



Welcome to the first edition of the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) Newsletter. In this first issue we introduce the Friends Group and aim to keep you informed of news, events and actions as well as provide useful information on conservation, recreation, history and land management. FOLK are currently working with Cheltenham Borough Council, the owners of the land, for the benefit of residents and visitors to Cheltenham and the surrounding areas and has already established the following objectives:

- To promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of the land.
- To promote the Lands status as an SSSI, an AONB and compliance with relevant National and European legislation.
- To support the widest possible recreational use of the Land consistent with the objectives above.
- To promote public awareness and education in the objectives above.
- To liaise and consult with the owners and trustees of the Land and of adjacent land over matters of mutual interest.

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1998 a hill walk was organised to discuss the management of the hill.

During the spring of 1999 the results of a visit by Countryside Exchange Team were produced.

A meeting took place on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2000 to propose a friends group. Followed by the first meeting of the friends steering group on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

By 23<sup>rd</sup> May the second friends steering group had met and proposed the inaugural meeting that took place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2000. It was at this meeting that the interim Executive Committee was formed and the first meeting of the committee took place on 25<sup>th</sup> July.

20<sup>th</sup> August saw the first interim Executive Committee walk of the hill supported by Geoffrey Jenkins for Cheltenham Borough Council. See further information on page two.

The second committee meeting took place on 24<sup>th</sup> August.

## WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September. Join us for a guided walk over the hill and common, meeting at 2pm, or come early and bring a picnic, in Brownstone Quarry – large quarry at the top of the hill. Walks from 1 to 4 miles to suit all ages and abilities.

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September. A working party has been organised. This will probably consist of shrub clearance from grassland on the lower slopes. Please bring secateurs, loppers, gloves & safety glasses if at all possible. Details will be provided at the meeting place, Daisy Bank car park at 2 pm. Please remember, children and dogs will need to be supervised.

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> October is the deadline for nominations to stand for the Executive Committee. This is open to all members and must be presented, in writing with a brief resume, to the Secretary of the Interim Executive Committee:

Mr Jack Shepherd  
Rainbow Cottage  
Leckhampton Hill  
Cheltenham  
GL53 9QJ

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October will be the AGM of FOLK and will take place in the main hall of Leckhampton Primary School in Hall Road at 7 pm. Any members wishing to include an item for the Agenda please ensure that it is with the Secretary (above) by 25<sup>th</sup> September.

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## Contacts and Administration

The Interim Executive Committee was agreed at the inaugural meeting that took place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2000.

The purpose of this committee was to establish FOLK and take it forward to the first AGM on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

Listed below are the main contacts of the committee should any further information be required.

Chairman:

Julius Marstrand  
10 The Dell  
Blockley  
Moreton in the Marsh  
GL56 9DB

Tel: 01386 701543

Secretary:

Jack Shepherd  
Rainbow Cottage  
Leckhampton Hill  
Cheltenham  
GL53 9QJ

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John-Paul North  
Shackleton  
Daisy Bank Road  
Cheltenham  
GL53 9QQ

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Newsletter produced by:

Andy Gilbert  
212 Old Bath Road  
Cheltenham  
GL53 9EQ

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## Interim Executive Committee Guided Hill Walk 20<sup>th</sup> August

On a beautiful warm August afternoon the group set off from the car park next to Tramway Cottage in Daisy Bank Road.

The first place visited was the "tobogganing field" below Daisy Bank Road. The boundaries and rights of way were pointed out. This is essentially an open area of grassland and scrub. It has rather different flora and fauna to the rest of the hill and is an important area for warblers, white throats, kestrels, butterflies and some orchids. The Roman Snails have crossed the road and now colonise this area. Opinions on the management of the field were expressed. While it was agreed that the thistles needed cutting and the ragwort needed pulling, other ideas varied (something which was to occur several times throughout the afternoon) from grazing to stopping the brambles expanding and allowing layered heights of vegetation from short sward through longer herbage to bushes and larger trees, to encourage more diverse habitats.

Walking up the main pathway to "the kilns" we passed the area of concrete laid 20 years ago to prevent water erosion. The history of the kilns was explained and we saw remains of the ruins and tramways, ravens and redstarts inhabit this area. The area is an SSSI for both the Cotswold limestone grassland and geology. RIGS – Regional Institute for Geological Services would be interested in clearing a face to show how the Jurassic limestone was set down approx. 200 million years ago.

The top of the hill by Salterly Quarry is well managed by the rabbits; they have been fenced away from neighbouring farmland, areas of short sward with higher growth around the fence line. Bee orchids can be found here in April / May.

A local farmer takes a hay crop from the area of the Iron Age fort. English Heritage, that oversee the management of this area, would like the trees removed to stop any of the archaeology being damaged by the roots. It was excavated in 1948. Ash seedlings need clearing from around the Devils Chimney by professionals with ropes.

County Archaeology has pledged money for clearing the tumulus just outside the hill fort. The gorse growth needs clearing about every 4 years on a rotational basis.

The grassland on the top Charlton Kings Common needs clearing of gorse and brambles, possibly with the idea of cutting it for hay. Grazing strips of the steeper slopes was suggested. We saw buzzards from this point soaring high above us.

On the pathway above the top of Sandy Lane were deeply grooved tracks made by carts or sledges used to remove the stone from the earliest quarrying. Near this site we saw fellwort, two types of blue butterflies – Common Blue and Chalk Hill Blue and many Roman snails. Then along Daisy Bank Road to the car park and the end of the tour.

There were many ideas on management problems, which will have to be reconciled. English Nature have produced a site management statement which is updated annually, usually in February.

A very successful walk to see Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common at one of the most pleasant times of the year.

Judy Frazer-Holland.

# Introduction to FOLK's plans for Conservation and Recreation

The Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common are committed to promoting the sustainable balance between conservation and recreation through involvement of interested parties, education, information and the involvement of all users of the site.

This will be a regular feature in this newsletter, which will develop with input from a range of sources as FOLK itself develops. Input is welcomed from all sources and any article or information that any members wish to submit should be forwarded to Andy Gilbert (see contacts) preferably in electronic format. Whilst every effort will be made to include as much information as possible, time and space constraints may have an impact. So please be patient!

Countryside Planning and Management, under contract to English Nature, produced a Site Management Statement in February 1999 for Cheltenham Borough Council, the site owners. This will form the basis for FOLK to formulate a Site Management Plan in conjunction with Cheltenham Borough Council. It is proposed that this plan will be a long-term plan to support, wherever possible, all interest groups. This will involve many debates and possibly some heated discussion but we believe if we get the balance right then some real progress can be made.

The site can be split into 4 main areas; each with special and quite individual interests and it is hoped that we can build on information for each of these areas in future issues of FOLK Newsletter.

- Grassland – many options have been put forward to maintain this with grazing offering the ideal solution, but this comes with many added complication.
- Scrub – in a managed form this can be an ideal habitat for many birds and animals etc. However if left untouched, as is already happening, the grasslands will rapidly disappear.
- Woodland – this has increased over the years and many options have been put forward as to what should remain and what should be removed.
- Cliffs and Quarries – there is considerable interest here not only from a nature conservation viewpoint but also from industrial archaeologists.

In order to come up with a workable Site Management Plan input is required from all interested parties, but particularly from all FOLK members. The next AGM on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2000 will be an opportunity to discuss and air some views but time will limit any major discussions. The current committee members, some of whom are listed on the contacts page, would welcome any input.

Andy Gilbert

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## General Membership Information

It is important that we attract as many members of FOLK as possible and particularly from varied interest groups. The Interim Executive Committee will be producing some flyers for a recruitment campaign in the near future but we would ask all members to do their bit towards recruitment. This can, and should, be extended to other interest groups that may wish to become more involved in working together with FOLK.

Please remember that voting at the AGM will be limited to members, so now is the time to join. Membership cards will be issued prior to the AGM.

Future editions of this newsletter will contain a letters page to allow a forum for all members. These should be addressed to:

Andy Gilbert, 212 Old Bath Road, Cheltenham  
GL53 9EQ. Tel: 01242 527135

## An introduction to the History of Leckhampton Hill

It is possible that various historians will contest some of the items contained in this section. If this is the case it will help to stimulate further input, which is welcomed by FOLK as this section will develop over future issues of the FOLK Newsletter.

It is very difficult to know where to begin with such a subject. Do we start during the Jurassic age or maybe a few million years later in the Iron Age? Most visitors will have seen some fossils whilst visiting the hill and many may know about the Iron Age fort at the top behind the Devils Chimney. However the more recent history is well documented and probably of greater interest when linking into some the reasons behind the formation of the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. The idea behind this feature is to give a very brief overview of the history and how it has impacted on the hill, as we know it today.

Quarrying has probably had the biggest impact and although it is not clear when this actually started, there are records from the early 1600's referring to Mr Norwood and his use of the stone. The earliest quarries are believed to be below and alongside the Devils Chimney and along towards Salterly Grange.

When Henry Norwood died in 1797, his estate including Leckhampton Court passed to his cousin Charles Brandon Trye. This was a few years after the visit of King George III to Cheltenham, which began a remarkable increase in the population of Cheltenham. This increase prompted the need for building stone and limestone for the manufacture of lime and mortar. This led to the increase in quarrying and the development of tramways to convey the stone to the town and beyond with the development of the Gloucester & Cheltenham Tramroad. The earliest known tramway on the hill itself is believed to have started near the Iron Age fort and its route led to the formation of the Devils Chimney. Quarrying continued and developed for many years under the Tryes, but the change of ownership of the quarries to a man by the name of Henry Dale created one of the most interesting periods of local history. In 1894 he refused to admit to any rights of way over the hill. This was not well received by the people of Cheltenham who used the hill for all manner of recreational purposes to a much greater extent than today.

In 1897 Dale built a house, Tramway Cottage on an old gravel pit that had been used as a recreational centre by local people. The cottage destroyed the site and almost blocked the main footpath to the hill. This was followed two years later by fencing off further sections of the hill. Many attempts were made by a number of prominent local people to resolve these contentious issues, but the lack of progress led to a crowd assembling on the hill in 1902 and partially destroying a number of the fences. The ringleaders of the crowd later appeared in court charged with obstructing the police and became known as the Leckhampton Stalwarts. Rather than prevent any further action this only prompted further unrest resulting in the demolition of Tramway Cottage. Long court cases followed and whilst no resolution followed swiftly, hostilities gradually faded away and eventually the hill was purchased by the Town Council for the sum of £6,500. The mayor officially opened the hill in September 1929. However this was not before the vast expansion of quarrying that took place after the First World War.

In 1921 the Leckhampton Quarries Company, under new management put plans together for a link to the Great Western Railway in Charlton Kings with the idea of forming a standard gauge incline from the, soon to be erected, lime kilns direct to the main railway. Cheap loans were available at that time to stimulate the economy after the war and work started in 1922. All works were completed by 1924 including the erection of the lime kilns and two road crossings in Sandy Lane and Daisy Bank Road. Considerably more was spent on the project than first anticipated and the Treasury provided a further advance of £50,000. However by October 1925 the company lapsed into bankruptcy and in November 1926 quarrying ceased completely.

In September 1927 the mayor, Alderman C H Margett made an address to the Town Council stating:

**"We shall acquire not only valuable property but we shall maintain for the public the right to roam over Leckhampton Hill. We shall be handing to posterity a large open space which can be visited by any and every inhabitant of this town"**

As Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common we are here to support these words spoken over 70 years ago.

Andy Gilbert