



# FOLKtalk

Issue 76  
Autumn  
2024

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

*Conserving and improving the Hill for you*



A brush-cutter is a very useful tool for tidying up the iron age ramparts surrounding the hillfort at the top of Leckhampton Hill.

This is just one of many tasks completed by our hard-working FOLK work parties in recent months.

*To find out more about what the work parties have been up to, have a look at Pete Niblett's report on page 16.*

With your copy of FOLKtalk you will have received the papers for the **FOLK AGM** which will be held on 12<sup>th</sup> November at The Wheatsheaf. We have been very lucky to book Stuart Manton to give his talk on ***The Genesis of Cheltenham South Town***. He looks at how Cheltenham South Town was created in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The area includes Bath Road, The Suffolks and Tivoli, and the connection to Leckhampton with land sales and the tramway. A talk not to be missed.



We presently have three FOLK committee vacancies. If you think you would like to be more involved, please fill in the nomination form. Also if you think you have any skills that would be useful to FOLK on a one-off project basis please get in contact.

The RCEG project funding by National Grid is in its final year and projects need to be completed by March 2025. We have recently completed another footpath improvement project at Brownstones Quarry car park. Not only does this give better access, but also it is a conservation project to protect the quarry's very valuable habitat and wild flowers by reducing the footfall in the quarry.

FOLK was formed on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2000. We will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2025. Based on this we are looking to the future by reviewing and updating FOLK's initiatives and objectives. Please support FOLK and learn more by attending the FOLK AGM.

***Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK***



View of South Town and Leckhampton districts from Leckhampton Hill c.1820

## The Genesis of Cheltenham's ‘South Town’

**Guest speaker:** Local Historian **Stuart Manton** looks at the rise and growth of Cheltenham's vibrant South Town, on the northern border of Leckhampton, during the early years of the 19th century...

### FOLK Annual General Meeting and Talk



Friends  
Of  
Leckhampton Hill &  
Charlton Kings Common

**7.00pm Tuesday 12th November 2024**  
The Wheatsheaf Function Room  
283 Old Bath Road, Leckhampton  
GL53 9AJ

**Non-members Welcome! Free Entry**

For further information about FOLK and the AGM please visit our website  
[www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk)

or contact The Secretary, Rachel Watson at [leckhamptonhill@gmail.com](mailto:leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

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## FOLK QUIZ NIGHT

### The next FOLK Fundraising QUIZ NIGHT

will be held at **The Wheatsheaf, Old Bath Road**  
**on Friday 22nd November 7pm for a 7.30 start**

Teams of 4 will compete at a cost of £5 per head.

Prizes will be awarded for winning teams.

***We would love to hear from anyone who is able to offer prizes.***

If you want to take part but do not have a team of four, please just turn up and we will make up more teams on the night.

To book in your team, or to offer a prize, please email Pete Niblett on [petersniblett@gmail.com](mailto:petersniblett@gmail.com)

## 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.

#### Grazing

The new enclosure on Daisybank Field (right) has worked well. It was created with the support of a grant from a special fund: Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) and has given the six Belted Galloway steers some good grassland to graze for about six weeks.



Once local residents understood the reasons for the change to the field, they have been very supportive. Indeed, when one of the steers got its head stuck in the lower branches of a tree while trying to reach some tender leaves, one resident raised the alarm and even came out to help with the rescue. The steer was completely unharmed.

Meanwhile the three Galloway mothers and calves were originally moved onto the Reversion Field in September where they could graze safely as the young calves grew and gradually learned to feed more independently.

Now that the wildflower season is over the whole herd has been brought together back on the main site. Here they will graze the Hill and Common hard between now and about the end of March. The exact timing of their removal from the main

site will be governed by two factors: the amount of grass left for them to graze and the start of the emergence of wildflowers.

While the cattle are up on this main site, the grazier Eddie Llewellyn controls the areas which the cattle occupy with NoFence technology. This uses GPS settings to establish invisible electronic fences which keep the herd in the area of the grassland where grazing is being targeted. Only the adults have had the electronic collars up to now, but the calves have now been fitted with them too.

In the meantime, land management continues elsewhere. A tractor flail is currently being used to go over the various winter pastures, which takes down anything which the cattle did not eat and helps prepare the area for new grass growth in the Spring.

### **Footpath improvement**

Two important projects have been undertaken by specialist contractors. Firstly there has been further work on the area by the gate between Bridge Car Park and the Main Incline.

For years this has been plagued by run-off of water flooding a dip and causing deep water and mud to hinder access to the Hill.

In the first phase additional stone was brought in to raise the ground level so that water would run directly into the large drainpipe that takes it away under Daisybank Road. As this settled, a further 20 tons of stone has now been added and compacted.

One advantage of the very wet weather we have endured lately has been that there have been plenty of opportunities to test out the effectiveness of the latest works and all appears to be working well. The contractors also re-surfaced the short length of path by the pedestrian gate. This is a very popular point for walkers to enter the site and hopefully they will now be able to enjoy trouble-free use of the gate.



Newly resurfaced path to side gate

The second and even larger project has been the completion of the final leg of the accessible footpath from Charlton Kings Common to Brownstones Car Park.



It involved two stages. Firstly the contractors built a new loop of accessible footpath (seen left) which leads walkers directly from the car park to the short length of existing public footpath that heads north-east through the trees.

The second phase was to resurface that footpath up to the point where it meets the already re-surfaced Judy's Ride which, in turn, leads to the top of Charlton Kings Common. The image on the right shows the new path coming in from the left and joining the newly re-surfaced footpath which heads off through the woods.



Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common provide a wonderful outdoor space for our town of 120,000 or more residents, many of whom have some degree of impaired mobility. So it is great to know that there is now a continuous footpath which can take all-terrain wheelchairs around a 1km, 2km or 3km route depending on the user's choice on the day. All of the loops take in some of the best sites and views, and brings users to a car park at each end. A new information panel is being developed to show the new accessible routes.

## Limekilns

Specialist contractors have been busy helping to preserve the Limekilns. The current phase of work includes re-pointing the base of the former kiln towers.



This base (seen left) is continually being eroded by weather and by water running off the slope above. As well as making the limekilns more durable this work certainly gives us a better idea of what they originally looked like. The contractor has also applied a concrete cap to try to prevent water ingress from above.

### **Making Daisybank Car Park safer**

One issue of concern has been the use of all-terrain electric and dirt motorcycles close to the car park. Riding these motorbikes is not allowed on site or on the road. Sadly, though, a few irresponsible riders have been speeding down the final slope and emerging from the woods and into the car park in a way which puts other users of the car park at obvious risk. So contractors have placed a series of very heavy tree trunks across the path above the car park to create a ziz-zag route with bends too tight for the turning circle of the motorbikes.



### **Cotswold Stone Wall**

The volunteers from the Cotswold Wardens have finally completed the rebuilding of the long length of wall which runs up from Hartley Lane to the new memorial wall. In this phase, the re-building will continue for a short distance beyond the memorial wall.

This has been a magnificent piece of work. It was started as a special project by the Cotswold Wardens in 2018 as part of their fiftieth anniversary celebrations. The work has been led throughout by the remarkable John Heathcote who has recently celebrated his 90th birthday!

### **Landscape improvement**

Three other important tasks have been contracted out. Firstly, **gorse**. The work of clearing the last of the gorse on some of the steepest slopes of the Hill will get under way this month. No doubt, as before, the contractors will work high up on



the slopes cutting and treating the gorse, while FOLK work party volunteers clear and burn the cuttings. While on site, the contractors will also re-treat any of the gorse they cut earlier but which is now showing signs of regrowth.

Secondly **scrub clearance**. Contractors will help clear dense scrub which has built up and narrowed some important routes across the site, including those used by horse riders and mountain bike riders, as well as by the many walkers who enjoy the site.

The third area of work concerns **veteran trees**. We have five veteran oaks already on the site. Now, tree specialists will undertake some techniques which will help three younger mature trees to enter the veteran stage. This includes measures to encourage them to move into a kind of self-protection mode where veteran trees naturally reduce their canopies to help maintain stability and ensure longevity.

### **Adder conservation**

We are making good progress on a joint project with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to help the local population of adders to thrive. This two-year project will come to an end next Spring.

The Adder was identified as one of the country's most endangered species in the national *Back from the Brink* project. That programme ran between 2017 and 2021, and was an ambitious nationwide partnership initiative that aimed to save some of our most threatened species from extinction and put them back on the road to recovery. On our site the existing populations of the Adder and the Duke of Burgundy butterfly were targeted for action.

The Hill and Common has been identified as a key local site for Adders where there is a good population. In some suitable places "Adder mats" have been installed. These provide them with a warm place for basking and a ready shelter for protection. In the next phase of work, some scrub and end-of-life trees will be cleared to create a new Adder-friendly zone not far from the hillfort. The Council's tree officer has approved this work and its impact will be monitored by the Rangers and volunteers.

## OTHER PROJECTS

### Information Boards

A key goal of our work on this site is to improve the landscape for people. This has driven a number of the projects, and a vital part of this strand of work is to help people understand the landscape they are visiting.

Thanks to an award of funding from **Cotswold National Landscape** (formerly AONB) through their fund called *Removing Barriers 24/25* we will be able to create new boards showing the recently completed accessible routes around the Hill and Common.

### Youth engagement

Our very good relationship with High School Leckhampton continues and another group of 25-30 students is due to visit the Hill soon. They will be shown around the site and also have the chance to do some practical land management work. In a separate project, Bournside School is planning to bring its entire new Year 7 intake up onto the Hill shortly. The students will come in groups over a three day period and will be introduced to the site. In particular the students learn about its wildlife and its history as well as developing their understanding of nature's resilience and the sort of steps we can take to help conservation and recovery.

### BEEF SALES

Graziers 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](http://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](https://www.instagram.com/wadesconservationgrazing?igsh=bnc0YXltaDMYMXVy&utm_source=qr)

# FOLK Annual General Meeting 2024

**Notice is hereby given of the 25th Annual General Meeting of The Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) to be held at 'The Wheatsheaf', Old Bath Road, Leckhampton 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024.**

## **AGM PAPERS**

The papers for this meeting (Agenda, Minutes of 2023 AGM, Annual Report and Accounts) can be accessed from the e-mail that accompanies this newsletter.

If you still receive your newsletter in paper form, AGM papers will be enclosed with that document.

## **COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS**

An up-to-date paper showing the names of individuals sitting on FOLK's Executive Committee is attached with the papers.

If you are a member of FOLK, you may nominate yourself or any other member.

Acceptance of a nomination implies that the nominee agrees to act in the interests of FOLK.

Should you wish to submit a nomination, please e-mail the Secretary using the details given below **by 29th October**.

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

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

## FOLK AT PITTVILLE PARTY IN THE PARK

### *No Child Left Behind's "Summer of Play"*

In August **Party in the Park** was held at Pittville Park. The event was organized by **No Child Left Behind** and was promoted as a Summer of Play. The complete event was free of charge and attracted a large crowd.



**No Child Left Behind Cheltenham** is a project supported by the borough council that aims to help all young people to thrive. In 2018, it was highlighted that there were around 4400 children and young people in our town living in poverty. It also showed that, when compared with those from more affluent families, these children and young people, faced significant challenges.

The FOLK display stand was in the Pump Room section of the park, alongside nineteen other organisations or projects which help or enrich the lives of struggling families. There was also live entertainment on a stage outside the Pump Room and extreme sports areas in the skate park and tennis courts. At the other end of Pittville Park, in a large green area known as Aggs Garden near the Leisure Centre, the organisers set up an "Olympic Village". There the children enjoyed bouncy castles, entertainment in a big top and even free food.

FOLK's display highlighted free membership, improved access to the site, resurfaced paths and the benefit of nature walks on the hill for exercise. We did not have a large number of visitors to the stand, but the quality of conversation and depth of interest was good. As well as promoting FOLK, it was a great opportunity to introduce young people to nature conservation.

Party in the Park provided a wonderful summer's day of fun in one of our town's great parks, with a huge number of children, parents and grandparents having a very enjoyable free day out in the sunshine.

Mike Donnelly, FOLK Chair

# BUTTERFLY EMERGENCY

## THE BIG BUTTERFLY COUNT 2024

**Butterfly numbers have fallen dramatically this year** according to the findings of the 2024 Big Butterfly Count run by wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation. In fact the results are the worst in the project's history. Even more worryingly, this continues a general trend over the lifetime of the project, leading Butterfly Conservation to declare a nationwide 'Butterfly Emergency'.

Butterfly declines are also an early warning for other wildlife losses. Butterflies are key biodiversity indicators for scientists as they react very quickly to changes in their environment. As Dr Richard Fox, Head of Science at Butterfly Conservation, explained, *"Butterflies are a key indicator species; when they are in trouble we know that the wider environment is in trouble too. Nature is sounding the alarm call."*

**This annual citizen science survey began in 2010.** It takes place during a three week period in the summer, with members of the public undertaking a fifteen minute "count" recording the butterflies they see. This year's survey took place between 12 July and 4 August, with counts taking place in gardens, parks and the countryside. When analysing the results, Butterfly Conservation focuses on around twenty "target species" – the most commonly found butterflies in the UK.

**So how bad does 2024 appear to be?** Each year the scientists look at the total numbers of the twenty or so target species spotted during the survey and divide this between the total number of fifteen minute "counts" reported. That gives an average number recorded per count.

This year there were 134,000 counts and 935,000 target species sightings. ***This saw the 2024 average slump to its lowest ever figure of 7.*** That is 22% lower than the previous lowest figure of 9 recorded in 2022.

On top of that, 9,000 counts were logged as seeing zero butterflies, the highest in the citizen science programme's history. Moreover a third of the species recorded in the Big Butterfly Count have had their worst year on record, and no species had their best.

**While that sudden drop is disturbing**, it looks even worse in the context of the whole fifteen years of the survey. The first survey (2010) saw an average of 13.3 per count. Sadly, that has only been matched once in fifteen years.

Even when the impact of individual good and bad years is smoothed out by taking five-year averages, the decline is marked:

- 2010-14: average 12.9 per count
- 2015-19: average 12.1 per count
- 2020-24: average 9.6 per count

In other words during the life of the study the five-year average has fallen by a disturbing 26%.

### **Are different species faring differently?**

- In 2024 only four of the twenty one target species saw numbers increase compared with 2023.
- Of the remaining seventeen, ten species saw a fall of 40% or more.
- Winners and losers differed sharply. The Red Admiral (below left) saw the greatest fall (-82%), but the Ringlet (below right) saw the greatest rise (+85%).



**Why is all this happening?** As with all complex scientific studies, the causes of trends are complicated. In broad terms, however, Butterfly Conservation concludes that

- a combination of weather conditions in the summer and the prevalence of parasites is the most likely causes of short-term change,
- human activity - most importantly loss or degradation of butterfly friendly habitat - is the most likely cause of the long-term decline in butterfly numbers.

**Serena Meredith**, who coordinates the annual butterfly survey on the Hill and Common, has noted a similar drop in butterfly numbers spotted here this year. She also echoed Butterfly Conservation's view that some short-term differences in the survey's findings are inevitable.

Serena points out, for instance, that large fluctuations in Red Admiral numbers year by year are not unusual as this is a migrant species with only small numbers overwintering here. On the other hand The Ringlet - a common species of long grassland that is a regular garden visitor - is a species that prefers cooler damper areas and thus has not been so badly affected by the poor summer weather.

It will be fascinating to know whether there are any more similarities between this national picture and the results of our local butterfly survey on the Hill and Common once all that local data has been fully processed.

To find out more about the Big Butterfly Count 2024 follow this link

[UK Butterfly Emergency Declared | Butterfly Conservation \(butterfly-conservation.org\)](https://www.butterfly-conservation.org/uk-butterfly-emergency-declared)

# FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

**Pete Niblett, FOLK Work Party Coordinator**

As I write this article we are nearing the end of spring and summer work party tasks and are approaching the autumn/winter season.

Some of our major tasks are not necessarily seasonal, but we tend to focus on these when we are unable to do major scrub clearance which we start again in the autumn.

## **Hemp and Ragwort**

Two regular summer tasks are the removal of Hemp Agrimony and Ragwort.

We spent three work parties on the Gallops pulling Hemp Agrimony. Why? It is an invasive plant, it is unpalatable to mammals, and left unchecked it will crowd out other species. We have no intention of removing it from the Hill - it is useful to some invertebrates - but we do need to manage it. Large swathes had grown in areas cleared of gorse by contractors last autumn. Several bags worth of hemp were produced.



Following a request from Wayne, six volunteers turned out to uproot Ragwort growing in the lower section of Hopkins Field - three dumpy (one ton) bags were filled. Whilst the plant is colourful and provides a good nectar source for pollinating insects, it is toxic and palatable to animals if present in dry hay. Luckily the task was completed just in time for the farmer to be able to mow the field that same afternoon.

## **Mowing**

Three of our main annual mowing tasks were carried out and almost completed in August and September. This took three separate work parties. We were pleased





to be joined by Wayne. Excellent use was made of the new mowing machine (below) which cut through the grass so efficiently and quickly. Brush cutters were used where appropriate to cut surrounding vegetation back.

The burial mound is now clearly defined and looking good, as is the side of the Iron Age Fort ramparts nearest the mound. During the same task volunteers worked close by removing growth from either side of the Cotswold stone wall. Our volunteers who battled wind and rain were rewarded by sunshine. A return visit to the area was necessary and

saw us finishing brush cutting the ramparts and removing the remaining grass cuttings from alongside the wall. Cut grass needs to be bagged and removed because if left in situ it would rot down and kill off plants underneath.

At the same time the nearby 'Butterfly Motorway' (seen right) was tackled, again using the new mower. A large strip was mown, with grass raked up and bagged. This will help butterflies to move between patches of suitable vegetation. Again another good job completed.



The third component of the annual mowing cycle is the grassy area above Bridge Car Park. The mower and brush cutters were again in action and the volunteers worked hard in warm sunshine to rake and bag up the grass cuttings.

The area (seen right) now looks pleasing to the eye, especially with small islands of



grass left uncut to protect the remaining patches of wild flowers. A nice touch. We have booked Wayne for October to help finish this task.

## **Paths**

Path maintenance involved four separate tasks to the same area – hardly surprising given the amount of vegetation crowding the paths. We removed growth from either side of the path that runs parallel to Brownstones Car Park and leads to Judith's Ride, which we also tackled. The aim is to make public access easier, but in addition - this year - we also wanted to make it easier for the contractors to resurface the Brownstones parallel path. Access is now much improved, and our efforts were praised by the Cotswold Parish Warden for Leckhampton and Shurdington and who said Judith's Ride had never looked so good.

Finally on paths, whilst tackling the Cotswold Stone Wall below, we took the opportunity to brush cut a fair stretch of footpath that leads to Hartley Lane.

## **Cotswold Stone Wall**

Maintenance of this magnificent wall is an unending but important task. This season we made two visits to the Charlton Kings Common boundary wall. With a variety of tools, including scythes, we removed growth from the wall itself and also cleared a strip either side of the wall. The aim is not only to prevent damage caused by ivy and other vegetation, but also to allow the public to view the wall in all its glory!

## **Training**

As I mentioned in my previous article we are keen to spread knowledge and expertise across the group. To this end we organised training for some of our volunteers, partly funded by local parish councils. Two people attended a brush cutter course near Gloucester. Both found it useful and will be able to apply the skills learned on future work parties. Two volunteers have recently attended a pesticide handling course over two days plus an assessment which will lead to a qualification. And finally four of us will be attending first aid courses in September and October.

## Our Outdoor Gym

Our work party numbers have been consistent so far this year with an average of twelve volunteers per work party. It would be good though to have a few more volunteers as there is always so much to do. If you are interested do get in touch with me and see how you get on. We are a friendly bunch who enjoy light exercise and some good fresh air - and it is so much more rewarding than an ordinary gym!

**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. 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:**

October 2024	Thursday 10th	Tuesday 15th	Sunday 27th
November 2024	Thursday 14th	Tuesday 19th	Sunday 24th
December 2024	Thursday 12th	Tuesday 17th	Sunday 22nd
January 2025	Thursday 9th	Tuesday 21st	Sunday 26th
February 2025	Thursday 13th	Tuesday 18th	Sunday 23rd
March 2025	Thursday 13th	Tuesday 18th	Sunday 23rd

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](mailto: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](mailto:webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com)

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**If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article** to the next edition please contact **Martin Wood** on **01242 231230** or send an email to: [martinwood360@gmail.com](mailto:martinwood360@gmail.com). Articles of around 500 words, plus a photo if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

### Contact FOLK

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Pete Niblett, Work Parties: 01242 235818

Mark Dowie, Treasurer: 07872 336006

Peter Whalley, Membership: 07857 939072

Martin Wood, Newsletter: 01242 231230

Find the ***Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common*** on [www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) and on Facebook

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