



[www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk)



## THE HILL & COMMON REOPEN

Following the closure of the Hill & Common in February to help prevent the spread of Foot & Mouth Disease, the area has been partially reopened to public access. Some paths remain closed where there is a risk of contact with livestock. It is hoped that these will also reopen when the infected area status has been lifted.

Public support for the closure has been excellent and the Executive Committee would like to thank everyone being so patient during the past few months.

The Executive Committee and Cheltenham Borough Council have been in regular communication during the FMD crisis to ensure that a balance between public access and protection of livestock could be maintained.

Andy Gilbert, 212 Old Bath Road, Cheltenham, GL53 9EQ or e-mail: [andygilbert@btinternet.com](mailto:andygilbert@btinternet.com).

### WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

- Updated website launched
- Continuation of Site Management Sub-Committee
- A number of meetings with both Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council on the FMD crisis.

### WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

- Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June – "Getting to know the flowers of Leckhampton Hill. Talk by Rosemary Westgate – 7:30pm @ Leckhampton Primary School.
- Working Parties have resumed and will meet at Tramway Cottage car park at 10:00am on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month.
- FOLK AGM – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2001.

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## FOLK Action!

As Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common, we are a group that has been established to meet our stated objectives. Progress has been a little delayed by the outbreak of FMD; however, as the area is reopening we must ensure that the good works started by many volunteers continues.

We currently have a number of regular people who turn out to assist in the work parties and an Executive Committee and other sub committees that help in other areas of administration, planning and publicity. We do also need **your** support in whatever way that you can assist. We are particularly looking for the following:

- **Feedback from the membership** – Is the Executive Committee working as you would hope?
- **People to assist on Working Parties** – Any help would always be welcomed.
- **Newsletter distribution** – Take part in spreading the word!
- **Newsletter & Website articles** – Do you have any interesting historical knowledge?
- **Letters to the Newsletter** – Your opportunity to get your message across to other members and stimulate debate.

Please contact any of the Executive Committee if you feel you can assist in any way. The telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are listed below.

### Committee News

Sheila Chaplin has stood down as a committee member due to her many other commitments. The Executive Committee would like to thank Sheila for her work, not only on the Interim Committee and the first Executive Committee, but also with the steering group that helped establish FOLK.

This highlights the need for other FOLK members to advise the Executive Committee should they ever be interested in standing as a committee member. We need to ensure that we maintain some continuity and welcome any offers from the membership!

The Executive Committee members are all listed below, and waiting for your feedback:

**Julius Marstrand** (Chair) 01386 701543,  
[Julius@marstrand.co.uk](mailto:Julius@marstrand.co.uk)

**Jack Shepherd** (Secretary) 01242 515902,  
[jack.shepherd@btinternet.com](mailto:jack.shepherd@btinternet.com)

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**Andy Gilbert** (Website & Newsletter) 01242 527135,  
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**Judy Frazer-Holland**  
**Shelagh Hallaway**

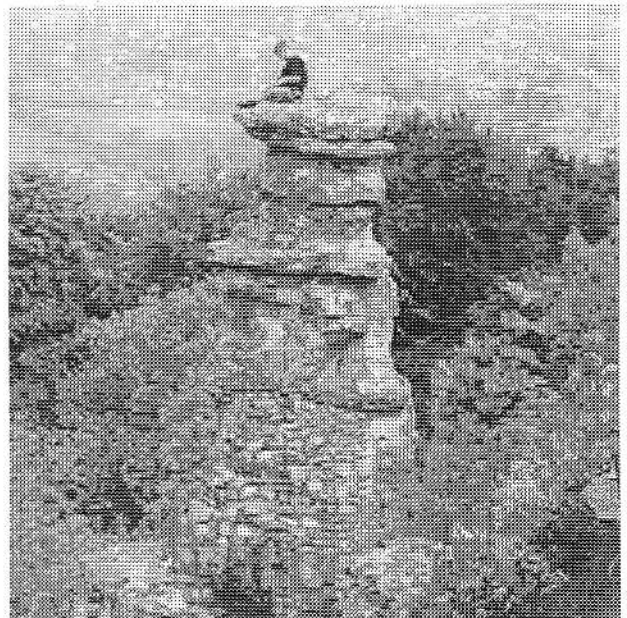
**Diane James**

**Tony Meredith**

**Maureen Peirce**

**Allan Wood**

The picture above is probably one of the more unusual uses of the Devil's Chimney. While it was probably quite exciting for the person involved, we do need to ensure that this does not become a regular event. It is important to ensure that the chimney is protected for future generations. See the history article on the back page.



The day the Hill reopened!

### Recreation

It is hoped that FOLK will soon be able to compile a comprehensive list of recreational uses and activities of the Hill & Common. This will assist in building the management plan for the hill without having a damaging effect on such activities.

### FMD Update

There have been no further outbreaks of FMD in the local area since 17<sup>th</sup> April. This is not only good news for all users of the Hill but also for those with livestock on and around the Hill & Common. It is expected that all footpaths, that do not cross land with livestock, will be opened by the end of June. The FOLK website has links to MAFF for regular updates and you can also get the latest news on all footpaths in Gloucestershire from the GCC website: [www.gloscc.gov.uk](http://www.gloscc.gov.uk)

## Conservation on the Hill & Common

Most of Southern England is either cultivated, or grazed - as such it is inevitably a continuously managed and enclosed [fenced, hedged or walled] environment. There is nothing wrong with this - it is what gives Gloucestershire its quintessentially 'English' landscape.

Even most of the Cotswolds falls into this category, but here and there, there are oases where land management is less intrusive and nature is allowed a freer rein. This is perhaps one reason why some members of F.O.L.K. are so opposed to re-introducing grazing as a method of maintaining the grassland on the Hill & Common.

This does not mean that these areas need no management. Neglect leads to a gradual degeneration into poor scrubland & impenetrable woodland. Even the environmentally important grass slopes of Charlton Kings were largely the product of extensive grazing. Without grazing, gorse, blackthorn and other scrubland plants would undoubtedly have overrun the grass.

Leckhampton Hill & Charlton King's Common is one of the oases, where a largely human created topography - from the Iron Age fort on Leckhampton Hill to the stone quarries that go back as far as Roman Britain and beyond and come forward to well into the last century - where nature has been allowed to evolve largely unchecked for the last twenty or thirty years.

The result is that the nationally significant 'unimproved limestone grassland' is being encroached upon and the limestone cliff faces are increasingly being obscured by scrub and ash wood.

The Hill and Common are important both environmentally [most of the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest] and as a recreational area for residents and visitors to Cheltenham. These aspects are not necessarily contradictory, but a balance does have to be found and this is what F.O.L.K. is trying to achieve.

### Site Management Plan

Nearly 10 years ago Gloucestershire Wildlife Management Ltd were commissioned to produce a Site Management Plan, this was to cover the period from 1992 - 1996, but in the event the 'start date' was deferred to January 1994. The Plan was updated with a Site Management Statement in February 1999.

In reality neither the Plan nor the Statement were ever implemented. In this the Council was failing in its statutory responsibility to maintain the S.S.S.I. In December 1999, before F.O.L.K. was established, the Council allocated another £14,000 to commission a new Site Management Plan. When F.O.L.K. was formed, many members were very sceptical of the need for another Plan and felt that the money could be better spent on implementing outstanding recommendations from the original Plan.

However, this was not an option and F.O.L.K. accepted that a new Plan would be better than nothing. In the meantime, F.O.L.K. decided to commence conservation work in accordance with the existing Plan, at least until such time as a new Plan is drawn up. This was agreed with the landowners Cheltenham Borough Council and English Nature. We have limited resources, but have already started conservation work on the Hill and Common.

Over 18 months later CBC has still not placed the contract for the new Site Management Plan, but is hoping to do so shortly.... Unfortunately it will take at least one full cycle of seasons before the Plan can be completed i.e. another year before the new Plan is likely to be published.

CBC has agreed to consult F.O.L.K. before the contract is placed and ensure that the contractor liaises with F.O.L.K. during the development of the Plan. One problem with the original Plan is that it was not costed and the Council failed to implement it. F.O.L.K. has asked that proposals in the new Plan should be costed, so that the Council can allocate specific funds to implement the Plan.

One thing that has changed, since the original Plan was published, is that F.O.L.K. has been formed. We will insist that the new Plan is not 'left on the shelf' - having spent so much on having a new Plan prepared, we will ensure that the Council implements it.

In the meantime, F.O.L.K. will continue to work to the existing Plan. Conservation Working Parties have had to be suspended since February due to the Foot & Mouth restrictions, but will resume on the last Sunday of every month from 24<sup>th</sup> June [see elsewhere in this issue for details]. F.O.L.K. will also help the Council to meet its statutory duty to maintain the S.S.S.I.

Julius Marstrand F.O.L.K. Chairman

## National Vegetation Classification Phase 1 Survey Map of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

An article by William Stewart, Community Park Ranger

It was a freezing cold December afternoon, with a biting northerly wind blowing in our faces. However it was a crystal clear day and the views across Cheltenham were brilliant, it felt great being in such a beautiful and dramatic setting. Jeffery Jenkins and I were on the Hill to complete an up to date habitat survey, which may be used to support conservation management work, which is urgently required on the site.

I had limited time to complete such a survey, so a National Vegetation Classification Phase 1 Habitat Survey Map was chosen for Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common. The map surveys vegetation cover, identifies dominant and rare species present, and prescribes conservation management actions in a nationally recognised classification. The survey supported the Leckhampton Hill Site Management Plan 1992 - 1996, and the Site Management Statement 1998 in concluding that urgent large scale scrub clearance on the Limestone Grassland is required to conserve and increase biodiversity of this ecologically important habitat. This initial management would then ideally be followed up by rotational grazing to prevent natural succession occurring. These conclusions support the scrub clearance that is currently being undertaken by the FOLK working parties and other organisations on the Hill.

I hope that this survey will be the first of many on the Hill, as the more unambiguous data that is available for the site, the better chance the Hill has of being conserved and managed effectively in the future.

# HISTORY

## Quarrying at Leckhampton Hill, 1920

Most of us are familiar with the Leckhampton Hill dispute of 1902 – 1906 when the owners of the hill sought to restrict the rights of way, but not so many will be aware of the trouble caused in 1920 as a result of the expansion of operations by the Quarry Company. Extracts from a letter to *The Looker* – On of 5th June 1920 tell the story.

'One of the most charming features of Cheltenham is Leckhampton Hill. Forming part of the escarpment of the Cotswolds, it has been, for hoary generations, the rendezvous for thousands of Cheltonians who love Nature in her differing moods. Nature does not truly belong to those who can buy her by the acre, but to those who love her and understand her. All Cheltonians are familiar with those historic days when the common people asserted their right of way over and around Leckhampton Hill. However, in these present days a new disaster is threatening our favourite rendezvous.

During the last few days many have been startled by what was first thought to be a dream of the Battle of Flanders, but which proved to be only the Quarrying Company blasting out the side of our beloved hill with some extraordinary efficient high explosive. When a large number of men are put on to this work in such a way as to promise the speedy removal of the Hill, coupled with an increasing danger to the public, and so failing to respect the rights of property owners so that when rocks are blasted they come crashing down into one's gateways, and generally obstructing the public footpath and rights of way, is it about time that someone began to sit up and take notice. It has been observed that some long time after blasting operations have finished for the day, a huge piece of rock will occasionally detach itself and come thundering down. One shudders to think what might happen.

Industry is an admirable thing, but if a small group of men are likely to add to their coffers whilst removing one of Cheltenham's most famous landmarks, the Devil's Chimney, it should be recognised that some outside restraining force should come into operation. The activities of the Quarrying Company are evidently not confined to changing the geography of the Cotswolds, but by failing to keep the truck, or tram-line, which runs across the main road mid-way on Leckhampton Hill, in good repair, they have created a second danger to the public, especially to cyclists and motor cyclists.

Another, third, side of the activities of the estimable quarry people is the predilection they have, when sending their fleets of huge steam wagons and lorries up and down the Leckhampton Road daily, of dropping out boulders, some the size of a melon, to say nothing of the hundreds of lumps, less formidable, ranging in size from a potato to a pineapple.

Fourthly, one has only to inspect the state of the road from the Hill to the station to see how the huge lorries have pounded our once decent road into potholes and indecent mud traps. It is a positive torture to cycle or motorcycle along the road now. Of course, the ratepayers will have to pay to put the road in order.

Those who have recently been blasting in the neighbourhood are credited with having said, perhaps cynically, that a strong sou'wester will soon bring down the Devil's Chimney – a unique geological formation which is worthy of most careful preservation. If the indiscriminate use of high explosive scatters that remarkable pile of rock, will the Burgesses of Cheltenham and the Parishioners of Leckhampton keep silent?'

Alan Gill

## And Finally.....

The new and brighter web site is now up and running and has a webcam page that is updated twice weekly. So if you can't get up the Hill for any reason – visit: [www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk](http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk)

Your committee set a FOLK membership target of 500 at the start of this year. We have in excess of 200 members now but recruitment has been slow during the access restrictions. You will find a membership application form with this Newsletter so if everyone can get one additional member, then we will reach the target!

Remember it is your Friends Group, so please let us have your comments and feedback and if you are able to help in anyway please contact any of your committee members listed on page 2.