

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

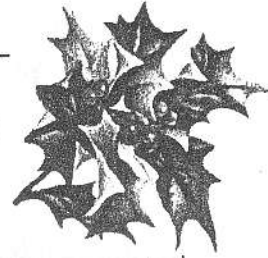
# NEWSLETTER

Issue 6 Free to members, non members 25p

December 2001

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

## F.O.L.K. SUCCESSFUL IN GRANT BIDS



After many months spent in anxious anticipation, we received the news that FOLK's application for a grant from Cheltenham Borough Council's Small Grants for Voluntary Organisations Fund 2001 had been successful. This means we will receive £750 towards the cost of hand tools and safety equipment. This will assist us greatly in achieving our aims in holding the scrub at bay on the Hill and Common in order to try and maintain the unimproved limestone grassland, and the many wildlife habitats present.

On hearing this very good news, we had even better to come. Our bid for a grant from the Shell Better Britain Campaign had also been successful. We have received a cheque for £1,600 from Shell, towards the purchase of brushcutters and other power tools, which will enhance our efforts and enable our conservation work to move forward more effectively.

Of course, with all these new tools, we will need volunteers to put them to good use!

**WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU IN THE NEW YEAR.**

### COMMITTEE NEWS

At the AGM three new members were elected to the Executive Committee – namely Robin Andrews, Tony Clifford and Vic Ellis. These take the place of Andy Gilbert, Diane James, and Maureen Peirce (also Sheila Chaplin, who had withdrawn from the Committee earlier in the year). Our very sincere thanks go to the people who stood down for their valuable input to the progress and success of F.O.L.K. during their first complete year. Although Andy has agreed, for the time being, to carry on with updating the website, we urgently need the services of someone to continue his excellent work in editing and producing the newsletter. A warm welcome to our new Committee Members.

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Committee of F.O.L.K.  
News, views and general comments are always welcomed and should be addressed to:-  
The Hon. Secretary, Mr Jack Shepherd, Rainbow Cottage, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ.*

#### WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

- FOLK AGM took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October
- Continuation of Site Management Committee to liaise with Cheltenham Borough Council in formulating consultants' brief for the new Site Management Plan.

#### WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

- Work Parties continue on a regular basis.  
Second Thursday each month – 9.30am  
Fourth Sunday each month – 9.30am and/or 2pm.  
Meet Tramway Cottage Car Park  
See Work Party Review for specific dates.
- **NB** There will be NO Work Party on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2001.

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## VACANCY

Apologies, in advance, for any shortcomings in this issue of the F.O.L.K. Newsletter, as we do not have a regular Editor at present.

If you would like to volunteer to produce the Newsletter, DON'T BE SHY, get in touch with a Committee Member NOW.

It would preferably need to be someone who has access to a computer. Maybe, if you are someone who cannot get involved physically with the activities of F.O.L.K., you could contribute typing skills. Come on, why not give it a go?

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter and have a letter or an article which you would like other members to hear about, get in contact with a member of the committee.

### Your Executive Committee Members are:-

CHAIRMAN - Julius Marstrand (01242 518846)

E-mail [julius@marstrand.co.uk](mailto:julius@marstrand.co.uk)

SECRETARY - Jack Shepherd (01242 515902)

E-mail [jack.shepherd@btinternet.com](mailto:jack.shepherd@btinternet.com)

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E-mail [anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk)

Robin Andrews

Judy Frazer-Holland

Tony Clifford

Shelagh Hallaway

Vic Ellis

Tony Meredith

Allan Wood

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Andy Gilbert (Website)

[andygilbert@btinternet.com](mailto:andygilbert@btinternet.com)

## KEEP THE HILL OPEN

## NO FENCING - NO GRAZING

The management of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common is of great importance to all users and specialist interest groups. It is also important to maintain **open** access to all parts of this area of outstanding interest, its rich history, numerous plants and animals and the spectacular views.

As a member of the FOLK Executive Committee and the site management sub-committee, I understand the importance of the limestone grasslands and the geological features, which is why the majority of the area has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). I am also a regular member of the conservation working parties, so have a very good understanding of the practicalities of managing this area.

As a walker, horse rider and local resident with land adjacent to the hill, I have been actively involved in the setting up of FOLK and in restoring access to the hill from Brownstone Quarry in the 1980's.

Management of the hill has raised many questions and it is important that both the hill and common do not lose their open access as has happened recently with Barrow Wake and Crickley Hill. The latter is now fenced and grazed and so sanitised that even a dog on a lead looks out of place!

Cheltenham Borough Council is under increasing pressure from English Nature to maintain the area in line with its SSSI status. CBC has made very limited funds available in the last 30 years and this has led to ever-increasing scrub invasion. English Nature favour grazing as a solution to maintaining the limestone grasslands and with the potential for grants, this makes this a cheap and easy option.

For grazing to work, significant areas of the hill and common would need to be fenced and this would make the area look like any other farmland, with the restriction of public access putting considerable pressure on the remaining open areas. This would in turn create increased erosion on paths and other areas of interest.

Some areas are too steep for cattle and sheep are not suitable because of the large number of dogs being walked. The local sheep farmer with the largest stock would not consider putting his sheep on the hill for that very reason. It is also important to remember that there are dangers to dogs from tapeworm in sheep and also dangers to pregnant ladies and children from toxoplasmosis.

From a practical point of view, stock would have to be checked daily, watered, wormed, vaccinated, attended at lambing / calving and would require handling facilities - corrals etc. It is also very important to remember that Foot and Mouth has not gone away and when, or if, movement orders are reintroduced, there would be a severe problem with overgrazing, not to mention the complication with various other restriction orders.

Finally, we must remember that local residents fought for public access to the Hill at the beginning of the last century, which followed the last attempt to fence the area. The council then purchased the hill in 1929 for the purpose of providing access to the public. In the 1970's other local residents registered the area as a Common. Common land must not be fenced and any proposals to do so have to be set out before the Secretary of State - meaning it should not be fenced, except in exceptional circumstances.

There are no grazing rights on this Common.

FOLK have already started a comprehensive scrub management programme that is there for all to see. The momentum will need to be maintained and Cheltenham Borough Council should provide funding for this, together with the funds that FOLK have been raising from various environmental sources.

Fencing and grazing this unique site should not be an option.

Judy Frazer-Holland

## Work Party Review

We are well into our winter conservation programme. We have purchased two brushcutters, and are currently looking at various types of wheeled strimmers and sickle bar mowers capable of tackling the rough grassland, around the Hill and Common.



Since my last report in the September newsletter, Glebe Contractors have mechanically cleared a large area of scrub adjoining and below the Hill Fort. FOLK members assisted in the clear up. The use of heavy machinery on the hill can leave the area somewhat bare and scarred, but provided the ground conditions are not too wet when the work is carried out, it recovers quickly. Next summer we should see the revitalised grassland providing the habitat which is so important for the wildlife and flowers. These results could not be achieved just using hand tools. The contractors are returning in the new year to cut scrub on the lower slopes of the Common above Daisybank

and carry out some limited clearance of scrub along the escarpment footpath, which is beginning to obscure the view from the top looking out over Cheltenham.

Both the Sunday and Thursday work parties have been reasonably well supported and have cleared footpaths and grassland areas of encroaching scrub. This type of work will predominate in the coming months. Unfortunately the only satisfactory way to dispose of large amounts of cut material is to burn it on site. Please accept our apologies for the occasional pollution which will be kept to a minimum.

On Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> November, a group of volunteers from the Mountain Bike section of the Cheltenham & County Cycling Club, under the auspices of F.O.L.K., did a brilliant clearing job on the track known as Windlass Hill (the Goatsteps to mountain bikers). The track, which runs from the top of the Common (east end) down to 'five ways' at the top of Sandy Lane, is the only officially designated bridleway on Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill. For most of its' length, it had become blocked by gorse, making it impassable on foot, let alone horseback or mountain bike. In one morning, the CC-CC work party managed to clear the entire length of the original track, opening it up for everyone. There is still some work required to remove gorse stumps from the top section and this will be tackled during subsequent F.O.L.K. work parties.



Finally we can supply the tools but we do need your support with the labour. Every little helps. You can work at your own pace for as long as you like. As a reminder the dates of the work parties are set out below. Any queries please ring me on 01242 233116.

### Midweek Work Parties

Thursday January 10<sup>th</sup>  
Thursday February 14<sup>th</sup>  
Thursday March 14<sup>th</sup>

By Allan Wood



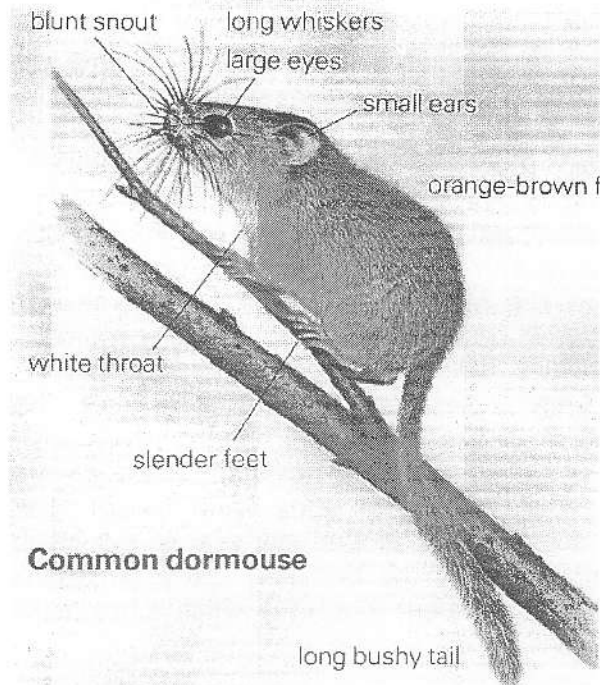
### Weekend Work Parties

Sunday January 27<sup>th</sup>  
Sunday February 24<sup>th</sup>  
Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup>



## Do dormice live on the hill?

Everyone has heard about dormice but few have ever seen them or know where they live. Alice met one at the Mad Hatters Tea Party and this confirms the general idea that they are sleepy and shy creatures. In fact their name suggests sleepiness; 'dor' comes from the Latin 'dormire' meaning 'sleep' and we also have the word 'dormitory'. These small rodents, although mice-like in appearance, are not in the same family as mice. In fact they are in a family all of their own - Gliridae.



They generally sleep during the day and hibernate throughout the winter October - April. At night they feed on seeds, nuts, berries, leaves and insects among low trees, bushes and shrubs. By the end of the summer they have doubled their weight to build up fat reserves to last them through the winter. To save as much energy as possible they reduce their body temperature during hibernation and enter a state of torpor.

English Nature and the Mammals Trust UK are concerned that these small mammals are becoming rare due to the loss of ancient woodland and the decline in traditional woodland management practices such as coppicing. An earlier survey in 1993 showed that there were sites containing dormice in Gloucestershire but not many.

You are not likely to see a dormouse but their presence can be detected by the remains of food they eat. Dormice eat green hazelnuts on the tree by nibbling a hole in the shell to extract the nourishing kernel. Later the shells fall to the ground and turn brown. Other mammals such as wood mice and bank

voles also do this but the dormouse leaves highly characteristic nibble marks around an 8-10 mm hole in the shell. Squirrels and birds usually crack open hazelnut shells leaving rough edges or half shells.



The shells remain on the ground for sometime and may be collected for a survey for the presence of these animals. With the help of a magnifying glass and a guide you should be able identify which animals have produced the shell remains. There are several sites on the Hill where hazel trees may be found.

*If you would like to take part in a dormouse survey FOLK can help by giving the first 20 people to apply some information packs and details of how to carry out the study. It would make an ideal family expedition during the Christmas holiday.*

Contact the Secretary of FOLK, Jack Shepherd Tel. 01242 515902 or e-mail [jack.shepherd@btinternet.com](mailto:jack.shepherd@btinternet.com)

More information can be obtained from [www.greatnuthunt.org.uk](http://www.greatnuthunt.org.uk) but please co-ordinate your survey of the Hill through the secretary who will try to make the survey comprehensive.

Jack Shepherd

## And Finally.... A Reminder....

Many people have now joined us for 5 years, but if you are someone who has overlooked renewing your membership – Please act now. If you have misplaced your renewal form please ring Anne North on Cheltenham 522767.

