



FOLKtalk

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Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



(l-r Charles Martell, Mike Donnelly, Mike Dunning, Sandra Holliday, Wayne Sedgwick)

A PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FOR THE HILL AND COMMON

The extensive range of improvements made to our site over recent years was recognised with one of the handful of CPRE Gloucestershire's 2022 awards.

The scheme celebrates projects across the county which have improved different aspects of local rural life. The awards were presented to each project's representatives by CPRE Gloucestershire's President Charles Martell in a ceremony held in November.

A full report follows on page 4

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Read all about past successes and future plans in the FOLK AGM report on page 13

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FOLK AGM 2022

On a distinctly cold and wet November night our Chair, Mike Donnelly, welcomed some forty members to the function room of The Wheatsheaf for FOLK's 23rd Annual General Meeting.



As an introduction Mike displayed the front page of the Annual Report and talked through the significance of its illustrations, which highlight some of the past year's successes. They showed the newly improved surfaces to stretches of the Cotswold Way and Main Incline, the rebuilding of the drystone wall, the ongoing battle against gorse and, in pride of place, a very contented English Longhorn cow peacefully ruminating on the slopes of the Charlton Kings Common. (See full report of the FOLK AGM on page 13)

A new year has begun: the 23rd since FOLK was formed in 2000. In this issue of FOLKtalk we reflect on a very successful 2022 and look forward to future projects in the coming year.



In November we held our well-attended FOLK AGM and, after the formal business, enjoyed a fascinating talk by Katie Allen of Heritage Graziers.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England Gloucestershire awards took place the day after the AGM, and Cheltenham Borough Council received an award for Partnership Management of the Commons.

The contractor has completed the second project for cutting gorse on Charlton Kings Common, and FOLK volunteers have cleared and burnt the cut gorse. The maintenance project on the veteran trees was also completed

Work parties have been well attended, but a couple have had to be cancelled because of bad weather. With the grant from Cotswold Natural landscapes we have been able to purchase a new mower and brush cutter. FOLK has now got its own portable defibrillator supported by a financial contribution from Cheltenham Borough Council. We had defibrillator training given by Passion First Aid at the Wheatsheaf in January which was well attended

It is proposed to produce a new management plan for the Commons and a subgroup are having a number of meetings at the moment aimed at employing an ecology consultant who will put together the many elements needed to produce an effective management plan for the coming years.

I have just touched on just some of the subjects that you will find in this FOLKtalk. Please enjoy.

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

Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK

CPRE AWARD CEREMONY

The wide-ranging improvements made over the last couple of years on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common have received a prestigious award from CPRE Gloucestershire. This was presented at a ceremony held in Highnam last November, along with awards to five other projects across the county.

It was a marvellous occasion. Before the ceremony all the representatives were invited to visit Holy Innocents Highnam Church to view the renowned high Victorian frescoed interior. Everyone then gathered at The Gambier Parry Hall which was laid out with large round tables for each project team, and a CPRE representative joined each table.

The purpose of the scheme is to “recognise and celebrate projects across Gloucestershire which demonstrate sustainability and have resulted in significant improvements to the environment and facilities for communities.”

Our project was praised for both the breadth of the impact of the improvements made and the demonstrably broad range of community involvement in its planning and execution. In particular the award highlighted: “re-establishing grazing, rebuilding drystone walls and enabling access for all.”

In their citation for our award, CPRE Gloucestershire noted *“the successful planning and management by partners and volunteers of a large and complex site achieving multiple objectives including access for all, biodiversity enhancement and landscape improvements”*. As Cheltenham Borough Council is the landowner, the mayor of Cheltenham, Councillor Sandra Holliday, was presented with a plaque and certificate by the CPRE President Charles Martell.

Certificates were also presented to Mike Donnelly of FOLK, Mike Dunning of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and the borough council’s Senior Ranger Wayne Sedgwick. Adam Reynolds CBC Green Space Manager also attended the event.



As well as the CBC Leckhampton project, four other awards were presented, demonstrating the wide variety of rural projects which the award scheme recognised. These were:

- Destination Lydney Harbour - transforming the significant historic harbour area into an attractive visitor destination and enhancing its links with Lydney town
- Barnwood Park - environmental improvements, reducing flood risk, creating new wetland scrapes and improving access and interest for visitors
- Ashleworth Hub – saving a village store and developing the site to add a deli, a post office and a small art gallery
- St James Great Church, Stoke Orchard – restoring and preserving extensive and rare medieval wall paintings

To finish off the event, after the awards had been presented everyone enjoyed a delicious celebratory cream tea.

IN THE NEWS

WOODPECKERS “SING”

Our green woodpecker is known for its ‘**kew-kew-kew-kew-kew**’ sound while the great spotted woodpecker usually emits a loud, sharp ‘**cheek-keek**’. **Neither of these come anywhere close to what we recognise as a song.**

However, recent findings (published in PLOS Biology) identified that the sound or rhythm patterns which woodpeckers use when pecking is associated with a “remarkably similar” part of the forebrain as other species use when they are singing. In trials, woodpeckers also mimicked drum patterns played to them.

This indicates that they can learn and replicate pecking patterns which they have heard - most commonly, perhaps, learning from their parents. That, in turn, suggests that these birds might also use the noise of their pecking to defend their territories and scare off potential intruders - in a way very similar to other birds’ use of song.

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL GRID GRANT

The works described here are part of a large programme called **Restoring Cheltenham's Escarpment Grasslands**, which is principally funded by a large grant from National Grid following network improvement works they have carried out in recent years.

Larch

Work has begun to clear selected trees within the large area of larch planted in the 1970s. Many of these trees are already nearing the end of their lives. So this first phase of the works has prioritised safety as some trees were in danger of falling across nearby paths. Forty eight trees will be felled in April, which will not only increase safety but also open up a great view across the Severn Vale.



Larch trees tower over natural woodland

Gorse

The second phase of gorse clearance on some of the exceptionally steep slopes on the Hill and Common was delayed by the heavy snowfall and exceptionally cold spell around Christmas. So at the very start of this year the contractors returned and completed the cutting. FOLK work parties then tackled the not insignificant task of gathering, chopping and burning of the huge amount of cut gorse that this project generated.

Ravensgate

Developments continue on this area of the project. With the involvement of specialist contractors, a further fifty diseased ash trees have been felled to keep footpaths safe, and the robo-mower has again been brought in to clear gorse and scrub from grassland which can now recover. This site has also seen improvements to the track which provides access for visitors.

Ash



Felling diseased ash trees to make the Tramway Cottage footpath safer

As ash dieback continues to spread, more work has been done by contractors to remove trees in danger of falling on footpaths. This time the efforts have been focused on the long track up from Tramway Cottage to the Limekilns and the Woodland Walk to the Devil's Chimney where as many as fifty trees needed to be felled. This is an ongoing programme and further reports on ash tree removal across the site will be reported in the coming months.

OTHER PROJECTS

Drystone wall The Cotswold Wardens have made great progress with the rebuilding of the wall around the area where the original Stalwart's Memorial stood. In particular they have been working on the section where the new memorial wall is being established.

They have already embedded a dozen flat stones within the re-built wall, each of which will eventually carry two or three memorial plaques. As the re-build continues, a further dozen such stones will be added. There has already been some interest from local families wishing to remember a loved one who had a special fondness for Leckhampton Hill.



Memorial wall and bench

Once this area has been finished, the Cotswold Wardens will continue re-building the wall back towards Hartley Lane where it will join the section which had already been completed.

Dog Fouling

The vast majority of dog owners who enjoy the Hill and Common are responsible people who clear up their dog's mess. Sadly, a minority do not, choosing instead to leave the mess where it fell or to bag it and then leave the bag behind anyway. Not only is this unsightly – and worse for anyone unlucky enough to tread or fall in it – it is also known to be harmful to wildlife. Not everyone realises, however, that it also poses a threat to cattle.

Cows that eat grass which is contaminated in this way are prone to suffer from a failed pregnancy. In a recent case in the New Forest almost half of one farmer's herd lost their calves during their pregnancy as a result of having eaten grass fouled with dog mess.



So Cheltenham Borough Council has installed new signage around the site, and has also deployed two wardens to patrol the Hill and Common. To date, all the dog owners and dog walkers whom the wardens have spoken with are fully supportive of the scheme and agree that it is right that those who are found guilty may end up liable to pay a fine.

The wardens have not yet had to issue a fine – and as well as having a friendly chat, they will even give out poo-bags if they are needed. But dog mess restrictions does present a real threat to nature and to everyone's enjoyment of the Hill and Common – and the risk of a fine is always there. So do spread the word among any dog-owners you know.

Footpath improvements

Following the works already undertaken on the main incline up from Bridge Car Park, and the stretch of Cotswold Way across Charlton Kings Common, plans are now in place to resurface two more lengths of footpath on the top of the Hill.

Firstly, the new project will tackle the stretch of footpath up from Hartley Lane, across the Hill and stopping at the boundary of the hill fort.

A second stretch will then lead from the hill fort, across to the Reversion Fields and Hill Farm, and down to Brownstones car park. Once finished, this will create an almost complete circular footpath which is fully accessible for those with impaired

mobility including users of all-terrain mobility scooters or trampers. The loop would be finished by travelling along the road back to the start point.

The Borough Council is contributing to the project, which will mainly be paid for by substantial grants from both Natural England and the Cotswold National Landscape's *Access for All* fund.

Grazing

The cattle have had a good winter up on the Hill and Common. The herd successfully grazed all the grassland set aside for conservation and this clears the way for ever more wildflowers to flourish over the spring and summer. Unfortunately, though, in November the routine veterinary check identified one cow with bovine tuberculosis.

So the animal was isolated for sixty days in the nearby layback land. The herd kept to the main site and when the cow was retested at the beginning of this year the result was thankfully all clear.

Having eaten all the suitable grass on the Common, the whole herd was then moved into Hopkins Field layback land. From there they moved to Cowslip Meadow and the Reversion Fields, where they will mainly graze on the last supplies of 2022's haylage until they are taken off the site and returned to their own summer pastures.

Mountain Bike Trail Signs

You may notice some new wooden posts and signs appearing on the Hill in areas where mountain bikers often ride - particularly between the standard incline and the rail sidings.

The signs will help to make it clear where cyclists must not ride. Other signs will highlight mountain bike tracks which walkers are asked to avoid to prevent putting themselves and mountain bike riders at risk. Warning signs will alert walkers and mountain bikers at points where walking and mountain bike paths meet.



This has all come about because a group made up of riders, walkers, the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, and Cheltenham Borough

Council worked together over many months to create a plan which would help ensure that all users can enjoy the hill safely.

The Cotswold Wardens have successfully installed almost half of the twenty or more signs designed to keep walkers and mountain-bikers out of harm's way. The remaining signs will be installed in the coming months, again focusing on locations where footpaths and mountain bike trails cross.

IN THE NEWS

WHY DO BUTTERFLIES HAVE 'EYE SPOTS'?

Scientists have three hypotheses about why eyespots might help butterflies.

Some think butterfly eyespots scare away predators because the predator thinks there is a large, dangerous animal behind the eyes (the intimidation hypothesis).



Peacock butterfly with large eye spots

A second idea (the deflection hypothesis) is that the eyespots deflect predators: The predator attacks the eyespots on the edge of the wings rather than the butterfly's head, giving the butterfly a better chance at survival.

A third hypothesis is that the eyespots make the butterfly stand out, and standing out is often a signal that a creature is poisonous.

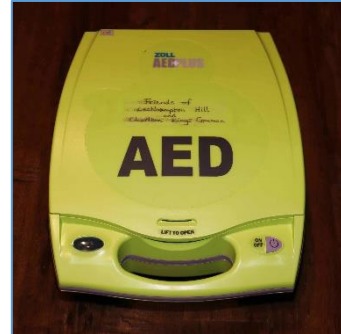
While it is not known which hypothesis is correct, having eyespots clearly aids butterfly survival. In one study, researchers compared butterflies with intact eyespots with ones that had the eyespots painted over. The butterflies with the intact eyespots survived much better; in fact, only one of 34 butterflies with intact eyespots was killed, whereas 13 of 20 butterflies with painted-over eyespots were killed. Additional studies have shown similar results.

LIFE-SAVING DEFIBRILLATOR FOR FOLK

Many times each year FOLK work parties - often accompanied by volunteers from local companies and schools - head up onto the Hill and Common. They are invariably working in fairly remote spots some considerable distance from roads and car parks. So, naturally, the group leader will always bring a full first aid kit. This covers provision for most of the predictable minor injuries.

One thing we couldn't treat, though, was cardiac arrest. Now we can.

There are around 60,000 incidents of cardiac arrest each year in the UK and, after a cardiac arrest occurs, the casualty's chance of survival drops by 10-12% in each minute which passes before the start of any treatment. This explains why more and more defibrillators¹ are being installed across the country. **More importantly, this is why FOLK now has its own portable defibrillator.**



All "public access" defibrillators - like FOLK's - are designed to be used by anyone, even children, whether or not they have had any training.

- The device gives clear audible instructions that lead the user through the procedure step-by-step.
- A visual display shows the instructions for those with impaired hearing.
- The defibrillator also regularly monitors the casualty's heart rhythm. So it will not let you give another shock if the person does not need it.

It is widely known, however, that most people might be wary of using a defibrillator for fear of doing something wrong. So Lucy Wise (Cheltenham Borough Council Community Ranger) arranged a couple of training sessions in January to help build confidence.

A good number of FOLK members attended the training sessions, which were led by **Jim Jones of Passion First Aid**. By the end of the session everyone had a much greater understanding of the importance of timely action, had been reminded of the key life-saving actions to take (such as CPR), and of course, had gained more confidence to use the defibrillator itself.



¹ Formally described as Automated External Defibrillators or AEDs



Our new defibrillator is small and easily portable, especially for outdoor activity such as FOLK work parties. FOLK has also bought a new, high visibility rucksack to hold the defibrillator and all the first aid kit which we always have available. This will be taken on every work party session.

FOLK is very grateful for the grants which supported the purchase of this defibrillator. In addition to FOLK's own significant contribution,

there was a substantial sum from Cheltenham Borough Council and a generous donation of £200 towards the cost by Charlton Kings Parish Council.

Given the importance for the casualty of swift action, and the difficulties which paramedics would face in actually reaching a FOLK work party, this is a very good investment for the group - even if it is one we hope never to have to use.

FIVE KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

Our trainer, Jim Jones, urged us to remember:

- **Time is crucial.** If the casualty is **unresponsive** and it looks as if they are **not breathing**, **CALL 999** and start CPR.
- **Defibrillators are easy to use.** The machine will tell you what to do.
- **If you do not know where the nearest defibrillator is, your 999 call handler will be able to tell you.**
- **You can get into a defibrillator cabinet even if it is locked.** Follow the instructions on the outside of the box, which begin **CALL 999**. They will tell you how to get the defibrillator.



and most important of all

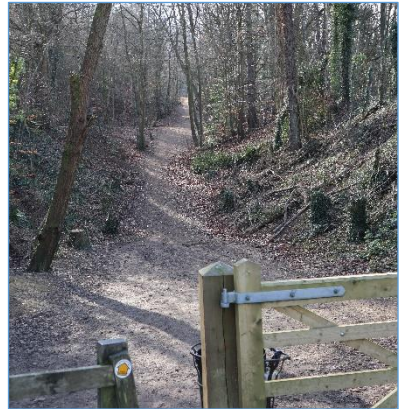
DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TRY TO HELP. If the casualty is unconscious and not breathing, **using CPR and a defibrillator can do no harm** and actually gives the casualty the best chance of recovery.

THE WORST THING YOU CAN DO IS NOTHING!

FOLK AGM 2022

In his presentation of the Annual Report Mike drew the meeting's attention to many notable successes over the past year. He explained that the Executive Committee was currently meeting more frequently than usual because of the rapid rate of progress with the projects funded by the National Grid's grant for landscape enhancement. Mike also praised the work done to keep FOLK's website regularly updated and to maintain regular posting on our Facebook pages. He went on to note the success of the FOLK stands at the Midsummer Fiesta and the two Charlton Kings Fayres.

The report naturally brought news of a wide range of projects made possible by the National Grid grant. All of these have been the target of work by FOLK, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and Cheltenham Borough Council for some years. Now, however, the employment of professional contractors both speeds up the work and makes possible tasks which volunteers alone cannot tackle. This has been particularly true of tree management, footpath resurfacing and the clearance of gorse from dangerously steep slopes. Having said that, none of these projects could have been fully completed without the energetic support of a host of volunteers.



Improved surface on Main Incline footpath

In addition to celebrating last year's achievements, Mike's address was very much looking to the future with various projects to start or complete including:

- new signage to help keep walkers and mountain bikers safe,
- the preservation of the Limekilns, and
- the continuation of the drystone wall which runs up from Hartley Lane to the Hill Fort, including the creation of the memorial wall.

The new grazing regime is continuing to bring benefits. The cattle were back, but will spend the spring and summer off-site, a cycle which greatly helps grasses and wildflowers to recover.

Another key development will be the creation of a new management plan for the site. The original plan is now some twenty years old and since its creation much has changed on the Hill and Common. Much has also been learnt (locally and nationally) about what works best to improve landscapes and boost wildlife recovery. Again, the National Grid grant has been crucial here, allowing the appointment of a specialist consultant to draw up a plan and an overarching work programme which will deliver the benefits that we all wish to see for people, for the heritage of the site and, of course, for wildlife.

Mike was pleased to announce that the presentation of an award from the countryside charity CPRE for improvements to the Hill and Common was to take place the very next day. The award would be made to Cheltenham Borough Council, FOLK and the Cotswold Wardens – and is a fitting and worthy reward for all the hard work which has been needed.

It was also reported that FOLK membership continued to grow and currently stands at 478, and he added that the loss of income caused by the suspension of membership subscriptions was now almost entirely replaced by the proceeds FOLK receives from the Cheltenham Lottery.

It is vital that FOLK and the Borough Council continue to spread the word about the importance of the Hill and Common, and to engage the public in the work needed both to conserve and to improve it. So Mike was delighted to pay tribute to the many volunteers generously released by local firms to join us on the Hill and Common, and to thank local schools and groups like the Scouts which allow young people to visit the site, learn about what makes it special and contribute some of their time to practical tasks. FOLK work parties contributed more than 1400 hours of effort, a workload splendidly matched by the Cotswold Wardens, and Mike was full of praise for all who have contributed their valuable time and considerable efforts to this very special place.

Guest Lecture

The formal business of the meeting was followed by a fascinating talk given by **Katie Allen of Heritage Graziers** whose cattle spend the autumn and winter up on the site.

Katie set the scene by explaining that she and her husband James are deeply committed to organic farming, conservation and the use of British heritage breed cattle. Although they do not actually own a farm, they started their business eight

years ago, generating income by grazing other landowners' pastures and selling their own meat. Katie is also a successful knitwear designer and maker, using wool from her own flock of heritage breed sheep.

For James and Katie it is very important that grazing is in harmony with nature, and so they work with a number of different landowners and land types. They are passionate advocates of Pastures for Life, the campaign by The Pasture-Fed Livestock Association. The PFLA promotes the principle that animals like sheep and cattle should be 100% fed on natural grassland which itself benefits from good soil health. This they maintain will help reverse the unintended but harmful effect of Britain's post-World War 2 agricultural developments when the rapid growth of industrial farming saw the extensive use of artificial fertilisers and the consequent depletion of our farmers' soil.

Katie went on to explain that their own approach at means grazing sheep and cattle on species-rich pastures and adopting "regenerative grazing" practices - a sensitive but complicated way of working. In the summer grass is allowed to grow tall – so tall in fact that it can reach the cows' shoulders and make it hard for a farmer to see the calves. Tall grass naturally develops deep roots, which in turn break up the soil and improve drainage. So at any given time, under this system, one third of the pasture is being eaten, one third is being trampled and one third is being left to re-grow.

James and Katie carefully selected the breeds of cattle which we now see on the Hill and Common between November and early spring. These British Whites and English Longhorns are hardy, thrive on rough mixed pasture and are tolerant of both steep slopes and passing humans. By using the NoFence technology James and Katie can work with landowners like the Borough Council carefully to plan the progression of grazing over the course of a season.

The talk ended with a lively and wide-ranging question-and-answer session which revealed more detail about NoFence Grazing and touched on issues such as the danger posed to cattle by dog mess and the need to help reverse the recent decline our native Dung Beetle, a species which is really good for the health and quality of our soil.

For more information about James and Katie's work visit:

www.heritagegraziers.co.uk

NEW EQUIPMENT FOR THE WORK PARTIES

Most of the tasks undertaken by FOLK work parties mean kind-hearted individuals using hand tools and a great deal of energy in order to make the Hill and Common better. Sometimes though, hand tools alone are not quite enough.

It is quite common for a brush cutter to be used to speed up the regular work of cutting down unwanted hardy vegetation. On other occasions, the work party will use a large all-terrain mower on long grass on locations such as Area 16, the Barrow and Hill Fort (to keep them visible), Brownstones Quarry and the edges of various paths, e.g. Judy's Ride.

All of these jobs naturally involve the work party raking up the cuttings to leave the site tidy and in good health. But the machinery certainly saves a lot of time and effort, meaning that much more can be achieved in each session.

FOLK started using tough equipment like this soon after it was formed, but while the volunteers continue their good work, the same cannot be expected of its machines. One of the brush cutters dated back twenty one years and the mower itself was only one year younger. Understandably, despite constant maintenance, both effectiveness and reliability for both the mower and the brush cutter have recently been hard to achieve. In short, time has caught up with them both.

The good news is that thanks to a generous grant from Cotswolds National Landscape's dedicated fund, *Farming in Protected Landscapes*, we now have two brand new pieces of kit (right).

The brush cutter is basically a slightly updated, like-for-like replacement.

However, the old mower has been replaced by a "power scythe". This design will not only be more efficient than its predecessor, but also more environmentally compatible with work on such a rare and valuable site.



FOLK's new brush cutter and power scythe

This is because our old mower had a rotary blade and pushed the cuttings out to one side without mulching them which made them easy to rake up. However, because of the status of our site as a *Site of Special Scientific Interest* we are now required by Natural England to rake up any cuttings. If we were to leave them on the ground they could smother other plants we want to protect, and potentially act as a fertiliser which could change the nature of our ground.

Unfortunately, modern rotary mowers equivalent to our old one, are now designed to mulch the cuttings as most people neither need nor want to rake them up. So the power scythe (which cuts once with no mulching) seems an ideal replacement which very much suits our needs. On top of that advantage, the old mower had a tendency to flatten taller grasses rather than properly cutting them. We don't expect to have this problem with the power scythe!



Wayne Sedgwick working with the new power scythe

THE STANDARD GAUGE INCLINE

An engineering triumph and a business failure

One hundred years ago Leckhampton Hill would have been very different from the tranquil natural space we know today. In fact it would have been a noisy site of feverish engineering activity as work began on the construction of a standard gauge railway track all the way up to the limekilns where quarrying was about to enter a period of rapid expansion.

Small scale quarrying had been carried out across the Hill for hundreds of years, but in the nineteenth century Cheltenham, Lansdown and Pittville grew quickly, and quarrying operations also grew to keep up with demand. So better transport links became essential. First came the tramways which brought quarried stone across the hill to a central point near to where the limekilns now stand. From there a main tramway led straight down to Daisybank Road, passing Tramway Cottage before crossing the main road which leads up Leckhampton Hill and heading down

into Cheltenham. Here the tramway ran to the main stone depot opposite where the Jolly Brewmaster now stands on Painswick Road.

In 1921, the Trade Facilities Act was passed, making cheap loans available as part of the government's drive for economic recovery after the First World War. Under this scheme The Leckhampton Quarries Company obtained a £50,000 loan, augmented by substantial private investment, and this funded significant growth in quarrying and the creation of the limekilns.

To optimize this expansion, a better transport link from the quarries to the mainline railway network was considered essential. The business plan hinged on the anticipated rise in demand for stone to support house-building, road construction, monumental stonework such as memorials, and poultry grit - as well as feeding the limekilns.



Limekilns under construction in 1924
(Photograph - the late TF Coke)

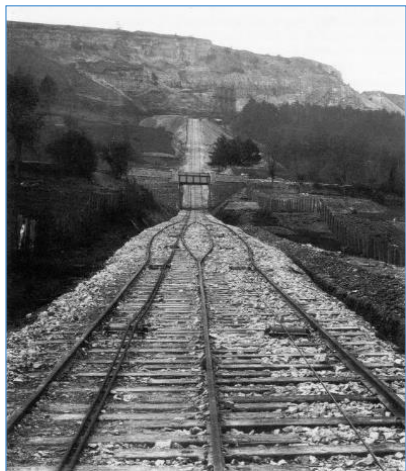
Work on the new standard gauge incline began in October 1922 with preliminary groundworks, but the scale of operations rapidly increased in early 1923.



Daisybank bridge under construction
(Photograph - the late TF Coke)

The new line led almost straight down from the limekilns, passing under Daisybank Road (left) and then curving round to Southfield where a new engine shed, weighbridge and stoneyard were constructed.

From Southfield the new railway track ran through the Lilleybrook estate and joined the main railway network in Charlton Kings.



Passing point on the new railway line

The entire development was complete by September 1924, but the works proved more arduous, and worryingly much more expensive, than originally forecast.

Only after a further £50,000 was borrowed from the Treasury were the works finally completed and the quarry work force soon grew to several hundred men.

In October 1922 great optimism in the project had brought Dr McNamara MP (Minister of Labour) to the grand and lavish ceremony in which he cut the first sod of earth. Sadly, though, although the stone itself initially sold well, the limekilns themselves were less

successful. Built to an innovative design they never produced lime of a sufficiently consistent quality.

In the end, then, despite all the noise, effort and early optimism, this rapid expansion of quarrying in Leckhampton proved to be a disastrously expensive failure. A combination of the much increased costs of the initial engineering works, falling demand and rising overheads spelled the end of the venture.

Just three years after the expansion programme began, the Leckhampton Quarries Company went bankrupt in October 1925, spelling the closure of its works and bringing to a sad end any large scale commercial quarrying of stone on Leckhampton Hill.

To read more about this intriguing era of Leckhampton's history look for a copy of **Old Leckhampton its Quarries, Railways, Riots and the Devil's Chimney (1971)** by D. E. Bick.

THREE COUNTIES SUPER WOODLAND

Wye to Wyre – connecting nature and people

Ecologists have shown that, as well as improving individual pockets of land to help nature recover, joining these areas up to form larger continuous habitats is even more powerful.

That is why FOLK is, for example, creating “butterfly motorways” to join up patches of land which will help butterflies like the Duke of Burgundy to flourish across our site. It is also why the boards of Cotswolds National Landscape and other such boards in this region, are looking into linking huge swathes of limestone grassland, stretching from the South Downs to the Cotswolds.

Now Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has joined forces with Worcestershire and Herefordshire Wildlife Trusts to connect two of England’s largest native woodlands. The ambition of this work is to create a 60-mile corridor of enhanced tree cover, from the Lower Wye Valley and Forest of Dean in the south, to the Wyre Forest in the north.

The **Severn Treescapes** project aims to demonstrate that increasing woodland connectivity at a regional scale - whether through woodlands, hedgerows, orchards, agroforestry or other tree systems - can work alongside productive agriculture. It is claimed that it will not only be maintaining agricultural productivity but also kick-starting longer-term improvements which will benefit biodiversity and tackle the impacts of climate change.

The project will build on remaining pockets of ancient woodland to create a climate resilient landscape, all within thirty miles of the homes of around eight million people.

As Dr Juliet Hynes, GWT’s Head of Ecological Evidence, put it ““Trees and hedgerows can help to tackle the impacts of climate change - providing livestock with shade in the summer, fruit and nuts for birds and small mammals in the winter and increased water infiltration. What’s more, it will create opportunities for people to connect with trees and the natural world.”

WORK PARTY REPORT

Geoff Holt, Work Party Coordinator

During the period since the last newsletter we have been engrossed in our usual winter work of 'scrub-bashing', mainly on gorse. Before expanding on this I'd like to express our thanks to a number of organisations that came to help us.

Some local companies encourage and allow their staff to take time off to do volunteering and a good number have joined us over the years. In this period we were joined by volunteers from Capita and from Talogy. (Talogy were also due to come a second time, but that had to be called off due to the snow covering we had.)



Capita volunteers



Talogy volunteers

In early November we held two special sessions for local schools. We had a second visit from Cheltenham College consisting of thirty students and three teachers. This was followed by a first visit by over twenty students from the new High School Leckhampton. They even walked all the way from the school to the top of the Hill, and back again!

These were very productive sessions with the students helping to clear scrub and to re-expose the old Cotswold stone wall. In addition, they were given a tour of some of the highlights of the site. (These visits were organised by the Council Rangers, assisted by FOLK volunteers.) Young people who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Awards continue to join our work parties.



Finally, we were visited by some of the local paragliders in January who helped us to clear gorse and hawthorn off the site which they use for take-off and landing on the top of the Common. As you may guess from the picture above, it was a foul day weather-wise. Despite the awful rain, however, we managed to achieve everything we set out to do on the day.

As mentioned earlier, the main focus of our winter work has been on gorse. As part of the National Grid grant-funded work, contractors have spent a number of weeks cutting and treating gorse on the steeper banks of the Common both to the West and to the East of the Windass footpath.



FOLK volunteers burning gorse cut by contractors

Our supporting task has been to burn their cuttings. We have so far spent seven work parties doing this, though there is still more to do.

We have also spent time cutting and treating gorse on the lower slopes ourselves. We carried out three work parties in an area just to the East of the Turning Circle which contained quite a bit of small hawthorn as well. While we were in that area

we also opened up some of the cattle tracks through a copse to the West of the Turning Circle.

As a slight change from majoring on gorse we spent one work party de-scrubbing some clearings just to the West of Five-Ways (seen below) which had more hawthorn and bramble than gorse.



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 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 three 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:

February 2023	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
March 2023	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
April 2023	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
May 2023	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
June 2023	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
July 2023	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd

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

Mike Donnelly, Chairman: 01242 238790

Geoff Holt, Work Parties: 01242 244165

Mark Dowie, Treasurer: 07872 336006

Peter Whalley, Membership: 01242 517024

Martin Wood, Newsletter: 01242 231230

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.