involving children and young people in the outdoors. Locally, links are being forged with both Cheltenham College and the new High School Leckhampton. This will include both familiarisation visits to the site and, where appropriate, a little bit of practical voluntary work.



On top of this there is an existing – and growing – response from local secondary-phase schools. Already five schools have offered their Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh’s Award students the chance to do voluntary work up on the Hill, including the energetic group from a range of schools (left)

who helped clear the drystone wall last month in preparation for the next phase of the re-building work.

IN THE NEWS

DOG MESS MESSES UP THE ENVIRONMENT

FOLK members – and especially volunteers – have long bemoaned the fact that some dog owners do not bother to pick up after their pets. Now a study in Belgium has identified the specific harm this does to the, often valuable, landscapes. Put simply, dog waste contains high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen which can be harmful to some species.

Sadly, though, despite the fact that most dog owners carry poo bags and clean up their own dogs’ mess in urban settings, many are less likely to bother in the countryside. Worst still, the popularity of dog-walking in nature reserves means that these landscapes are disproportionately harmed even though they are important habitats specially designated to benefit often precariously endangered natural species.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE LAND MANAGEMENT

Just designating an area for nature is not enough

Calls to conserve 30% of the Earth's surface by 2030 are gathering pace, but as countries come together to agree the new Global Biodiversity Framework, it is becoming increasingly clear that targets must focus on creating and supporting protected areas which are well-managed.

A key motivation for FOLK is to improve Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common in ways which help wildlife not just to survive but actually to flourish.

Alongside that aim sits the conviction that this area's designation as a Site of Special Scientific Importance is not, in itself, enough. The land needs careful and targeted action to make a difference.

A recently published study¹ has further underlined the importance of doing more than just drawing lines around tracts of land and telling people what they cannot do. Using waterbirds and wetlands as an indicator, the research examined how well 1,506 protected areas across the globe have affected the trajectories of 27,055 waterbird populations. They found that, in terms of how wildlife fared, success varied hugely around the world and depended a great deal on how an area was managed.

By comparing sites before and after they were officially protected, and comparing the trends of similar bird populations inside and outside protected areas the team concluded that, "In the majority of places we looked, wildlife populations were still stable or were increasing, but they weren't doing any better than in unprotected areas."

Using a robust design, the study demonstrated that protected areas have a mixed impact on waterbirds, with a strong signal that areas managed for waterbirds or their habitats are more likely to benefit populations, and a weak signal that larger areas are more beneficial than smaller ones.

The scientists concluded that targets need to be set for the quality of protected areas, not just the quantity. Measuring success could include measures such as doing species population counts or setting goals for increasing the diversity of plant and animal species in an area.

In terms of positive management, beneficial measures for waterbirds might include, for example, keeping wetlands wet throughout the year by managing drainage and enhancing water storage facilities to compensate for dry spells; well-timed grazing to help more ground-nesting birds find safe places to breed; and creating more islands where the waterbirds can shelter and nest.

Locally such active management is already underway. This latest research, even though focused on wetlands, demonstrates the wider point about active management being more effective than simple designation. That in turn underlines the importance of our existing local efforts on the Hill and Common, including:

- creating butterfly motorways to help endangered species travel between previously isolated patches of favourable habitat
- helping pollinators by changing the grazing regime to keep cattle off the hill during the times when wild plants are flowering
- clearing targeted areas of scrub to help the underlying grassland to recover
- sowing wildflower seeds in selected areas previously dominated by grasses

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¹ Protected Areas have a mixed impact on waterbirds but management helps, Dr Hannah S. Wauchope, Conservation Science Group, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

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To read more follow the link below

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-022-04617-0>

WILDFLOWERS AND BUTTERFLIES

How is nature faring on the Hill and Common?

FOLK is continually working to make the site better for nature. A key element of this is to help its rare unimproved limestone grassland not simply to avoid further degradation but actually to improve.

The selective removal of scrub and the change in grazing - keeping the conservation cattle off the hill during prime season for wildflowers - will help grasses and wildflowers to become more widely established. This in turn should eventually offer the chance for more invertebrates like butterflies, moths and bees to flourish.

It is not a project which offers much in the way of very short-term gains. Moreover 2021 was, across the country, a poor year for butterflies, which are a key indicator of the state of nature in our sort of landscape. However, the butterfly survey team was already busy as early as March.

With more summer months ahead for the butterfly surveys to be carried out it is too soon to be certain about the spread and abundance of our local butterflies this year, but sadly it seems that early indications are not encouraging. Some poor weather - especially the late frosts in April - certainly hindered the butterflies. On a brighter note, as Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator Serena Meredith reports here, there are good signs of the increasing health of our wildflower populations.

WILDFLOWERS

Orchids:

- Three Butterfly Orchids have managed to flower close to a desire line path for the first time in many years.
- As usual, White Helleborine and Twayblades Orchids were seen in good numbers scattered across the whole site.
- Common Spotted Orchids are now visible almost all over the site.

- Early Purple Orchids put on a good show this spring, flowering well on the lower slopes of the eastern end of Charlton Kings Common.
- Forty five flower spikes of Fly Orchids were found, 60% of which were in the area cleared of gorse during the winter especially for them, with the remainder on the lower slopes of Charlton Kings Common.



Early Purple Orchids

- Pyramidal Orchids are just beginning to show.
- Bee Orchids in Brownstone Quarry suffered from the early spring drought, and may not flower this year. However, one was spotted at the top of the Windass slope and should be in full flower by the time this article appears.

Other flowering plants:



Cowslips

- Cowslips seemed very abundant and many have set seed. This is the plant on which the larvae of the endangered Duke of Burgundy butterfly feeds.
- Various yellow flowers are very much in evidence: Birds-Foot Trefoil, Rockrose, Buttercup and the group including Hawksbeards, Hawkweed and Catsears.

- Common Milkwort in several of its colour forms – blue, pink, white – are seen creating spreading mats, while the round headed Salad Burnet show inflorescences which are reminiscent of pompoms.
- Common Thyme is just coming into bloom.
- Several different grass species are visible now that their flower heads have been allowed to form in the absence of grazing.

BUTTERFLIES:

From the casual observations and surveys submitted so far, numbers have been disappointing.

- Early spring sun and warmth saw hibernators (Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone and Comma) emerge in March.
- Frosty weather in April may have contributed to the decline in Small Tortoiseshell in April, whilst Peacock numbers remained fairly constant.
- Holly Blue continues its comeback with nine being seen by the end of May – more than in the entire 2021 season
- May saw an influx of (presumably migrant) Red Admiral and Painted Lady butterflies.
- Ten Duke of Burgundy were first spotted on 14 May, ten days later than on a nearby Cotswold site. A timed count on 27 May in good conditions was disappointing, though, with just eighteen counted. On 3 June, there was only one to be seen.
- A single Marsh Fritillary has been recorded for the first time since comprehensive recording began in 2013. Whether this is from natural dispersal or unauthorised release of captive bred stock cannot be determined.
- Dingy Skippers and Small Heath have been less in evidence so far than in previous years.
- Large Skippers, normally the most numerous of the Skippers, are now being seen here, as are Meadow Brown and Marbled Whites, the latter being about two weeks earlier than usual.



Holly Blue butterfly

It will no doubt take several years for both the butterfly numbers to increase and vegetation composition to respond to the grazing regime change (from almost all year-round grazing to autumn and winter only). Hopefully the result will be a positive change for the better.

Serena Meredith
8 June 2022

HOW TO MANAGE A TREE'S GROWTH

Pollarding, coppicing and topping

The spread of Ash Dieback – and the need to deal with diseased trees – has made us all aware of the delicate balance of our human interaction with trees. At times, the necessary reduction or felling of trees attracts understandable protest. We are, after all, supposed to be looking after trees, not needlessly chopping them down. At times, though, radical action is needed. This is, in fact, nothing new.

The shape of a trees has often been changed for good reason. Apart from simply desiring a more appropriate shape for its setting, we may give a tree special attention to keep us safe or to provide wood.

Historically, ordinary people did not want large heavy timber. They could not handle it and did not need it. Large trees might be felled to construct ships or large impressive buildings – and we know that many of our woodlands were planted by the Crown for just that purpose. Indeed, under Forest Laws brought in after the Norman Conquest, the large trunks of trees belonged to the king, with illegal “theft” of such timber deemed a hanging offence. Only the thinner growth of higher branches could be harvested by the people. The different methods available for tree management have always been carefully chosen depending on the reason for the work.

Coppicing has been widely used in woodland management for centuries. It means cutting a tree down to ground level so that new growths sprout from the stump. Every few years this could be repeated, providing a continual source of wood for fences, country furniture etc.

Pollarding is a variation of coppicing, but entails removing the branches at a higher point so that the new growth cannot be nibbled by sheep, cattle or deer. As the old word “poll” literally means head, a cut at or around human head height served this purpose well.

Mature trees, though, may require a different and more radical regime of management both to preserve the tree and to protect those who might be passing by. Where a single branch is either weakened by disease or growing in a direction which poses a risk to people, the removal of the problematic branch may be sufficient. We may often see the healed scars of such action on the sides of trees.

The other scenario is that the tree may simply become too big for its site, or there is a clear risk that either disease or wind damage may bring down the whole tree. The best way to keep the tree alive and people safe is to undertake “topping” or “crown reduction”. We are all familiar with this work in the town centre and in sites like Burrows Field recreation ground. At first it looks pretty shocking. Before too long, though, a healthy tree like the large poplar in Burrows Field (right) will regrow its canopy and after a year or so it will look perfectly normal once again.



COMMITTEE WALKABOUT MEETING

On a hot evening in late June ten members of the committee met Wayne Sedgwick for the annual site walk. This meeting allows the committee to see for themselves what has been achieved, and what projects need to be addressed next.

During the course of the two-hour walk led by Wayne, the meeting covered a range of issues.

- **The improvements to the footpath which runs up the Main Incline.** This former railway track was increasingly lined by ash trees, which self-seed prolifically. Sadly, many of these were suffering from Ash Dieback and posed a risk to walkers. The path is now not only safer but also lighter. The fact that its edges have been marked off by FOLK volunteers using a lot of the wood and branches from felled trees (above right), only adds to its naturalistic appearance. Thanks to FOLK volunteers explaining what was going on, the overwhelming response from walkers was positive.



- **Plans to open up a strip of lane between the Reversion Field and the Sidings** by removing a redundant fence line and clearing any unwanted scrub. This will make the Sidings more visible and create a wider path for visitors to enjoy.

- **The success of the gorse clearance on just over an acre of land near Windass Hill.** Here, contractors not only cleared the area of gorse but treated all the cut stumps to prevent re-growth. As a result a large area of land (seen right) is already re-growing as a natural mixture of grasses and wildflowers.



- **The area of badly-worn ground by the restored section of the Cotswold Way** close to the far western end of the drystone wall. Before the re-surfacing of the original Cotswold Way route, this patch was heavily walked, reducing it to bare earth (and in the winter a sea of mud). So it has temporarily been closed off with gates to allow for the existing grass and wildflowers to recover and for further re-seeding to be done in the autumn

- **The next two phases of gorse removal**



There are two very steep areas of gorse which are too risky for the volunteers to cut, and require specialist equipment. The work will take place in 2023 and 2024, with the contractors hired through the National Grid funding. Ongoing efforts on gorse removal include a new area for FOLK work parties to clear in the autumn.

COTSWOLD STONE STILES

Recording and Saving our Gloucestershire Heritage

THE STONE STILES PROJECT

As regular readers of FOLKtalk may well recall, a couple of years ago a project got under way to find, record and protect as many as possible of our county's stone stiles. They are very characteristic of the historic Cotswold landscape and are well worth preserving. However, until then there was no definitive list of stone stiles in Gloucestershire and most are unprotected. So volunteers from all over Gloucestershire have been helping to compile a comprehensive record. Two years on - with the support of both CPRE Gloucestershire¹ and the CNFC² - much has been achieved.



Slab Stile

Photo by Ann Dickinson

The project team estimates that around 95% of our stone stiles have now been reported, with the outstanding ones being those lost in hedgerows or thrown aside. A valuable part of the survey has been the use of Ordnance Survey coordinates which has enabled accurate mapping to commence. Even more valuable are the photographs. There are still some sightings to log, with indexing by Parish proving successful. There is also an ongoing project to add the individual stone stiles to a digital map.

Gloucestershire's stone stiles can be at least 300 years old, but most date from the acceleration in land enclosure which began in the 1750s when more food was needed for a rapidly rising population. In the main, they are on the lines of very ancient pathways which had to be kept open by those enclosing the land. Where a pathway entered a new enclosure, a gate would be the natural means of securing the boundary, letting people through but keeping livestock inside. However, people leave gates open! So stiles proved to be a more reliable solution. In the Cotswolds, stone stiles were especially popular as timber was both scarce and expensive whereas durable stone was readily available.

Throughout the project, despite many stiles being properly looked after, reports have been received both of stone stiles being removed and of others being destroyed. Sometimes this was done to improve accessibility as some stone stiles are quite tricky to climb through. In the better examples, however, instead of ripping out the old stone stiles, new kissing gates are installed next to the original stile.



A new gate next to an old stone stile.
Photo, Michelle Calverley

The project team believe that the removal or destruction of Gloucestershire's stone stiles has accelerated to such an extent that there is now a pressing need to campaign for their protection.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP?

- **Encourage local councils** to list stone stiles as non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) for inclusion on their Local Heritage List.
- **Urge Landowners** to seek financial help through the **Defra Cotswold Farming in Protected Landscapes** programme.
- **Campaign** for stone stiles to be protected and their retention/maintenance to be funded alongside stone walls and stone gate posts through the new **ELMS**³ programme which offers landowners 'Public funds for Public good'.

For more information please contact Peter Wilson at:
peter.wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk

¹ CPRE Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

² CNFC Cotswold Naturalists Field Club

³ ELMS Environmental Land Management Schemes

FOLK AT THE FAIRS

After two summers of disruption caused by COVID it is good to see outdoor events springing back into life. FOLK has been quick to take the opportunities which these popular fairs present. The stands at each fair included lots of information about the projects for improving the Hill and Common which are funded by National Grid, and what the works are intended to achieve. It also featured additional measures being taken to make the Hill and Common more accessible.



FOLK's display stand

Charlton Kings Summer Fayre

FOLK had a stand at the Charlton Kings Summer Fayre which was held on Saturday 18th June. After a hot and sunny Friday it was a shame that the Saturday was surprisingly cool and wet. So attendance wasn't as good as usual. However, a number of people visited the stand and a few joined up as FOLK members there and then. So it was still a productive event for us.

The general response of the visitors to the stand was that they were particularly happy with the work done on resurfacing the Cotswold Way along the top of Charlton Kings Common. They were also looking forward to the return of the long horn cattle.

Midsummer Fiesta

This popular event was held on Saturday 2nd July in Montpellier Gardens. Here a wet morning was, thankfully, followed by an increasingly warm and sunny afternoon. So footfall at our stand grew as the day wore on.

Once again the stand attracted plenty of interest in the work being done by FOLK, the Borough Council and various specialist contractors. There was much interest in the work funded by the National Grid grant, and the stretches of footpaths now boasting increased accessibility for all terrain mobility scooters. It was also pleasing to see several visitors joining FOLK straight away at this event too.

WHY IS A BEE A BEE?

Because it isn't a wasp

For those of you who find bees adorable companions in the garden and regard wasps irritating pests, the uncomfortable truth is that a bee is actually just a sort of vegetarian wasp. Indeed wasps had been hunting and scavenging on our planet for millions of years before bees started to develop.

The wasps' diet includes proteins - which drives them to seek out flies, aphids, caterpillars and, of course, anything attractive which we are eating. They also feed on sugars found in nectar. This way of surviving made it advantageous for wasps to be small, agile and aggressive with a sharp and repeatable sting.

Millions of years ago, however, some wasps switched their diet away from proteins and gradually evolved into bees, which – unlike their wasp ancestors - feed solely on what flowers produce. Over time these new species grew more and more like the bees we see today. They developed long, tube-like tongues to sip nectar deep in the throat of flowers, and also feathery, branched hairs to gather pollen and carry it back to their nest. However, not being hunters, bees have been able to grow bigger and become a bit less agile – if not entirely harmless.

It is a common myth that a bee dies after it stings a human. This is perfectly true for **honey bees**, which have a sharp hook at the end of the sting that gets stuck in human skin, causing mortal injury to the bee when it attempts to fly away. **But beware!** Most other species of bee, including all the **bumblebees** (like the White Tailed Bumblebee pictured here) have a smooth tip to their sting which they can withdraw from their victim and use to strike again.



White Tailed Bumblebee

They are, however, unlikely to sting unless threatened or provoked and will generally leave us alone if we do the same to them.

Over time, of course, flowering plants themselves evolved, developing mechanisms such as sending out more perfume when a bee starts feeding on its flowers. This keeps the first bee to arrive interested in other flowers on the same

plant and also attracts others to join in the feast. Similarly, many different species of bees evolved, each perfectly adapted to its own environment and preferred food sources. In the UK alone we have around 270 species of bee, just under 250 of which are solitary bees.

The symbiotic relationship between bees and flowers has turned the bee into one of the world's most important and much-loved pollinators. Given the bee's benign image, though, and the widespread concern about the future of many species of bee, perhaps it is only right that we also acknowledge that it has very distant, and generally less welcome ancestor: the wasp.

FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

Our work parties in February and March took the opportunity to do a bit more scrub clearance before we had to stop for the bird nesting season. We cleared some more gorse alongside the Cotswold Way on Charlton Kings Common to open up the distant views as shown by the *before and after* photos below.



We also did some scrub removal in the clearing alongside the footpath that goes up from the Woodland Walk to the top of the escarpment on Leckhampton Hill. This area was slowly being invaded by a variety of saplings and other scrub.





In March we were again on Charlton Kings Common. This was mainly to burn the gorse cuttings we had generated at earlier work parties, but we also took the opportunity to remove some more.

In April we focused our work on infrastructure: clearing growth from, and alongside, various sections of Cotswold stone walls.

Firstly we worked on a corner of the old wall on Leckhampton Hill that the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens are slowly rebuilding. This is where it is intended to create a memorial wall on which remembrance plaques can be fixed. It is also where the memorial to one of the Leckhampton stalwarts can be found.

We also spent two work parties continuing the task we started last year to clear the growth obscuring the long Cotswold stone wall running along the top of Charlton Kings Common. The improvement this makes can be clearly seen from the *before and after* photos below.



In May, as reported elsewhere in this newsletter, there was extensive felling of dead or dying ash trees, predominantly along the main incline up from Daisy Bank Road. This generated a lot of cut branches which we helped to clear during our

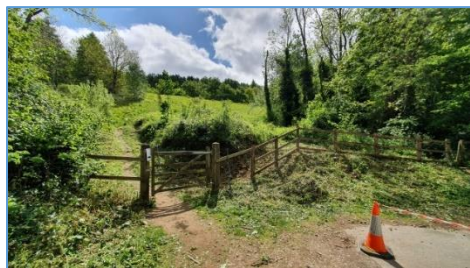
three work party sessions. For two of these the Council provided a chipping machine to which we dragged the branches.



The chipper (left) wasn't available for the third work party when instead we tidied up the branches by creating 'dead hedges' alongside the path.



During our first 'chipping' work party we were joined by a group from Atkins (seen above) who work in the Structures Team of Gloucestershire County Council. They were a great help and we are always happy when companies release their staff to volunteer to work alongside us.



Thanks to the Atkins team boosting our numbers, we were also able to work on clearing the fences and footpaths in the area at the bottom of the incline.

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 come along to 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:

July 2022	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
August 2022	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
September 2022	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
October 2022	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
November 2022	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our website (<https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/work-parties/>) or send an email to folk.workparty@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

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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 send an email to: martinwood360@gmail.com. Articles of around 500 words, plus a photo if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

Contact FOLK

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

The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee.