



FOLKtalk

Issue 80
Autumn
2025

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

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



Leckhampton Hill boasts a rich variety of wildflowers and each year we harvest seeds from fields just off the main conservation site.

Here we can see FOLK volunteers sowing seeds recently harvested from our own site. This is creating a new wildflower margin in farmland just the other side of the Cotswold stone wall.

To find out more about the gathering and sowing of wildflower seeds, both here and on sites across Cheltenham, have a look at [The Word from Wayne](#) on page 4 and [Pete Niblett's Work Party report](#) on page 10.

Inside this issue

Our graziers, Eddie and Emma Llewellyn, now have their pasture-fed Galloway beef boxes for sale. See page 9 for all the details.

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FOLK Annual General Meeting and Talk 2025



Friends
Of
Leckhampton Hill &
Charlton Kings Common

7.00pm Thursday 13th November
The Wheatsheaf Function Room
283 Old Bath Road, Leckhampton
GL53 9AJ

Non-members are very Welcome! Free Entry.

GUEST TALK

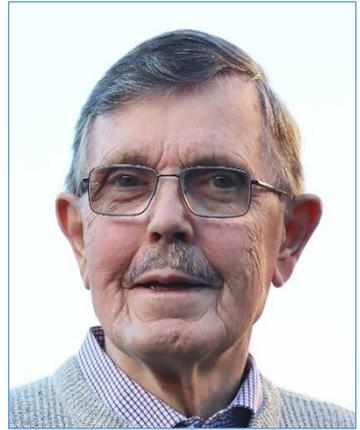
After the formal business of the AGM, there will be a presentation on
Wild Life and Management of Cleeve Common.

This will be given by our guest speaker, **Giles Alder.**
Giles is the Volunteer Co-ordinator/Reserve Manager
of Tewkesbury Nature Reserve
and
Conservation Officer of Cleeve Common Trust.

For further information about FOLK and the AGM please visit our website
www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

or contact The Secretary, Rachel Watson at leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

You will be receiving this 80th edition of Folktalk with the papers for the **FOLK AGM**, which will take place on **Thursday 13th November 2025**.



The guest speaker this year is **Giles Alder**, who is the **Conservation Officer for Cleeve Common and Reserve Manager for Tewkesbury Nature Reserve**. The title of his talk is ***Wildlife and Management of Cleeve Common***. This should be an interesting comparison for our own site and we may pick up some ideas that we can use on the Hill and Common.

On a more serious note, following our email, *Important Appeal to FOLK Members* we still need to hear from more members considering coming on to the committee. If you are concerned you do not have enough knowledge, that is not a problem; in fact, it could be an advantage as the committee always needs to be mindful of the public point of view as users of the Hill.

We look forward to another busy year focusing on conservation and education. During this academic year High School Leckhampton, will be having two conservation work parties on the Hill and with the agreement of Cheltenham Borough Council. Also, Bournside School organised team-building walks on the Hill for the new intake of 300 Year7 students over a number of days.

Thank you for your support by being a member of FOLK and taking an interest in our activities. I look forward to seeing you at the FOLK AGM.

Mike Donnelly, Chair of FOLK

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

Sharing our Wildflower Seeds

Despite the very dry summer, the pastureland just outside the SSSI has yielded a good harvest of wildflower seeds. This year I was especially pleased to see such a good crop of Devil's Bit Scabius (seen right) on the Hill.

We have developed a good working relationship with both Cotswold National Landscape (CNL) and the National Trust to gather and sow wildflower seeds. This helps us make sure that we not only maintain the "species-rich" quality of the whole site but also spread the joy and natural benefits of wildflowers more widely.



As in recent years, the fields selected for harvesting wildflower seeds are mown and then raked – a pretty labour-intensive task. All the gathered material is taken away by both the National Trust and CNL who have large barns to dry and process the seeds ready for sowing. This year we received 5 kg back from the NT and 17kg from CNL. We had to purchase a further 20kg of seeds from CNL gathered from other compatible sites throughout the Cotswolds.

On Leckhampton Hill the main area selected for sowing was a huge strip of arable farmland along the edge of the field just the other side of the stretch of Cotswold stone wall currently being re-built by the Cotswold Wardens. The farmer had prepared the soil and a special work party of six volunteers spread the seed. This strip of field margin, just 5m wide but up to 700m long, will make a marvellous sight next summer. More importantly it will provide a wildflower haven for many species, including an ideal site for our Adders to bask or shelter.

A key element of this annual harvest of wildflower seeds is to enhance our urban green spaces. So this year we have also been spreading the seed in selected areas of Queen Elizabeth Park, Sandford Park and Springbank Park. We look forward to seeing the flowers bring a welcome splash of colour next year.

Grazing

At the start of this month the whole herd of Galloway cattle moved back onto the main site. Their Nofence pasture has initially been set at the far eastern end of the conservation area and they will slowly move westward to graze across the whole site until next April. The bull which sired the calves has now been returned to Eddie and Emma's farm (Wade's Farm, near Stroud) for the winter, along with one of the cows for company. This will leave a herd of around nineteen cows and calves to graze the site.

The success of the grazing regime is dependent on our dedicated team of Cattle Spotters who take it in turn to check on the safety and welfare of the herd during each week. Although we have recruited a full team, and they are doing a great job, they do need a bit of help.

So we would like to recruit some more volunteers. This could help to spread the workload and provide some back-up for occasions when a day needs to be covered. Maybe you could offer some time once a week, or perhaps just once a fortnight? The Cattle Spotters are key, and they significantly help us to achieve the positive impact which the grazing is having on our precious limestone grassland. Eddie the grazier trains all new recruits on what to look for, and there is a WhatsApp group for spotters to report any concerns they have when they are with the herd.

If you would like to volunteer – or just find out more about the role – please email me at wayne.sedgwick@cheltenham.gov.uk.

National Nature Reserve - a big step up in the importance of our site

The Borough Council is making good progress in its application to have the site designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR). This will apply to the approximately 150 acres of the site which are already recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

NNRs were established to protect some of the country's most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Most NNRs offer great opportunities to schools, specialist interest groups and the public to experience wildlife at first hand and to learn more about nature conservation.

The basis of the application is twofold: the site's biology and its geology and, indeed, the interaction between the two. As a rare surviving area of unimproved limestone grassland it is home to a rich, and in some cases site-specific, range of wildlife, including a number of endangered species. At the same time, its history of quarrying has exposed the whole of the Lower Inferior Oolite formation in one outcrop area – a feature almost unique in the Cotswolds. The rock exposures are all classified as Nationally Important and the landslip and gravel sites as Regionally Important.

Natural England will be considering the application later this month and a final determination will be announced in February next year.

Cotswold Stone Wall

The Cotswold Wardens are making great progress with the re-building of the wall which runs up from Hartley Lane towards the Hillfort. It already stretches to almost 400m and the final load of stone funded by the National Grid grant has now been received. Fortunately, the Wardens are now working on slightly less challenging slopes than when they began the project a few years ago, but it is still hard and skilful work for which we are all very grateful.

Management Plan

Managing this large and complex site, which also has full public access, is a considerable challenge. First of all, it requires a detailed scientific and historical understanding of the site's current nature and condition. This includes its varied landscape types, its wildlife, its geology and its industrial archaeology. Then it is vital to know what needs conserving and what needs improving. Finally, those who will be undertaking land management work on the site need a clear steer about what to do and when to do it. The last management plan was issued in 2000 and a more up-to-date version is clearly needed now.

With the benefit of funding from the recent National Grid grant, the first phase of the new management plan has been delivered. This independent report gave us a detailed and comprehensive description of the site, and a broad steer as to what we need to achieve to conserve and improve its condition.

Thanks to additional funding made available for the project, we are now able to commission the next phase: the implementation plan for conserving and improving the site. This will be set out in clear terms which Council employees, specialist contractors and lay volunteers can use to plan their work. It will also

help ensure that all works are carried out sensitively and in a way which avoids or limit any collateral harm to the many and varied aspects of this complicated site.

Information Boards

The site now has the benefit of various stretches of accessible paths for those with restricted mobility. So two new information boards have recently been installed showing these routes. They have been designed by Georgie Bearder, our apprentice ranger, and we are sure they will both help encourage a wider range of visitors to enjoy the Hill and Common – and give them useful information about the site.

New Benches

Two simple new benches have been added to the site where people may rest for a while and take in the glorious views. One bears a plaque dedicating it to the many volunteers who help to manage the land, and the other is



dedicated to the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who make such a contribution to the heritage of the Hill and Common and to people’s enjoyment of and access to the site.

New Trees to be planted

The Council has applied to Natural England for permission to plant some new sapling trees near the new Adder habitat. This follows the removal of some trees (including the end-of-life larch) which stood nearby. Native species have been chosen, with three specimens each of Silver Birch, Field Maple and Rowan chosen for their hardiness and suitability for the Leckhampton environment.

The saplings will be 90-120cm tall and will have protection from any local deer that fancies a nibble. However, even hardy species like these will need nurturing in their first year or two.

So can you help? The Borough Council, working with FOLK and the Cotswold Wardens, are looking for volunteers to water the saplings until they are established enough to fend for themselves. A rolling water container will be provided nearby (and regularly refilled) to help, but we still need people to water the trees twice a week during their early life.

If you are able to volunteer some time for this, or would like to find out more, please email me on wayne.sedgwick@cheltenham.gov.uk

There are also plans in place for the planting of 150 small trees in the Reversion Field. This will provide shade for the cattle while they are grazing there during the summer months, when the herd is taken off the main conservation site.

New Communications Protocol for Projects of Public Interest

Cheltenham Borough Council has been working closely with FOLK to create a new protocol for the way communications with the public are handled for planned works on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. The development of this protocol is in an advanced stage and full details will be publicised once the wording has been finalised.

OUR LOCAL GRAZIERS' BEEF BOXES

Dear FOLK Members,

We are now opening pre-orders for possibly our last beef boxes of the year, which are now ready for collection, either from our farm or from the Daisy Bank carpark at Leckhampton - timings TBC.

See details on the different boxes available below, and full price list of individual cuts attached. As always you are welcome to add additional cuts to any of the boxes below. ***See enclosed pricelist or click the link on FOLK's covering email.***

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for supporting us - the herd, and therefore the very special conservation sites that we help to manage - by purchasing our beef.

Beltie Box £100 / approx 6.5-7kg

Topside joint, Brisket, Diced stewing, Mince, Neck or shin (osso buco) on the bone, Minute steaks x 4, Rump steaks (10oz) x 2, Sausages x 6

Winter Warmer Box £58 / approx. 4-4.5kg

Brisket, Diced stewing, Neck or shin (osso buco) on the bone, Marrow bone (optional)

Steak Box £58 / approx. 2kg

Rump steaks (10oz) x 2, Sirloin on the bone (12oz) x 2, T-bone sharing steak

Eddie and Emma Llewlllyn

Wades Farm, Slad Road, Stroud, GL6 7JU

<https://www.wadesfarm.co.uk/>

To pre-order

Please let us know what you would like to order

by email wadesfarmhouse@gmail.com

or by text message to Emma on 07551 979197

Then (however you place your order) please transfer the right amount to:

Account name: Wades Farm

Sort code: 30-98-97 Account no. 47849262

WORK PARTY REPORT

Pete Niblett, Work Party Coordinator

Introduction

We have had a successful summer and early autumn season, often working in the heat. Attendance at work parties continues to grow and it has been great to see many new faces, including some younger volunteers who have reduced the average age of the group!

Organising and running work parties is a team effort and my thanks go to the team for their hard work and support. Equally it wouldn't be possible to achieve what we have achieved without the dedication and enthusiasm of a growing number of volunteers.

My thoughts now turn to the winter programme and gorse, gorse and yet more gorse.



Sowing wildflower seeds

However, something different: FOLK has already sown wildflower seeds on a strip of nearby farmland (seen left) and in November the plan is to plant some saplings in one of the Reversion Fields in conjunction with Cheltenham Borough Council. Watch this space.

Of course, scrub management is always essential, but being able to do something other than slashing and burning is always welcome.

Firebreaks

This has been an extremely dry season and as I write this report we haven't burned any brash for months! So all the more reason for maintaining the gaps in the firebreaks at the top of the eastern end of Charlton Kings Common (CKC).

Ironically on the morning when we were opening up two of the firebreaks, the heavens opened, accompanied by blustery winds! We ignored the downpour and carried on cutting and treating gorse regrowth, and also removing Hemp Agrimony which quickly establishes itself in areas recently cleared of scrub.

Hemp Agrimony



Hot hard work clearing Hemp Agrimony with weeding forks

A considerable effort was given to Hemp Agrimony removal during this period: five work parties, mainly above the Gallops in CKC East where the largest concentrations of the plant are found. If not dealt with Hemp would soon cover whole swathes of open grassland, overwhelming native species.

On one occasion we took the opportunity to experiment with different methods of controlling the weed. One group used weeding forks to remove the plant in its entirety. Another group used shears to cut the stems at grass level. The third group 'pulled' the plant manually, hoping to pull up the roots. Hemp has brittle stems, so this method often fails to get the roots out.

We will not see the results until next year. One conclusion that was obvious, is that the weed forks are hot, hard work. Thanks to all for their efforts we achieved more than we could have hoped for.

Mowing

The mowing season began in mid-August on the Burial Mound, with the nearby Ramparts, fence-line and Butterfly Motorway also receiving the annual treatment. With the help of the CBC Senior Ranger and the all-terrain mower, the volunteers made light work of this task. The grass cuttings are raked up and bagged and then

taken away to a nearby waste site. The end result is always pleasing as these important features are once again clearly defined.

Mowing the species-rich grassy areas above Bridge car park is another annual task. On this occasion volunteers walked in the footsteps of the CBC ranger and a FOLK volunteer – operating the all-terrain mower – with two others operating brush cutters, raking up the grass and other vegetation we had cut and dragging it to the dump sites. This action is to reduce the build-up of soil fertility as well as preventing the coarser grasses, old man's beard and other scrub species from dominating the less robust ground flora thereby keeping the area 'open' and diverse.

Mowing the Sidings

Another important task is clearing the Tramway Sidings of brash to expose the industrial archaeology of the Hill. This is rework from recent years, so the growth is not firmly established. The site has been quarried for hundreds, and possibly thousands, of years but the most recent quarrying took place for a period of about 150 years from the late 18th century to the mid-1920s. Stone was taken off the hill by the many tramways once in place on the slopes. The sidings were used to 'park-up' the tram trucks ready for the next day's load. They led to the terrifying '45 degree' incline towards the lime kilns, so steep that very few like to walk down there!



Something different!

On a warm, dry, autumn morning sandwiched between two rainy days, fifteen volunteers plus the CBC Senior Ranger turned out for a very varied session. It was a reminder that the Hill is home to a huge variety of interests, all of them attractive to someone, all of them equally valued. The varied session included work on the Sidings whilst the second involved sowing wildflower seeds.

The seeds, harvested nearby, were sown onto a field margin. While this was not within the walled area of the hill, it is owned by CBC. We had the support and co-operation of the farmer, who prepared the 5 metre wide strip prior to the sowing. This margin will provide shelter for wildlife on the sunny side of the wall, an area where they won't be disturbed by passers-by. Further work will take place on the 'Hill' side of the wall in due course. Due to the blustery winds, sowing was hard work for the volunteers. They spent the morning bent over double. They earned their cake!

Circles



Despite it being a bank holiday weekend, sixteen volunteers - a record number for a Sunday, took the advice not to travel any distance and instead lent a hand to widen the Windass path from Mountain Knoll Wood up towards the Cotswold Way at the top of Charlton Kings Common.

Large quantities of gorse and bramble were cut back and stacked in a neat circle under an oak tree (seen left).

This in turn will provide habitat for small mammals and insects as well as preventing the cattle from compacting the soil close to the tree trunk. Job well done!

Working with others

On a warm and overcast Sunday, twelve FOLK volunteers were joined by four from Gloucester Vale Conservation Volunteers (GVCV). Many groups enjoy the hill, and it's always good to share the workload. Many hands really do make light work!

This joint work party set to work pulling up Hemp Agrimony and cutting back gorse growth on the lower slopes of the gallops. The cut material was deposited at a suitable location.

On 31 July, FOLK organised an additional work party to support the Cotswold Wardens continued construction of the new stone wall in an area near the Memorial Wall. A combined force of FOLK, Wardens and CBC staff removed a line of barbed wire, dismantled part of the old wall and moved the stones nearer to the construction area. A few days earlier a small number of diseased ash trees along the old wall had been felled. The brash was used to build an adder habitat in front of the wall (seen above).



The next few months will see the return of High School Leckhampton pupils, volunteers from a local business, and another joint work party with the Cotswold Wardens on the eastern side of CKC.

And finally

One of my fellow team leaders wrote this post work party report which I think sums up the summer.

“The sun and heat brought out the crowds today! The Hill was busy with lots of people enjoying the sunshine and the ‘flaming’ June heat. The Hill put on its best to earn the admiration of these appreciative crowds.

The grasslands were a carpet of wildflowers. Common-spotted and Pyramidal orchids were glowing in the sunshine. Newly emerged Ringlet and Marbled White butterflies zoomed around looking fresh and crisp. We also spotted a Crimson Tiger and a Skipper.

“As an unskilled observer, my personal verdict is that the decision to remove the cattle from the hill in summer has paid off. Quite simply, the flowers can bloom without appearing on the bovine menu. We will welcome them back later in the year.”

And really finally (me again)

Although attendances are good, it is also nice to welcome new volunteers to ensure the continuation of our conservation work. Work parties are not daunting

and we have an experienced team of work party leaders who will provide guidance and also encourage you to take breaks - with cake - and work at your own pace!



A welcome break for the Work Party

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As you can see, there is always plenty to do. So please contact me if you would like to join one of our work parties. Do give it a go - we are a friendly group!

Work Parties are usually held on the second Thursday, third Tuesday and fourth Sunday of each month. Details of the dates and meeting points for upcoming work parties are shown on the “FOLK Work Parties” page of the FOLK website.

If we need to cancel a work party (usually because of bad weather) or change the meeting point, details will be posted on the FOLK website and sent via a Work Party WhatsApp group to existing volunteers.

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.

For further information you can contact me, Pete Niblett, on 07857 939072 and I would be happy to answer any questions. Alternatively please go to our website where you will find the ‘**FOLK Work Parties**’ page on the right hand side of the homepage, or click on this link: <https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/work-parties/>

Otherwise, just send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com and we will get back to you.

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 (Editor)** 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.