



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

FOLKtalk

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 51 Summer
2016

Welcome to the 2016 Summer FOLK newsletter. In this issue:

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Chris Ryder at the Palace

Our new Mayor and active FOLK member, Councillor Chris Ryder, has launched into a hectic year of official events and social engagements. An early highlight was taking up an invitation to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace on May 24th. Chris had invited Anne North to accompany her in recognition of all the time Anne has devoted to FOLK since its launch in 2000. The party was completed by Paul Ryder, the Mayor's consort and Mrs Cindy Lewis, representing Cheltenham in Bloom. A memorable time was had by all from Cheltenham and the weather was kind to the guests in the outdoors. Chris's words sum up the day:

"We were fortunate to see the Queen, Prince Philip, some two feet from us along with William, Kate (the Duke



Anne North, Paul Ryder, the Mayor and Cindy Lewis at the Palace.

and Duchess of Cambridge), Prince Andrew's daughters and the Duchess of Kent or it could have been the Duchess of Gloucester (I get my Duchesses mixed up). We were entertained by a lovely lady who was the Australian Ambassador's wife, informing us of her visit to Chelsea flower show with

all the poppies that had been made by various

people and organisations from across the world. She had her knitted, crochet poppy on her beautiful grey silk suit. It was a lovely afternoon, enjoying our cucumber & mint sandwiches while viewing all the styles of costumes and so many hats! The escort of Beefeaters for the Royals was a splendid colourful sight. All finished off with an ice cream served to us, before we made our way from Her Majesty's lawn, through the Palace to go home via the front of Buckingham Palace Gates. A once in a lifetime experience for us all

Introducing Angela France, poet

Following on from our introduction to Chris Ryder in the last issue of FOLKtalk, some FOLK members attended the Mayoral inauguration ceremony on May 18th in the Town Hall. As part of the celebrations, Cheltenham's Poet in Residence, Angela France, read a moving poem about the echoes of the events surrounding the struggle of local people to protect access to the Hill in the early part of the last century. Angela has kindly agreed to share with readers her deep affection for the Hill and its history.



Angela France- Cheltenham Poet in Residence

pathways on the Hill have got narrower as the trees have grown bigger and the traces of ironwork from the old tramroads around the quarries have mostly disappeared. I agree with keeping the scrub from covering the Hill but I do love the mature trees that are there.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? This is a difficult choice to make and it depends on the season. I like to look down on the autumn colour from just above the Lime Kilns. In summer I look down from the Devil's Chimney over Cheltenham, the Severn Valley and to the Malvern Hills beyond.

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? Springtime is definitely my favourite, when I go up the Hill very early in the morning to see the Roman snails as they emerge from their hibernation. I think I can recognise individuals with their own special markings. I also love the autumn with the rich colours of the beech trees and other plants.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? I have always been fascinated by the Roman snails. I understand that they can live for many years and despite their soft bodies they burrow into the ground with their heads as they find a spot to hibernate. I am also interested in the Lime Kilns, all the industrial archaeology and the stories of the people associated with that history.

When did you join FOLK? Angela has been meaning to join FOLK for some time and has now taken the plunge.

How do you (and your family) enjoy the Hill? I am Cheltenham born and bred and my mother's family have lived in Cheltenham for generations. I have been visiting the Hill for over 50 years. My parents gave me my first dog when I was 10 to keep me company on my expeditions to the Hill from Moorend Road, where we lived. With a few breaks, when life got in the way, I have enjoyed the Hill continuously and still do. I walk on the Hill often although sadly my dog Chester can't manage the climb these days.

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? As a 10 year old I remember playing on and around the lime kilns. For me they were like an Aztec temple and it was a great adventure to explore them. I also searched out the beetles and other wildlife in the grasses and lichens.

What changes have you noticed over the years? The Lime

kilns have crumbled a lot in recent times and seem to have got much worse in the last 12 months. The many historic

What does membership of FOLK mean to you? We hope that Angela will enjoy joining FOLK and will no doubt enrich the group with her poetry and experiences of the Hill over many years.

What would you hope that FOLK would have achieved on the Hill by its 25th anniversary in 2025? I would like to see the Hill gently preserved. I treasure the Hill as a wild place with open access so I would not like to see it being over-managed with lots of signs and the other facilities that we see in country parks.

Angela became Cheltenham's first Poet in Residence in 2015 following an invitation from Councillor Rowena Hay and Anne Saunders the Director of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival. The role of Poet in Residence has no job description so Angela welcomes the opportunity to raise the profile of poetry in the life of the town. Poetry has been a passion since her childhood. As well as working with a charity in Gloucester and teaching poetry at the University of Gloucestershire, she has managed to study for a Master's degree and has recently been awarded a Doctorate in the subject so congratulations to Angela. She has held monthly poetry evenings at the Exmouth Arms for 10 years; she has a poetry page in the Gloucestershire Echo where she edits the work of local poets and is involved in a project to install art works in the, soon to be improved, alleyways around the Minster in the town centre.

Angela has published a number of books of her poetry. She is currently working on a book of poetry based on her lifelong love of Leckhampton Hill. It blends aspects of the history, the lives of the people who contributed to that history and the creatures, the foxes, snails and adders that give the Hill its unique character.

We wish Angela well with that venture and look forward to seeing the results. Below is one of Angela's poems telling the story of the Hill.

Aged Witness #8

I looked after my father's sheep
when he rented land on the top.
People used the paths daily, stopped
by no-one. Marketing each week,
men to work, schoolboys scuffing feet.
William Hawkes had long supplied
donkeys for those who wished to ride
up the steep paths. Some young women
thought it fun to ride up sitting
in the panniers, till the beast shied

and they took a spill. Good Fridays
travelling men came with games and stalls,
there was music and contests and all
working people took holiday,
a good break from workaday
lives. We bought our wives catchpenny
trinkets and police watched nearby
to see no damage was done. I
would climb up the skew path ready
to play my harp by middle jenny.



Enjoyment of the Hill in bygone days

Word from the Chair

Who Protects the Views?

Over the past eighteen months FOLK's Executive Committee has become aware of a number of applications advertised by council Planning Departments for building developments near the Common or the Hill. In two cases, FOLK was urged to object to these proposals, on the grounds that they posed a threat to the site. The Executive has had several discussions on the issues raised by the proposals, most recently when it explored what guidance it might draw from the 2003 Management Plan and from FOLK's Constitution. In what follows, I try to outline some of the background to the Executive's discussions. One conclusion I draw from this review is that the Executive needs more guidance from you, as members, as to what you think FOLK should do when it becomes aware of future applications.

One of the important issues that FOLK may have to decide is what we consider to be *a threat to the site*. Threats could take many forms, such as pollution by noise or effluents, facilities that might encourage undesirable forms of access such as motor bikes, the removal of the ancient trees on the boundary between the Hill and the Golf Club, or what used to be called "blots on the landscape". Usually, however, we have thought of threats as changes to the views of or from the site that are felt to be undesirable. Indeed, the Management Plan stresses both the values of the site as a visual

backdrop to Cheltenham and for the views out of the two units.



The view over Cheltenham from Charlton Kings Common

The views from the top of the Common and the Hill are impressive, indeed the Management Plan suggests that *One of the main reasons for visiting the Hill is to enjoy the magnificent views over Cheltenham, the Severn Vale and beyond to the Malvern Hills and the Brecon Beacons*. To help

ensure that visitors can take advantage of these views, one of the *Access Recommendations* in the Plan is *to maintain and improve viewpoints from the Hill over Cheltenham, Leckhampton and the wider countryside*.

The Plan also stresses the importance of views of the Common and Hill from many parts of Cheltenham, with the one of the three *Landscape Recommendations* being *To maintain the overall*

appearance of the site when viewed from Cheltenham, Leckhampton and the wider countryside. These recommendations are important, and have helped guide management over the past decade. As a result, the Common and the Hill retain the key features that make them a valued view out of the town.

Despite the weight given to views in the Plan, it could be argued that the document is not as comprehensive as it might have been. Examples of this include; the lack of reference to the views east and west along to Cotswold scarp, to Cleeve Hill and to Crickley Hill and the Severn Estuary respectively, and southwards over the parish of Coberley. Similarly, and perhaps more importantly, there is no detailed reference to nearby sites. One of these is the open land between the Common and buildings on the southern edge of Cheltenham, which is important both in views out of the Common and as part of Cheltenham's visual setting. Nor is there any reference to the valleys on either side of the site. Also, the Plan provides no guidance as to what features of the views, whether near or distant, contribute to their valued character, nor on what types of change might reduce the aesthetic appeal of the landscapes involved. The Plan makes no recommendations as to how any valued external views might be protected.

The situation with distant views is perhaps the easiest to deal with. In most cases the distances are such that any development will need to be massive to significantly alter the appearance of the landscape, although a wind or solar farm to the south might be an exception. In addition, FOLK is rarely likely to learn of proposals in advance, whilst our distance from the affected site is likely to reduce the weight given to any comments we might make.

Nearby proposals raise a different set of issues. These include the location to which the application refers and its nature. That last might include purpose, scale, design and impact on existing views or vegetation, including trees. Hypothetical examples might be: proposals for housing in the fields between Daisybank Road and the southern edge of Cheltenham; the replacement of the semi-derelict bungalows or redevelopment of existing properties along Daisybank Road; new development on the northern side of Daisybank Road near the two carparks, or further modern developments near Brownstone car park. Should FOLK have a view as to the possible threat that such proposals might pose to the views out of the site, or to the public's experience of approaching the site along Daisybank Road or Hartley Lane, and if so, should we have a policy of expressing suitable opinions to the relevant planning authority? Public appreciation of approaches to the site may be important; as one of the backgrounds to the recommendations in the Management Plan was the perceptions of consultees on the Plan had regarding the *wilderness* feel of the site and *the lack of buildings*.

The recent analysis of the Management Plan and of our Constitution seems to limit the scope of what FOLK can do. I have already noted that the Plan does not include any formal *Recommendations* for the desired appearance of adjacent land, nor for safeguarding the present appearance of such land. The Constitution appears to be similarly restrictive. The last of our five Objectives relates to cooperation with the *owners of adjacent land over matters of mutual interest*, but there is no mention in any of the Objectives to views out of the site. Similarly, in the nine powers that FOLK has none makes any reference to external views or to the protection of landscapes. It is therefore unclear to some of us whether the Executive has adequate guidance on which to make decisions on how

FOLK might respond to any proposals for building development near the Common or the Hill, or whether it has the authority to comment on such applications.

This analysis creates a second layer of decision making in which FOLK may have to become involved. If we were to decide that there is a role for FOLK in seeking to safeguard the nearby views from the Common and the Hill, and supposing that we can agree our objectives in this, then we may have to modify our Constitution so that this is a formal Objective and that we have the Powers to implement that Objective.

Various opinions are currently held by members of your Executive. These range from recognition that views out of the site are important and need to be safeguarded, through the possibility of making case by case decisions as to how to respond to individual applications, to a desire that FOLK should focus on the management of the site and not become “a lobbying organisation”. It would be very useful to us if we knew what you think.

I would be delighted to receive any comments on the issues above. Depending on responses, we may devote part of our next AGM to discussing possible ways forward.

Thank you in advance for your input. John Harvey FOLK Chairman

Magnificent Meadows Fun and Flowers on the Hill event

On Saturday June 18th the Magnificent Meadows project with the help of Cheltenham Borough and FOLK staged a family event on the Iron Age Hill fort. Attractions included a story teller, face painting, games and a bug hunt. FOLK members Peter Niblett and Tim Sugrue led a walk on the Hill and Common. Eleanor Reast from the Magnificent Meadows project said that although visitor numbers were not large all participants had an enjoyable time.



Activities at the Magnificent Meadows event

Results will be reported at the end of the summer. A scything course was held on June 19th in the arable reversion field and will be reported on in the next issue. There are no further collaborations planned before the project ends.

The Word from Wayne

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

The **Magnificent Meadows** project, which the Borough Council has been working with, is due to finish in April 2017 although it is hoped the project may be able to have its funding extended. Wildflower seeds were harvested, by the project team, last summer and were spread in the autumn on cleared ground in area 16 above the Bridge car park. There is good growth there but it remains to be seen how many wild flowers have grown.

Grazing is going well and the herd has several of the cows in calf. Natural England carried out an inspection on April 21st 2016 resulting in a favourable report by Paul Hackman of Natural England. The area of Charlton Kings Common fenced off in April to exclude the cattle to investigate the effect on vegetation and invertebrates is being monitored and results will be reported in the autumn.

There appears to have been a recent increase in the number of bikers on the Hill. Particularly near to the Daisybank car park but we still have poor links with the **biking** community.

After a recent approach to the Council from a community group who had plans to develop the buildings at **Hill Farm** as community farm, there has been no further progress so the long term use of Hill Farm is still uncertain.

A 7 year project to complete the renovation of the **dry stone wall** on the south eastern boundary of the Hill Fort nears completion with a dry stone wall course held on the 18th and 19th of June. Report and picture in the next issue of FOLKtalk.

FOLK Work Party Report Summer 2016

As reported in the last newsletter we did a lot of gorse clearance over the winter. We had a final big push on this in February before we had to stop scrub removal to avoid impacting on nesting birds. This left a large quantity of cuttings that we spent all of March burning. Gorse is very combustible, particularly when it has dried out, which can result in spectacular fires with flames leaping high into the air, so we had to be careful to ensure we didn't set fire to the Hill!

We are really pleased with our gorse clearance work which has opened up a number of areas of grassland that were being swamped by gorse. The photos below shows our last work party to burn gorse and one of the areas that is now clear of gorse.

As a lot of our work over the last few years has focused on Charlton Kings Common, which is the main open grassland area, we thought it was about time we put some effort into the Leckhampton Hill area which is dominated by woodland. One of the main tree species is ash which is a prodigious seed producer and disperser resulting in abundant ash saplings which, if left, produce dense thickets. We have therefore spent a number of work parties removing saplings, and some of the seeding trees, to re-expose the undergrowth and also some industrial archaeological features. For example, we have worked on the top of the Hill (near to the gate onto the Common at the West end of the Cotswold stone wall) which has exposed the earthworks related



Photo: Geoff Holt

Volunteers ready for action

to tramway sidings that were used in the quarrying days.

We also worked to remove ash saplings on the triangular area at the top of the Sandy Lane track. For this we were joined by some volunteers from Yorkshire Building Society on release by their company to do community work (see photo opposite). We have had a number of groups like this come and join us on work parties and they are always welcome.

As an example of the impact of ash sapling growth, and the benefit of removing them, the before and after photos overleaf show an area near Hartley Lane

that we recently worked on. We started the work here very much in the shade from the saplings and by the time we had removed them we were working in direct sunlight. Quite a dramatic change!



Photo: Geoff Holt

Ash growth being cleared



Photo: Geoff Holt

A job well done

Another job that we have done, resulting from comments from a number of people, was to install some steps on the woodland walk that runs below the Devil's Chimney. This track splits towards its southern end with one track going down to Hartley Lane and the other going up to the top of the escarpment. At this split, on the track that goes up, there was a short stretch that had an awkward camber and could be very slippery and awkward to negotiate at times. The before and after photos below show this improvement which has been appreciated by walkers.



Photo: Martin Wood



Photo: Martin Wood

Improving access and safety on a well-used path on the Hill

It is likely that over the next few months we will get on to our regular summer tasks of pulling weeds we are trying to discourage like Ragwort, Hemp Agrimony and Golden Rod. We will also be mowing and brushcutting certain areas to keep them open and under control, e.g. around the Iron-Age Hill Fort and the cleared space above Bridge Car Park, and possibly some footpath maintenance.

As has been mentioned previously, we welcome any comments from FOLK member (and other users of the Hill) on the work we have been doing or on what you think we should do in the future. We produce a six-monthly work plan twice a year (in March and September) to identify the work we intend to do. If you would like to see the current plan, and possibly comment on it, it can be found on the FOLK website at www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/work-parties/work-party-plansreports/. If you would like to send any comments to us then please use the email address given below.

As always you are welcome to join us on any of our work parties. We are a friendly mixed group of male and female members. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves. We have three FOLK work parties a month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below.

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or Mike on 01242 238790, or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

Work party dates for Summer to Winter 2016

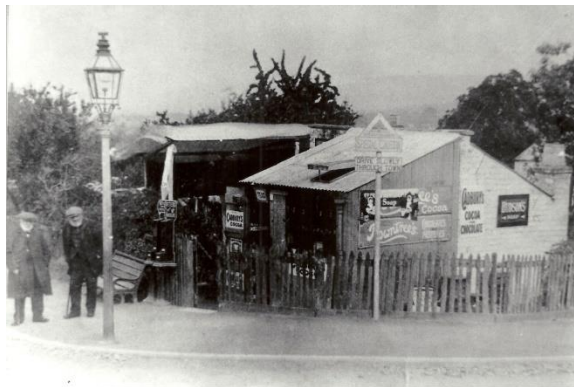
July 2016	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
August 2016	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
September 2016	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
October 2016	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
November 2016	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
December 2016	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	

SMOKE SIGNALS other news from the Hill and Common and the conservation scene.

Shop on Leckhampton Hill



Local Drama at the Hill Stores



Early days at the Hill Stores

In the last issue of FOLKtalk a call was made for information on the shop that used to be found on the approach to Leckhampton Hill. Eric Miller who is a FOLK member and local history expert has come up trumps. These are Eric's recollections: "It was the place to call in for an ice cream or a drink of 'pop' with people going to and from the Hill. Known as 'The Hill Stores', the shop was last owned by Mr and Mrs Keen about 1962-1976. It came to grief in 1973 when a coach attempting to climb the hill ran back and crashed into it and also demolished a post box. Mr Keen is shown holding the 'Cheltenham' sign. The shop closed 3 years later. The earlier photo, dated about 1900, also shows some historic advertising signs - mostly for cocoa and soap. The traffic sign gives plenty of warning - 'SPECIAL CAUTION - DRIVE SLOWLY THROUGH TOWN'. Part of the building was occupied by a cobbler, a Mr Lacey. The photos are taken from the Leckhampton Local History Society archive, and also appear in *Leckhampton in Old Photographs*.

Many thanks to Eric for this fascinating recollection. Thanks also to Sue Marlow, who has fond memories of the lovely things to be bought at the Stores and particularly the ice-cream when she was a child.

Tree planting on Leckhampton Hill

Users of the footpath along the boundary of Leckhampton Hill below the Devil's Chimney have reported the unauthorised planting of more than 200 young trees on the Borough Council land. These trees will rapidly block the path which is also a permissive bridle way. Complaints to the Council are being dealt with but may



Tree saplings planted on the Woodland Walk footpath

take some time as correct legal procedures will have to be followed before the trees can be removed.

Butterfly monitoring

Early results from the 2016 monitoring suggest that butterflies are in short supply this year. For more information, please contact me, Serena Meredith on 01242 524138 or gmeredith308@btinternet.com with butterfly

survey in the subject line.

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received. Contact:

webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com.

And finally:

Our trig point on the top of Leckhampton Hill has been visited by the paint fairy again see picture below. Does anybody know who has given it its fresh new coat of yellow paint as we would like to pass on our thanks for their efforts.



Freshly painted Trig Point on the Hill Fort

Thanks as ever to all our sponsoring organisations: Charlton Kings and Shurdington, Parish Councils from whom we have had financial support this year and the Leckhampton and Warden Hill Parish Councils who have promised to provide financial support. Cheltenham and County Cycling Club provide financial support, and Cotswold Conservation Board and a special thanks to Cheltenham Borough Council in the shape of Wayne Sedgwick who gives cheerful and enthusiastic and continuous support for which we are very grateful.

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. Annual membership is £6 per year for an individual or £9 for a family.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2013 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: norwoodpw1@gmail.com articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time would be most welcome

Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman: 01242 520053

Geoff Holt Treasurer and Working Parties: 01242 244165

Mike Donnelly Working Parties 01242 238790

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767

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