



FOLKtalk

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

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



The cattle are thriving up on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings

Common. The last of the three calves born here (pictured above) is doing well and the new grazing regime is already paying dividends in terms of its impact on the wildlife on the site.

There are plenty more improvement projects making a difference up on the Hill and Common. See [The Word from Wayne](#) for more news on page 4.

The cattle belong to our new grazier, Eddie Llewellyn, who took over the work of grazing the site only last September. Eddie is based at Wades Farm, just outside Stroud, which he owns with his wife Emma.

To find out more about this remarkable young couple and how they got into conservation grazing, go to the main article on page 11.

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HIGH SCHOOL LECKHAMPTON ECO DAY

In the spring term FOLK supported the first Eco Day at High School Leckhampton (HSL). One of the events on the day was for year eight and nine students to visit exhibition stands in the school’s sports hall.

There were eighteen other exhibitors including Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Cheltenham Borough Council Green Spaces Team, Butterfly Conservation and Friends of Pilley Bridge.

The students came in groups of sixty over a two hour period. They had a set of prepared questions such as “How is your organization helping to solve climate change?” and “How can young people get involved in your organization?”

The event was very successful, with the students keen to explore a range of environmental and conservation issues. It has been proposed that the Eco Day becomes an annual event.

Our thanks go to HSL’s Eco Coordinators Katherine Kennedy and Alex Agombar for arranging the event and inviting FOLK to exhibit.

Report by Mike Donnelly, FOLK Chair

The first half of the year has been a busy and positive period for FOLK. We now have a new team of work party coordinators and the work parties continue to be well attended. The FOLK Quiz Night in March at the Wheatsheaf was very successful and we are planning to run another one in November.



The Treasurer has successfully applied for two grants, one from the Build Back Better fund and one from Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council. The money is specifically to fund FOLK's core running costs, more details of which appear later in this edition of FOLKtalk.

The guided Wildlife Walk on the Hill and Common took place in May. Unfortunately it had to be delayed for one day because of poor weather. This led to slightly fewer people taking part, but it was still a success.

FOLK recently attended the Charlton Kings Parish Council Summer Fayre. Our display included particular focus on the improved access to the Commons following the resurfacing of a number of paths. Although footfall at the event was a bit patchy because of the disappointing weather, the public were very supportive of our work.

I would like to thank the committee and all the volunteers who contribute to the smooth running of FOLK. If you think you would like to contribute in any way please do not hesitate to contact us.

Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK

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.

Conservation Grazing on the Hill and Common

The Belted Galloways are doing well and have now become thoroughly accustomed not only to our site but also to the NoFence technology which uses GPS to govern where they graze. The three pregnant heifers have each produced one fit and healthy calf, and for the time being these mothers and calves are being kept separate from the main herd. They are currently grazing in the Reversion Field, while the remaining



Black Galloway heifer and calf

cattle - seven steers - are grazing in Upper Hopkins Meadow. Later in the summer the entire herd of steers, mothers and calves will be re-united.

This is our first summer with the Belted Galloways and we are gradually working out how best to balance the needs of biodiversity on the Hill and Common with the obvious need to keep the cattle content and well-fed. The wet spring we experienced was good for grass growth, and so natural grazing in a succession of fields has been very successful. As the season wears on, grass-grazing has been supplemented by haylage – much of which has been sourced by last summer's mowing of selected areas on the Hill and Common.

To support this programme of grazing, further improvements are being made. A new grazing area on Daisybank Field is being established - supported by a special fund called Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) - administered by the board of Cotswolds National Landscape. This will enable the creation of a large fenced area of around 1.5 hectares (just under 4 acres). A contractor has been hired to install

fence posts around the 539 metre boundary, and the fencing itself will be completed by the Cotswold Wardens. The new grazing zone has been designed to ensure that the whole field will remain open to walkers as usual, thanks to the installation of four kissing gates, which are also being put in by the Cotswold Wardens.

We are also installing two more water troughs: one in the left hand side of the Reversion Field and another in the new grazing area on Daisybank Field. Although temporarily filled from plastic water tanks, these troughs will be connected to the mains before too long.

Nature is key. It is important to bear in mind that, in all our work on this site, our aim is not simply to halt the general decline in biodiversity, but actually to help some of the more endangered species to recover. This means both increasing their numbers and expanding their presence across a wider area of the land. So, under the conservation agreement, the cattle do not graze key areas of important limestone grassland during spring and summer, allowing the natural grasses and the many wildflower populations to flourish in the main growing seasons. We are already seeing improved numbers and spread of wildflowers and hope that this, in turn, will help the many pollinators to thrive too.

Our Cattle Spotters are doing a great job. Each of the cattle spotters has an allocated regular day when they spend about an hour up on the site checking the wellbeing of the herd. They have been trained by the grazier on signs of injury or poor health and also check using the Nofence app that the cattle are actually in the area where they are supposed to be. The spotters contact the grazier via a dedicated WhatsApp group to report back each time and let him know of any issues. They are also on the lookout for any problems with fences, gates etc which need attention.

Our Cattle Spotter team is clearly loving what they do, and will fill in any days when the regular spotter cannot make it. However, one or two more spotters would be useful to ensure continuity.

So if you are interested in joining the team on a “stand-by” basis, please contact me on wayne.sedgwick@cheltenham.gov.uk

Accessible footpaths

Plans are now in place for the next important phase of the accessible route around the top of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. This will see some important changes to the area around Brownstones Car Park and help us meet two important goals. Firstly it will extend the accessible route around the top of the Hill. Secondly it will help protect the wildflowers (including rare native orchids) in the foot of the old quarry itself and, in turn, support their natural pollinators.



To help everyone – include those with mobility issues – to enjoy better access to the Hill, a new path (shown in blue) will be made at the eastern edge of this car park. It will join up with an existing path which passes through the woodland before joining Judy's Ride which runs to the top of Charlton Kings Common. Much of the existing route near Brownstones Car Park is very uneven. So a 250m length of this old footpath (the start of which is shown in orange) will soon be re-surfaced.

When complete, this work will enable all visitors, including those using all-terrain wheelchairs, to benefit from a continuous surfaced path from the new ramp on Hartley Lane (near Quarry Car Park) all the way round the top of the Hill and across to Brownstones Car Park.

As part of this project, the footpath exit on the north-east side of Brownstones Car Park which leads directly into the old quarry bottom will be blocked off with a new barrier (shown in red). People may still, of course, reach the quarry bottom (seen in the top right hand side of the plan) from the other side, but removing this old route to and from the car park will reduce footfall in an area where nature needs more protection. The preference is that people will use the path rather than the quarry to run their dogs as there is also an increasing amount dog faeces being left uncollected in this particularly floristic area.

Preservation of the Limekilns

With every passing year it becomes more and more challenging to preserve this important part of Cheltenham's industrial history. For a start, natural erosion caused by rain and frost continually eats away at the mortar holding together the base of the kilns. On top of that, the one hundred year old concrete used in the early 1920's by the Leckhampton Quarries Company is showing clear signs of structural deterioration. So the next stage of preservation works has been approved by Historic England, and will include a specialist contractor undertaking some refurbishment and re-pointing.

Bridge Car Park drainage

Over the past year, work has been done to improve the area around the gate from Bridge Car Park onto the Main Incline. This small area has suffered long-term problems with flooding and deep mud. The remedial works completed last year have certainly helped tackle these issues, but have not completely solved them. So before too long some more work will be done to raise ground levels and improve drainage on this key entry point to the Hill.

Gorse clearance

Another round of work by specialist contractors will be arranged early in the autumn to clear more stands of gorse from extremely steep sections of the Hill and Common where it is too dangerous and demanding for FOLK volunteers. A managed programme of controlling gorse remains an important part of our ongoing work to preserve and improve the limestone grassland. So it is good news that, once again, we are able to bring contractors in to undertake clearance on these very challenging slopes.

Management plan

The specialist who has been contracted to prepare a practical and flexible plan for the management of the site has made good progress in recent months. So it is expected that a first draft of the plan will be ready later this summer. After this draft has been considered and commented on by all the relevant parties, including FOLK and Natural England, the consultant will then be able to progress the plan. Once it has been finalised, everyone concerned with the ecology, geology and history of the Hill and Common will have a much clearer idea about what to do, when to do it, and how to evaluate the impact of the work.

The Drystone Cotswold Wall



On the memorial wall, contractors have now added this year's allocation of plaques. Eight in total have been added to the flat stones embedded in the wall and to a second bench which has been placed there. After costs, every penny of the families' fees for their plaques will be set aside specifically for improvement work on the Hill and Common.

Elsewhere, the Wardens have added two more of the special carvings of the four iconic towers found along the length of the Cotswold Way. They are all the creation of amateur stone carver John Shaw. The fourth and last will be built into the wall before too long. Somerset Monument, Hawkesbury Upton, is one of the latest installations (pictured right).



The Cotswold Wardens are nearing the end of this phase of the project. What remains is the task of completing the re-build of the short stretch between the memorial wall and the earlier length which runs all the way up from Hartley Lane.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Information Boards

Thanks to a grant from the "Removing Barriers" fund - managed locally by the board of Cotswolds National Landscape - we will soon see two new and updated interpretation boards on the Hill. These will include information about the Hill and Common, and also set out recent improvements to the accessibility of some of the footpaths.

FOLK at CHARLTON KINGS SUMMER FAYRE

It has become a bit of a tradition for FOLK to support Charlton Kings Parish Council summer fayre, with a gazebo and the FOLK display panels. This year we decided to have a more focused theme for the display. I chose the improvements to the access to the commons by the resurfacing of a number of footpaths including the Cotswold Way.

We explained that the numbers of the public using the commons during and after lockdown had increased considerably and this had resulted in unsafe conditions to some of the main footpaths. The footpath work was mainly funded with grants from National Grid and Cotswold National Landscapes



Our stand also featured improved access for members of the public with less mobility. The display included pictures of the places where gates have been removed and some tramper mobility scooters being used on the commons.

On the day, the weather was not kind, with heavy rain showers when we were setting up and more throughout the day. However there were some sunny periods. Although the footfall was not as high as we would have liked, we had good feedback and support for FOLK activities and the work on the footpaths. We made some useful contacts and a number of people showed interest in becoming members of FOLK.

Report by Mike Donnelly, FOLK Chair

SUCCESS FOR FOLK IN GRANT APPLICATIONS

We are very pleased to confirm that we have been successful in our application for a Build Back Better grant from Gloucestershire County Council.

These funds are for FOLK's core running costs, including our insurance premium and the maintenance of our mechanical equipment.

On behalf of the FOLK committee, I would like to register our thanks to Councillor Angie Boyes a Cheltenham Borough Council representative on the FOLK Committee, for drawing our attention to this grant opportunity, and to County Councillors Emma Nelson and Matt Babbage for approving and processing the grant application.

Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council have recently approved a FOLK grant application. This grant will enable us to pay for training courses for our work party volunteers. Our thanks go to the parish council clerk Arlene Deane for her support and guidance with the grant application.

FOLK QUIZ NIGHT

Pete Niblett, Work Party Coordinator

On 22 March, I hosted a General Knowledge Quiz at the Wheatsheaf. A dozen teams took part and it was an enjoyable and competitive evening. As this was a FOLK quiz, one round of questions was all about Leckhampton, whilst a second concerned events that occurred in the year 2000 - the year FOLK was formed!

The evening raised nearly £300 for FOLK. Thanks should go to the proprietor of the Wheatsheaf who not only waived the usual charge for the function room but also donated a raffle prize. Thanks also go to Rick and Marina for helping me run the quiz. I might be persuaded to organise another quiz in the autumn.

INTRODUCING OUR NEW GRAZIERS

Eddie and Emma Llewellyn live and work on a ten-acre farm just outside Stroud – with breathtaking views across a glorious Cotswold valley. First-time farmers, they are totally committed to running their farm in a way which respects and supports nature. It is this commitment which led to them taking over the conservation grazing on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. Individually, though, they came to rural life - and conservation grazing - from very different start points.



Eddie has a background in graphic design, sculpture and carpentry and ran a successful carpentry business in London for more than ten years. Eventually, though, he longed for a life away from the hustle and bustle of city life. While planning to continue his core timber and carpentry business, he also wanted to get involved in farming livestock, and specifically in a way which was good both for the animals and for nature.

Emma has a background in international development and spent a good deal of time in South America. There she was profoundly influenced by peoples who lived on the land and met their needs for essential commodities – food, fabric and timber – from sustainable sources all within a short distance from their homes. She has now become actively involved in the *Fibreshed* movement to promote and expand the use of home-grown fibres in British fashion. This is not only helps improve the carbon footprint of our fashion industry by reducing the amount of imported fibres, but also offers farmers another income stream on top of that already gained directly from food production.

So five years ago they moved to Gloucestershire and bought Wades Farm. It had been a dairy farm for years, but by the time the then widowed farmer died, it had become quite run down.

When the farm was sold it was split into four lots – giving Eddie and Emma ten acres and a farmhouse (pictured right) - an ideal sized farm on which to start their new life in the country. The farmhouse itself needed a good deal of attention, and Eddie has also built a large timber-framed workshop. Here he can mill timber and process timber (mainly oak) from around the county, but particularly from the Forest of Dean. He supplies timber to local carpenters, as well as using it for his own commissions and renovation work on the farm. He also sells firewood.



In 2020, just two years after moving to Wades Farm, they bought their first cattle, three Belted Galloway steers, from a highly respected herd in Wiltshire. Galloways are a small, resilient breed known to thrive in wild grassland on difficult terrain, making them ideal for sites like our Hill and Common, and are also regularly seen on Crickley Hill.

In 2021 Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) approached Eddie with a view to using conservation grazing on a small plot of land they own on Swift's Hill. This was their first conservation grazing contract. The impact of this grazing was evaluated jointly by the Land Manager for GWT and by a local member of the Royal Entomological Society. Both were full of praise for the benefits which had flowed from the regime. Dead sward had gone, low nutrient tussocky grass had been refreshed, and long-stifled plants like native orchids were once again flourishing. By developing a schedule which rotates the grazing between three sites – Wades Farm, Swift's Hill and a nearby orchard – Eddie ensures that the cattle always live on good pasture and, season by season, nature can not only survive but visibly recover.

Eddie and Emma came to know our previous graziers, James and Katie Allen, through connections both with conservation grazing and home-grown fibres for fashion. So Eddie took the opportunity to join a group visit to Leckhampton Hill where James was explaining NoFence technology: the GPS-based equipment which electronically sets and monitors specific grazing areas on large open sites.

Adopting NoFence grazing was an obvious for Eddie and Emma as the cost of renewing and maintaining fencing at Wades Farm would have been prohibitive.

By 2023 Eddie was keen to grow their conservation grazing business, but needed more land in order to support a larger herd. So he was in a prime position to tender for the grazing contract on the Hill and Common when James and Katie Allen moved to Wiltshire.

The feasibility of this venture, like his work with GWT, relies heavily on the contribution of the “Cattle Spotters”. These enthusiastic volunteers have been specially trained to check on the location and wellbeing of the herd. As a team, they ensure that one of them visits the herd every day, feeding any important information straight back to Eddie via a dedicated WhatsApp group. FOLK, Cheltenham Borough Council and Eddie himself remain hugely grateful for the contribution these dedicated volunteers make to the conservation of our site.

In every way, Eddie and Emma are a perfect fit for Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. They are a remarkable couple: principled, knowledgeable, skilled and totally committed to conservation, nature recovery and high standards of animal welfare. We look forward to seeing their business thrive and fully expect the health of our precious grassland to go from strength to strength.

BEEF SALES

Eddie and Emma sell their beef direct to customers, which goes some way to meeting the costs of keeping the cattle. The beef is slow grown and pasture-fed, and the animals do not require any antibiotics or medication throughout their life due to the varied diet they have from browsing good pastures. The couple use a small family run abattoir called Broomhalls in Eastington, as well as Jesse Smith butchers in Cirencester where their meat is aged in a Himalayan salt chamber for up to thirty days.

The beef is available by collection from Wades Farm in Stroud or Eddie can bring it to Leckhampton on one of his many visits.

Contact details are available at their website www.wadesfarm.co.uk which they're trying to find the time to build.

There is a lot more info on their **wadesconservationgrazing** Instagram page. Click the link below or paste it into your browser.

https://www.instagram.com/wadesconservationgrazing?igsh=bnc0YXltaDMyMXVy&utm_source=qr

GOOD NEWS FOR DISABLED WALKERS

On behalf of disabled ramblers, Cotswold National Landscape (CNL) has commissioned a series of videos highlighting and describing easier access to sites throughout the Cotswolds.

The project is supported by the board of CNL, which provided the specialised camera and the hire of the tramper (an all-terrain mobility scooter).



A typical tramper

One of the featured routes is the new accessible pathway around the top of Leckhampton Hill, filmed by local resident John Shaw. The video shows John's progress along the way, starting at Quarry car park on Hartley Lane and joining the footpath via the long ramp which was created last year. From here, John covers around 700m of the Cotswold Way, initially travelling up by the recently rebuilt Cotswold drystone wall. Before long, this offers him the kind of stunning views which would have been all but inaccessible for him a couple of years ago.

The benefits of the tramper he is using become immediately obvious when John heads off the resurfaced path and across rough ground to chat with a group of the Cotswold Wardens who are working on the rebuilding of the wall. After stopping at the memorial wall, John continues upwards to the open grassland which leads towards the newly restored topograph, before heading to the ramparts which protected the prehistoric hill fort.

The route runs past fenced pasture at the top of the Hill and then onto the path which runs across the top of Charlton Kings Common. It is only at this stage that there are a few gates on the route as it passes through pastures which are fenced to contain the cattle.

The route re-joins Hartley Lane, passing through Hartley Farm before turning onto the track which leads to the end of the accessible footpath at Brownstones car park. From here walkers using wheelchairs can follow Hartley Lane back down to Quarry car park.

To view John's video – and to get a sense of the huge benefits this accessible route brings for disabled walkers – click this link <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cI9DL7YGKKc>

CHARLTON KINGS COMMON WILDLIFE WALK

Peter Whalley, Membership Secretary

Friday May 17th saw a small group of FOLK members gather on Daisy Bank Road, in the welcome sunshine, to embark on a walk of discovery of the variety of often overlooked animal and plant life on our doorstep.



Mark Dowie, the FOLK Treasurer and multi-disciplined natural history enthusiast organised and led a fascinating and enjoyable meander along the lower reaches of Charlton Kings Common. Mark introduced the walk by describing the overall ecological features of the dry, unimproved Limestone Grassland that makes Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common a rare and valuable habitat.

After the obligatory Health and Safety briefing, without further ado, Mark had us plunging into the shadows of the trees and scrub to discover our first orchids, two species of Helleborine. We learned about the specialist ecology of our native orchids and their unique relationships with the unseen soil fungal community.

Re-emerging into the sunshine we walked eastwards along Daisy Bank Road and switched our attention to the “sound landscape” to spot the songs of several bird species around us, including the Willow Warbler and Tree Pipit, which is a notable summer visitor. Participants had brought along binoculars but the small brown birds were as ever somewhat difficult to spot.

While we walked there was animated conversation amongst the group as questions were posed to Mark and John Harvey, about orchids, birds, wildflowers and other species. Early Purple Orchids were spotted, which prompted Mark to give a brief master class on the anatomy of orchid flowers aided by the use of a hand lens to facilitate the up close and personal contact of the walkers with the flowers.



The highlight of the walk was the inspection of an area near the “Gallops” on the Common where Mark gave us the opportunity to spot two nationally rare species. First, a Duke of Burgundy butterfly (left). This was an exciting discovery for the party as it is a butterfly for which FOLK has done a range of work to help rebuild its nationally endangered population.

We also sighted several Fly Orchids (right), which are also rare, as well as the very attractive Green Hairstreak butterfly. The presence of these beautiful and rare specimens highlights the need to conserve and improve the limestone grassland habitat, which is a big part of the *raison d’être* of FOLK.



Our Wildlife Walk passed some veteran Ash trees, described by John Harvey as the walk reached its endpoint by neighbouring Lilley Brook Golf Club. This is part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is an area where FOLK is hoping to collaborate with the Golf Club in its management.

The walkers then made their way back to base, grateful that Mark had given them a fresh insight into the very special nature of the site: its biodiversity and its huge value to all Cheltenham residents.

[On their way, the group saw or heard a huge variety of wildlife species,](#) some of which are rare or notable. In addition to the ones described above, they were also lucky enough to come across the Tree Pipit, the Early Purple Orchid and the White Helleborine.

[A full list of all the species encountered can be found by clicking the link on the covering email.](#)

LECKHAMPTON THROUGH THE AGES

Alan Booth (FOLK member)

Pre-history

Neolithic Man, his son by his side,
Looked out to the west from this lofty hillside.
Eyes to the sunset, the sky aflame
Distant hills with as yet, no name.
Now after millennia the same awe rings true,
Delights our senses, such a glorious view.

18th and 19th centuries

Loud hammers and chisels to cut the stone blocks
Crank up the crane to load the rough rocks
By tramroad and wagon to stone yards below
A dangerous descent, careful and slow
To build Cheltenham's churches and schools in the town
Fine stone for carving, for headstones renown

1922 – 1927

Former soldiers, home from the War,
Labourled each day, hands aching, feet sore
Constructing the Incline for John Henry Dale
To haul up large wagons, by standard gauge rail
Install mighty Lime Kilns, near Dead Man's Quarry
Dale didn't yet know it, for t'was major folly.

Today

The Cotswold Way crosses Leckhampton's tops
Long distance walkers make welcome stops
To savour the landscape, to gaze at the sky
To listen to skylarks singing on high.

Happy locals out with their dogs
Mostly respectful, some sadly not.
Areas of debris despoil the dear land
FOLK volunteers remove it by hand.

Cyclists, Horse Riders, Gliders and Runners
Delight in our Hill, enjoy the fine summers.
Blessed are we who enjoy such a treasure.
Ensure that our young ones will share it with pleasure.



IN THE NEWS

Ancient tree rings show 2023 to be the hottest summer in 2000 years

Climate scientists have been demonstrating evidence of global warming for some years now – and noting the rapid rise in temperatures seen in recent decades. They have found this in records of indicators such as ice cores and deep sea sediments. These features of our planet provide crucial data, but cannot offer evidence about specific years or even particular decades.

Now research by the University of Cambridge into ancient tree rings in the northern hemisphere has shed new light on the trajectory of global warming. This is because tree rings not only show a tree's age, but also provide quite detailed information about the climate in each year of the tree's life.

The scientists studied samples from thousands of trees in the European Alps and the Russian Altai mountains, areas in which tree rings in warmer years are demonstrably wider than in cooler ones. They looked at tree rings in dead trees, living trees and even fossilised trees, gradually building up a picture of summer temperatures spanning the last two millennia.

What emerged was clear evidence of both the general pattern of global warming but also the variabilities seen over two thousand years. Examples of the conclusion drawn from all this data are startling:

- Temperatures seen last summer (June, July & August) were nearly 4°C warmer than the coldest summer in 536AD/CE.
- The summer of 2023 was 2.07°C warmer than the “pre-industrial” summer of 1850.
- Even the warmest pre-industrial summer (246AD/CE) was nowhere near as warm as 2023.
- After allowing for some large uncertainties, the researchers say with confidence that last summer surpassed normal climate variability by at least 0.5°C

VISIT TO THE HILL BY LOCAL CABINET MEMBER

The crucial role of conservation grazing in the overall management of the Hill and Common has drawn the attention of Cheltenham Borough Council's Cabinet member for waste, recycling and the public realm, Izaak Tailford. Recently he visited our site with Senior Ranger Wayne Sedgwick and was introduced to our grazier Eddie Llewellyn. This gave him a great opportunity to learn about the cattle themselves, the NoFence technology Eddie uses, and how the grazing regime fits into our collective efforts to look after the site and help nature not just survive but flourish.

To view a short film about this visit, please click on this link:

<https://youtu.be/uQ9-EvYXdVI>

FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

Pete Niblett, FOLK Work Party Coordinator

As some of you may know Geoff Holt stood down as Work Party Coordinator at the end of March after nearly ten years in the role. Geoff did a magnificent job and will be a hard act to follow. I have now taken on the overall role of coordinating our programme of work parties, but I am very grateful that a number of FOLK volunteers have stepped forward to help form a wider leadership group.

There is now a team of six who will share Work Party Leader duties: Tony Duffin, Julian Jones, Serena Meredith, Robert Niblett, Tim Sugrue and me. Between us we have a wide range of experience in conservation work and can each bring different skills to the group.

In addition two members, Andrew Bishop and Gareth Richards, have taken on the vital work of looking after the tools and the chemicals, respectively.

The running of our very successful work parties has always depended on people giving generously of their time. It is, after all, a team effort and I would like to thank all the work party volunteers for their support. Without their efforts we wouldn't achieve anywhere near as much as we do.

Between early March and mid-June, our volunteers took on a wide range of tasks. Readers of previous newsletters will know that part of the challenge of preserving and improving the quality of the limestone grassland on our site is the control of gorse and scrub. Most of this work is done by work party volunteers, but some slopes of the Hill and Common are so steep that contractors need to be brought in. It's a partnership. First of all, contractors do the more dangerous work of cutting down and treating the stumps of unwanted gorse. Then FOLK volunteers take on the job of gathering, chopping and burning what the contractors have cut. Given that the contractors worked on three separate areas over a number of weeks, there was an awful lot of gorse to burn!

Elsewhere on the site, our work parties cleared plenty more gorse.



Another very prickly challenge was the removal of a number of hawthorn trees from the large grassy slope above Daisy Bank Road. So much was achieved that it took the whole of the next work party session to chop and burn what had been cut.

One of the reasons for clearing gorse and scrub is to allow the native wildflowers on the Hill and Common to thrive. So on one of the work parties we were all delighted to see bee orchids (seen right) flourishing.



From spring onwards, all vegetation grows rapidly and a regular part of the work parties' programme is the task of stopping popular footpaths from becoming overgrown. This time we focused on clearing excess growth from either side of the path that runs parallel to Brownstones Quarry and leads to Judy's Ride.

There was so much to do over more than two hundred metres of footpath that it took two work parties. (See finished work below.) So we were very pleased that, on the second session, we were joined by a large and enthusiastic group from Spirax Sarco.



Another important job we do is removing excess growth from Cotswold stone boundary wall which runs across the top of Charlton Kings Common. (See before and after pictures, right)



In part this is to expose the wall, which really deserves to be seen, but more importantly it stops vegetation growing in between the stones and destabilising the fabric of the wall itself. Once again, it was a big task and took two work party sessions to complete. On another occasion we also removed spare stone and rubble in the area in front of the memorial wall.

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 few months are:

July 2024	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
August 2024	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
September 2024	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
October 2024	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
November 2024	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th

For further information you can contact Pete Niblett on 01242 235818 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

Pete Niblett, Work Parties: 01242 235818

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.