



FOLKtalk

Issue 72
Summer
2023

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you

MAKING THE HILL AND COMMON MORE ACCESSIBLE



Work has now been completed on a long stretch of the Cotswold Way which rises from Hartley Lane towards the Hill Fort. As this section is entered by walking up what has always been a steep and uneven slope off Hartley Lane, it has presented a challenge to those with any type of mobility issue. Now, with the support of National Grid funding, there is much better accessibility.

The path itself has been resurfaced, but significantly, it has also been remodelled to include this new accessible ramp (left). While making this length of path easier for everyone, the gradient of the ramp was calculated to

make it suitable for those using all-terrain mobility scooters or “trampers”.

So, thanks to this project, a difficult section has now become a fully accessible start/finish point of what is an almost complete 2.5km “tramper” route across the top of Leckhampton Hill. Also, Brownstones carpark has seen the introduction of two disabled spaces close to a different entry point to the tramper route.

To read more about National Grid funded improvements see The Word from Wayne on p 9

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THANK YOU JOHN

The dry stone wall rebuilding project – one of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens' 50th anniversary projects - has been skilfully led by highly experienced Cotswold Warden John Heathcott. In tribute to John's tireless dedication to the work of the Wardens in general over many years - and especially to this particular project – the wall is to be known as "John's Wall". To mark the town's gratitude, a simple plaque bearing the name of the wall has been embedded within the stonework near the end of the memorial wall.



The weather as predicted seems to go from very wet to very hot, sometimes almost hour by hour. Charlton Kings Common is looking very green at the moment and if you walk on the Common you will find a large number of flowers. This is the second year that we have had no cattle grazing over the summer, and the number of flowers appears to go from strength to strength. The cattle will be back on the Common in the autumn.

Following the successful resurfacing of the Cotswold Way on Charlton Kings Common, we have now resurfaced the path up from Hartley Lane to the Hill Fort. This gives much better access for people with limited mobility who want to enjoy another section of the Cotswold Way.



We are now in the third and last year of the **National Grid's *Landscape Enhancement Initiative*** funding, and there are a number of projects still to be completed. One very different task is the planned conservation work on the base of the Lime Kilns which need repointing with lime mortar. A FOLK work party has already tidied up the excessive growth of vegetation in the area.

I must thank everyone who supports FOLK in any way, especially the FOLK work party volunteers, the Cotswold Wardens, Cheltenham Borough Council, local schools and companies, and the FOLK Executive Committee.

To get a better understanding of our work, do visit our stand at the
Cheltenham Borough Council Midsummer Fiesta
Montpellier Gardens, Saturday 15th July 2023.

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

Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK

MEMBERS' FAVOURITE WALKS

If you love spending time on the Hill and Common, maybe you would like to share your favourite walk with other FOLK members.

There are a number of different entry points to the Hill and Common and once you are up on this 165 acre site, you will find plenty of routes to enjoy. In fact it is criss-crossed by more than thirty established paths and tracks. These include walking routes, designated mountain-bike routes, bridleways and vehicle tracks.

We know that many of you enjoy walking on the Hill, whether alone, in pairs or with family groups. On the way you will pass some places teeming with nature, and others offering great views or glimpses into the fascinating geology and industrial archaeology of Leckhampton Hill.

So why not share your favourite walk with other members?

If you have a favourite walk which you think others would enjoy, please send an outline of the walk in 100-200 words.

Suggestions should be sent to leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

COMMITTEE WALKABOUT MEETING

On a warm evening in late June eight members of the committee met Senior Ranger 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 undertaken next.



The walk began in Salterley Quarry and Wayne led the committee up Hartley Lane via the newly created ramp which leads to the stretch of the Cotswolds Ways that runs up towards the Hill Fort. This ramp replaces a short length of particularly steep and uneven pathway with a sloping route, making the footpath more easily used and safer for everyone.

The group moved on up a good 100m of newly resurfaced footpath. As with the long section of the Cotswold Way across Charlton Kings Common, which was resurfaced last year, this latest phase of the work serves three key purposes:

- Firstly it makes the route safer for all, and accessible to those with restricted mobility.
- Secondly it will prevent the erosion and degradation of the path caused by repeated footfall.
- Thirdly it will help to avoid a problem common to many beautiful sites across the country: the gradual and unintended widening of footpaths caused by walkers moving off the main path when it becomes muddy and so walking on (and inadvertently harming) the adjacent grassland.

The resurfaced lengths of path across our site are also wide enough for walkers to pass each other without leaving the stone surface. Wayne explained that there are plans to resurface one or two more lengths of footpaths at some stage in the future, principally to extend and add interest to the sections which are useable by trampers.



Memorial Wall and Bench

The committee took the opportunity to see the progress made by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens on rebuilding this length of drystone wall.

The work began at Hartley Lane and will see around 300m of wall rebuilt. About half way along the new wall, the committee spent time at the new Memorial Wall (seen left). This is set back from the main path, where the wall dog-legs around a field boundary.

The committee were hugely impressed by the work of the Wardens in the whole rebuilding project, and in the precise laying of the flat memorial stones – a very tricky process given the generally random nature of the stones in this distinctively local style of wall. The one bench has also been installed.

In passing, Wayne pointed out a couple of ash trees, each thirty feet or so tall, which last year showed terrible signs of ash dieback and were considered for felling due to their proximity to the footpath.

Now, however, rather than declining in health both are showing strong signs of regrowth. This is a welcome sign of the emerging science which concluded that some ash trees have greater resistance to the disease than others.

With this comes the hope that the likely impact of ash dieback – here and across the country – though still serious, may not always be quite as bad as first feared.



An ash tree returning to full health

The committee then stopped at the Devil's Chimney. With the continual spread and growth of trees over the past fifty years or more, this famous landmark is becoming increasingly hard to see. Here, Wayne pointed out where it is planned that contractors funded by the National Grid grant will be returning to clear some of the trees which have spread across the nearby ground. Once completed this will greatly improve the Devil's Chimney's visibility from all angles – a welcome development for the very many people who come up onto the Hill to see it.



Towards the end of this “walkabout” meeting the committee walked along the top of Charlton Kings Common towards Windass Hill. Here they were able to appreciate the way in which recent scrub clearance and selected felling of small common trees has already improved the views of the town and across to the more distant countryside. This allowed for discussion of nearby locations where further work by contractors and/or FOLK volunteers might open up new viewpoints.

The FOLK Executive Committee is very well-informed about developments on the site - and very knowledgeable about the needs of both people and wildlife. Once again this extensive annual two hour walk around the Hill and Common helped the members of the committee both to appreciate what has already been achieved and to consider carefully what needs to be done next.

FOLK AT CHARLTON KINGS SUMMER FAYRE

The weather forecast for the Charlton Kings Summer Fayre in June was for a “cooler day” (only 23 degrees!), but right from the start it proved to be surprisingly hotter than expected. The dog show had already been cancelled because of the heat, but at least the dry and sunny weather encouraged a very good attendance.



FOLK had a gazebo with our display boards focusing on the contribution volunteers have made over the last 23 years, and also explaining the ongoing work funded by the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative Grant. The improvements to public access and the resurfacing of stretches of the Cotswold Way were seen as a good idea by people we spoke to, with more access for those with reduced mobility.



The steady flow of visitors to the stand showed a genuine interest in the work of FOLK and clearly understood how much the townsfolk value the Hill and Commons – both for people and for wildlife.

We signed up some new members and Cheltenham’s new mayor Matt Babbage spent some time on the stand and showed interest in our work.

The presence of FOLK at these events allows us to meet new members and to improve our general efforts to strengthen our public relations.

The next event that FOLK will attend is the
Cheltenham Midsummer Fiesta 15th July in the Montpellier Gardens
Why not come to the event and visit us at the FOLK stand?

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. The third and final tranche of money from National Grid's "Landscape Enhancement Initiative" has now been received. This means that contractors can now be approached to tender for the next round of early autumn tasks. These will include:

- opening up more views by felling selected trees, particularly within the 1970s plantings of larch which are reaching their end of life
- clearing more scrub and gorse on slopes too steep for volunteers to tackle
- providing stone for the completion of the drystone wall from Hartley Lane to the Hill Fort
- continuing repairs to the perimeter fencing round the area grazed by the cattle

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Bringing the Countryside into the Town



Last year a particularly rich range of wildflower seed was harvested from Hopkins Field in order to create a wildflower area in Pittville Park, to the east of Tommy Taylors Lane. Following the success of that project, seed will again be harvested so that a new area of wildflowers can be created.

Again it will be in Pittville Park, but this time on the western side of Tommy Taylors Lane, just north of the Prince of Wales Stadium.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Survey

In 2020, the local Wildlife Trust (GWT) launched a citizen science programme to map and monitor the county's habitats every ten years. The survey, known as **Habimap**, targets a variety of sample plots in different habitats. This year the surveys will include local woodland and an area of Charlton Kings Common. In

each plot the survey will focus on a carefully selected list of identifier species. The surveys are carried out by volunteers who are trained by GWT to different levels according to their own interests and levels of existing expertise. A separate team of volunteers helps process the data which, in the end, will be analysed and interpreted to provide a report. It is expected that the results will be made public next year.

Memorial Wall

The Cotswold Wardens are rebuilding the drystone wall from Hartley Lane to the top of the Hill and have almost completed the section which makes up the new memorial wall. Here, two dozen or so flat stones are being integrated into the wall to carry small memorial plaques paid for by families wishing to remember loved ones who had a special fondness for the Hill and Common.



The entire rebuild will recreate just over 300m of beautifully crafted Cotswold drystone wall, a project led by the Wardens, but ably supported by FOLK volunteers who have helped move deliveries of stone into place and have removed vegetation from the old wall to leave the Wardens with a clean site to work on.

Youth Engagement

The Borough Council remains committed to involving local young people in the preservation and enhancement of the Hill and Common. The new High School Leckhampton has a thriving Eco Committee for students interested in the local environment, and some members have already visited the Hill and taken part in practical improvement work. Both this school, and Cheltenham College, are keen to continue this active involvement of their students and they plan to arrange further sessions in the new academic year.

Footpath and Mountain bike trail safety

Work continues on the installation of the new signage which is being put in place to keep walkers and mountain bike riders safe – especially where their respective routes meet. Almost all the signs have now been installed and work has also been done to trim back undergrowth at key points to improve sight lines and so help to avoid accidents.

GEOLOGY WALK ON LECKHAMPTON HILL

On the evening of May 23rd, FOLK members had a rare opportunity to take part in a guided geology walk on Leckhampton Hill. This was led by new member, Steve Peacock, who is a professional geologist with long international experience. Steve generously volunteered to arrange a walk for FOLK in advance of the one he was booked to lead in June as part of this year's Cheltenham Science Festival.



In dry and bright spring weather, ten FOLK members and guests were treated to a fascinating and informative tour of the nationally important Jurassic era geology of Leckhampton Hill. The walk started in the Salterley Quarry car park, and followed a route along the Cotswold Way, down to the Devil's Chimney and paused at Deadman's Quarry where Steve's expert and detailed commentary gave us an overview of the marvels of the Jurassic geology which were on view.

Steve used his imaginative and easy-to-understand visual aids to evoke the shallow tropical Jurassic seas which covered the area 150 million years ago – and were teeming with many different lifeforms. For those of us on the walk, terms like Oolitic limestone, Freestone and Pea Grit are no longer exotic mysteries, but actually make sense in the long story of the Hill.

The tour continued via the Lime Kilns where Steve explained the role of the geology in the industrial archaeology of the Hill. We wended our way along the Woodland Walk and back to Salterley Quarry as Steve continued to give us vivid descriptions of the views over the Severn Valley to the Forest of Dean and the Malverns.

The whole evening ramble was very enjoyable, entertaining and educational. So many thanks from FOLK to Steve for arranging this walk especially for us.

Peter Whalley (FOLK Membership Secretary)

IN THE NEWS

2023 – A YEAR OF CHALLENGING WEATHER

This year has seen some unwelcome extremes in the weather, especially for nature.

Spring was, overall, cooler than normal and March was the wettest since 1981. Now June has been confirmed as “the hottest on record”, ie, since records began in 1884. June 2023 experienced the highest ever overall average temperature (up almost a whole degree from 14.9°C to 15.8°C) as well as the highest average maximum temperature. The West was hit hardest, with average temperatures 2.5°C higher than the rest of the country.

This year has also seen some exceptional contrasts. In some areas, as well as being much hotter than normal, there have also been devastating wildfires, while in others it has been thunderstorms and flash floods causing the problems.

While some of us have found some of these extremes uncomfortable, and others less fortunate have endured severe damage to homes, land and businesses, nature is even more vulnerable to the harmful effects of our changing climate.

Some species are also adversely affected not only by overall trends but also by, for example, very short-term fluctuations in temperature. So even if – on any particular day – the overall average temperature is around normal, for some small species a very wide fluctuation between the day and night temperatures makes it difficult for them to survive, let alone thrive.

As a result of the recent heat, wildlife has suffered. Many flowering plants wilted and in some cases produced reduced amounts of nectar. For short-lived species, like butterflies, when there is a poor availability of the specific type of food they need during the crucial days of their brief adult stage, the success of their breeding stage is threatened and we can predict reduced populations in future years.

It is far too soon to draw any definitive conclusions about the impact of this year’s weather on our wildlife, but it has undeniably been challenging.

THANK YOU TO THE TOWN'S GREEN SPACE VOLUNTEERS

In April, FOLK attended the volunteer event hosted by Cheltenham Borough Council to recognize the hugely valuable contribution made by “Friends of” groups to the town’s many green spaces.

A wide range of groups and organisations from across the town were represented, and they were all warmly welcomed by the mayor Sandra Holliday who praised their vital contribution. The Borough Council’s Green Spaces Team had arranged the event and were well represented, including team leader Adam Reynolds, and both Wayne Sedgwick and Lucy Wise.



The event was held at Emmanuel Church and featured a wide range of stands where each group could mount displays to explain their own green space and the work they do to preserve and improve it.

A lot of interest was shown in the FOLK information boards - one of the fifteen displays put on by these local volunteer groups and several partner organisations.

A fascinating illustrated talk was given by John Heathcott on Ancient Woodlands. John is obviously extremely knowledgeable and very passionate about the subject – and could easily have talked for much, much longer without running out of interesting things to say. After John’s talk everyone was treated to a delicious tea with cakes and savouries. The more than one hundred attendees then took the opportunity to visit all the displays and to network with other volunteer groups.

This event highlighted and paid tribute to the crucial role of volunteers in caring for Cheltenham’s many parks and green spaces. It also made very clear how much the Council values the work of each and every one of the many hardworking volunteer groups.

THE COTSWOLD VOLUNTARY WARDENS



All across the country, some of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs, now known as National Landscapes) and National Parks benefit from the tireless work of Voluntary Wardens.

We are lucky that, here in the Cotswolds, we have one of the largest, most trusted and most skilled group of Wardens. They were formed in 1968 – just two years after The Cotswolds gained AONB status - and fifty years later in 2018, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens were presented with The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens is a group of over four hundred volunteers working to promote and look after many aspects of the Cotswolds National Landscape. Our local National Landscape is the largest in England, stretching from Chipping Campden in the north to Bath in the south and from Cheltenham in the west to Burford in the east.

Such a huge area is quite a challenge to maintain, especially when work includes tasks such as highly skilled drystone walling (right). So it is no surprise that, each year, our local Wardens clock up more than forty thousand hours of voluntary work.



Photo © Russell Sach

To achieve this, the Cotswold Wardens are organised into a number of smaller areas. The local group, defined as “Central” covers the area from south of Cleeve Common to Stroud and includes Charlton Kings and Leckhampton.

Each area team undertakes a wide range of work.

- **Did you know that the Wardens usually have a named person** (a *Parish Warden*) who patrols all of the footpaths in a given area and ensures that they are clear and well signed?

- **Where a team effort is needed**, work parties carry out tasks like installing stiles and gates, adding or replacing steps in steep footpaths, and clearing overgrown paths etc.
- Of course, there is a team of dedicated **drystone wall builders** who you may well have seen hard at work on Leckhampton Hill.
- **One other major activity is the organisation of guided walks**; these occur throughout the Cotswolds and, in the summer, are quite frequent.

A full list of local Warden-led walks can be found in the link below. They are free, although donations are always welcome.

One of the walks in the near future is a short tour (4.5 miles) of Leckhampton Hill, on 11th August. It will start at 6:00 p.m. from the Salterley Quarry Car Park, Hartley Lane.

Further details of this walk can be found here:

https://www.cotswoldsaoib.org.uk/guided_walks/summer-stroll-2-leckhampton/

If you would like to know more about the work of the Wardens please contact me at cent.membership@gmail.com

Tony Duffin

FOLK Secretary and Cotswold Warden

ART AND POETRY ON THE TRIG POINT

A few years ago a mystery artist (No. It's not Banksy!) painted a bold geometric design on the trig point near the Hill Fort at the top of Leckhampton Hill. Now the artist has returned and it has a whole new look.



This small concrete pillar, like thousands across the country, was originally installed to establish fixed points (precise location and height above sea level) for official surveying. These markers are placed at prominent points – usually hilltops – and for years the triangulation of groups of such points guaranteed accurate surveying of the land. Positions of all land boundaries, roads, railways, bridges and other infrastructure could therefore be accurately located by the network, a task that is essential to the construction of modern infrastructure.

Nowadays these pillars are no longer required for most surveying purposes, but they remain useful (and popular) for hikers as navigational aids, and often for the simple reassurance that one really has reached the top of the hill.

Recently, our local trig point has been given a makeover. This time the colour scheme is more muted, but the artist has included a short poem. Anyone who walks the Hill would do well to pause here and reflect on the words left by this secretive artist, who has decorated many a trig point across the countryside:

IMAGINE PEACE
PERMANENTLY FLOWING
QUIETLY FOREVER
THROUGH THE PRIME
GOLDEN SPIRAL CORE
OF YOUR BEING

WORK PARTY REPORT

Geoff Holt, Work Party Coordinator

Since the last newsletter we have been focused on finishing off our winter scrub clearance and tidying up after work that we and various contractors, working as part of the National Grid project, had done earlier.

Our scrub clearance work included finishing the removal of the remaining gorse and hawthorn in the area used for take-off by paraglider pilots. We had started this work, supported by some of the paraglider pilots, in January but before we had cleared it all we were forced to stop by the driving rain!



We spent a couple of work parties cutting back the encroaching gorse on the track through the extensive gorse area between the Cotswold Way and the main wall at the Eastern end of the site. As well as making it easier to pass through this area it will also make it easier to carry out the regular butterfly surveys which are completed along this track.

The other significant cutting task was clearing encroaching growth from the edges of the Cotswold Way footpath in the same area. The gorse had begun to overhang the path and was pushing walkers over to the other edge of the track that was resurfaced in 2021 resulting in damage to this edge. The full width of the track can now be used again.



At the same time we cleared growth from off, and alongside, the main Cotswold Stone Wall at its Eastern end to prevent it being damaged and to make it more visible.

We spent quite a few work parties gathering up and burning mounds of gorse cuttings that had been generated by ourselves and contractors in various locations and at various levels on Charlton Kings Common. We had to be very careful with this work to ensure that the fires didn't spread to unwanted areas. Fortunately we have had a lot of experience of doing this over the years and are able to keep our fires under control (so far!).



As we moved into Spring we were able to get away from gorse for a few work parties. Firstly we did some support work for the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

who are rebuilding the Cotswold stone wall up from Hartley Lane. We moved some stone to make it more accessible to the builders, cleared growth from the old wall remains and did some general tidying up in the surrounding area.



Our final major task took place in an area we have not worked in before: the larch plantation above the Daisy Bank car parks. Contractors felled about sixty old larch trees over the winter, opening up a number of clearings where we hope there will be natural regeneration of native woodland. To try to assist this we spent a work party



moving the covering brash from these open areas down to lower levels and under still-standing trees where there is no growth. We had 25 volunteers attend this work party, including seven helpers from Spirax Sarco. So we got an awful lot done that day!

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:

July 2023	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
August 2023	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
September 2023	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
October 2023	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
November 2023	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
December 2023	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 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.

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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.