



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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AUTUMN 2008

Our Heritage for Sale

Tramway Cottage – Cheltenham's place in the history of the struggle for public rights of access to open land

From the Levellers and the Diggers on St George's Hill in Surrey, in the seventeenth century, to the famous mass trespass by Ramblers on Kinder Scout in 1932, the struggle for the right of access to open land has been a long one – only finally enshrined, albeit to a very limited extent, in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act of 2000.

Cheltenham has its own place in this long struggle. Long before ordinary people could afford to go on holidays abroad, Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings used to be important places of recreation for the people of Cheltenham. There were allotments on the Northern slopes and numerous footpaths criss-crossed the Hill. On Good Friday's there was an important fair in a disused gravel pit.

When the quarries were acquired by Henry Dale, in 1894, he wrote to the Rural District Council refusing to admit any rights of way and even denied access to residents whose gardens backed onto the Hill. Under the Local Government Act 1894 it was incumbent upon the R.D.C. to act against this threat, but it failed to resolve the issue at a parish meeting in 1896.

In 1897 Dale provocatively built Tramway Cottage, to house the quarry foreman, on the site of the former fair and obstructing the main right of way onto the Hill. In 1899 he fenced off a further 26 acres. Finding the R.D.C. still reluctant to act against him, in 1901 he began obstructing other footpaths.

Even Dorothy Beale, the famous Headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies College opposed the denial of access.

However, after years of inaction and frustration, the people of Cheltenham took matters into their own hands. On 8th March 1902, thirty years before the more famous

mass trespass on Kinder Scout, "a large and resolute crowd" tore down some of the fences around Tramway Cottage. On Good Friday, the anniversary of the fair and on July 7th similar large gatherings tore down the remaining fences.

The four ringleaders, who with others became known as the 'Leckhampton Stalwarts' were arrested, but on 15th July acquitted. That evening a crowd of around 2000 Cheltenham citizens marched on the Hill, evicted the Quarry Foreman and razed Tramway Cottage to the ground!

In 1903 the R.D.C. was, reluctantly, forced to take legal action in a trial defence of three rights of way. The matter came to court in May 1904. Despite "overwhelming and irresistible" evidence for the rights of way, the case was lost, but Dale failed to prevent the Council from being allowed to pursue further rights of way. Thousands of Cheltonians packed Clarence Parade in support of the Council. In response Dale provocatively rebuilt Tramway Cottage on exactly the same spot.

As a result it came under almost immediate attack, culminating in another crowd of 2000 Cheltenham citizens marching on the Hill on Good Friday 1906, with the intention of tearing the Cottage down again. This time however, the Riot Act was read and the crowd eventually dispersed without achieving their objective.

The eight ringleaders were subsequently arrested, despite one of them having not even taken part in the riot and imprisoned. Although a petition to the Secretary of State succeeded in having the sentences reduced.

Although unsuccessful at the time, the public interest, ultimately led to Cheltenham Town Council purchasing the whole of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, including Tramway Cottage, once quarrying ceased in the mid-1920s.

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In 1927 Alderman C H Margett stated that "We shall acquire not only a 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"

When the Hill was re-opened to the public in 1929 the Echo described it as: "one of the great days in the history of Cheltenham".

Tramway Cottage was the focal point for the struggle for the right of access to Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. As such it is an integral and crucial part of our heritage.

Acknowledgement to David Bick's book 'Old Leckhampton', Runpast Publishing.

The Council and FOLK

The Council was unable to implement the 1992-1996 Management Plan for the site properly. Inadequate resources was the main problem, but so too was the difficulty of consulting with the disparate groups of users and interests in the site, from environmentalists, to ramblers, horse riders and mountain bikers. So, in the late '90's, the Council called a series of well attended public meetings to consider the future of the Site

This culminated in the formation of FOLK in 2000, to act as a channel of communication between the Council and all the users of the site. We were promised that, in future, the Council would consult FOLK on all matters relating to the site, before any decisions were made about it.

Despite this, the 'Proposed Sale of Tramway Cottage' appeared on the Agenda for the Cabinet Meeting on Tuesday 23rd September, without there having been any prior consultation with FOLK.

At its Executive Committee meeting on 9th September, when the possible threat to sell Tramway Cottage first came to our attention, it was agreed that FOLK should oppose the disposal of this important part of our heritage. At the time the exact nature of what was being recommended was still confidential, but the intention was clear.

Cabinet decision

Despite our protests, at the Cabinet meeting, it was decided:

- "1. That Tramway Cottage is currently surplus to the operational requirements of the Council;
 - "2. That 3 months consultation should take place with interested parties, to explore potential options for the future of the property;
 - "3. That the results of this consultation be brought back to Cabinet for consideration, probably in December 2008."
- The decision appears to be virtually a 'fait accompli' and the consultation a cynical PR exercise, although it is actually required because Tramway Cottage is sited on 'public open space'. The decision does appear to have been a watering down of 'The proposed sale of Tramway Cottage' that was on the Cabinet Agenda, almost certainly as a result of the initial reaction from FOLK.

Nevertheless, it is clear, that if a viable alternative use cannot be found within the next three months, the Cabinet intends that Tramway Cottage should be sold to help fund the shortfall in the Council's current budget.

Grounds for Opposition

FOLK opposes this on four grounds:

1. Tramway Cottage's historical significance in the history of the struggle for the right of access to the site. The Cabinet's decision appears to be entirely financial and completely disregards the historical significance of the Cottage.
2. The potential future use of Tramway Cottage as accommodation for a Project Officer (as recommended by the site Management Plan), or Warden, or as a Visitor or Field centre, or other use relating to the Site of Special Scientific Interest.
3. The recent and current use to accommodate the Community Park Ranger with primary responsibility for the site. This means having someone on site, who can lock and unlock the car park gate and is available outside normal office hours (when most problems occur).
4. The failure of the Council to consult FOLK before the matter was put up for discussion by Cabinet.

Defence

It has been suggested that FOLK should organise the people of Cheltenham to march on the Hill, with placards, to protest at the possible sale – perhaps stage another 'riot'. Whilst this may be dramatic and may make us feel good, we doubt that it would be very effective in changing the Cabinet's mind.

The Council's decision appears to be primarily financial, so we believe that the most effective way to persuade the Cabinet to reverse it is also financial.

The Council has a statutory obligation to maintain the S.S.S.I. It is clear, from what happened to the 1992-1996 Management Plan that the Council does not have the resources to do this without the committed support of voluntary helpers – something recognised by Natural England.

Furthermore, if it fails to maintain the site in accordance with the Management and Conservation Plans agreed with Natural England, it stands to lose tens of thousands of pounds in various grant subsidies.

FOLK has no right of veto over Council decisions, however, we do have a right over the voluntary labour that FOLK contributes to assist the Council to meet its statutory obligations to the S.S.S.I.

In protest at the Cabinet's decision and demonstrate that FOLK is serious in its opposition to the proposed sale, the conservation Working Party, on Sunday 28th September

was suspended, with the exception of helping the grazier to erect another paddock in Daisybank Fields.

At FOLK's Executive Committee meeting on 14th October, we will consider whether to suspend all working parties for the period of the consultation. This will lose three months of scrub-removal during the most critical time of the year, but the consequences would eventually be recoverable.

At the AGM in November, the membership will be asked whether it wishes to send a similar message to the Cabinet, by withdrawing voluntary conservation work in the event of Tramway Cottage being sold.

If you, like FOLK, oppose the sale of this historic landmark, please write or e-mail to the Council's Heritage and Conservation Office conservation@cheltenham.gov.uk, with copies to your local Councillor and the Cabinet office. The more opposition they see, the more likely they are to take notice.

Julius Marstrand – FOLK Executive Committee Member

**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE
F.O.L.K.**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

on

Wednesday 12th November 2008 AT 7PM

venue

**Leckhampton Primary School, Hall Road,
Leckhampton GL53 0HP**

ALL WELCOME

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

CHAIRMAN - Judy Frazer-Holland (01242 580026)
Highfield, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ

SECRETARY – James Blockley (07881 432077)
3 Gravel Walk, Tewkesbury GL20 5NH

TREASURER - Tony Meredith (01242 516393)
14 Greatfield Drive, Cheltenham, GL53 9BU

Tony Clifford	Vic Ellis
Julius Marstrand	Serena Meredith
Christine Ryder	Roger Smith
Allan Wood	

Co-opted Anne North
CBC Ex Officio

Articles for the newsletter can be sent to the Editor, Annette North, Shackleton, Daisybank Road, Charlton Kings Common, CHELTENHAM, GL53 9QQ or email anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk

The views expressed in the articles are of those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee

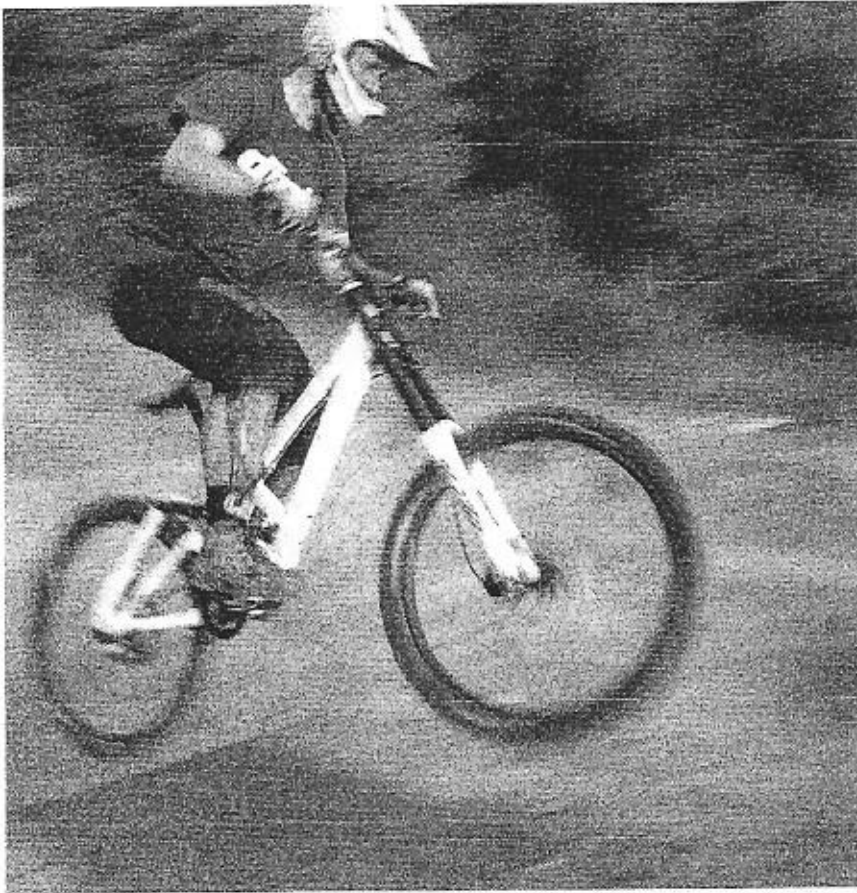
Mountain Biking Update by Roger Smith

In the first half of 2008 there have been some quite positive steps forward on Leckhampton Hill as far as mountain biking goes. In the past the hill has comprised of many riders on the hill essentially riding independently, with a modest amount of success through myself to try and communicate important issues to them by word of mouth and email. Well, now with summer upon us, Cheltenham & County Cycling Club (CC-CC) can claim to have had quite a bit of success with respect to laying the foundations of a more organised MTB community on the hill and progressing steadily with implementing track modifications that are safer to all hill users. Highlights so far this year are:



- Assisting with the construction of a Mountain Bike Code of Conduct leaflet for Cheltenham Borough Council.
- Establishing a comprehensive emailing listing group of regular Leckhampton Hill riders (estimated at about 60 or more now).
- Completing a modification to a Downhill track that crosses a well used footpath that is safe to walkers and fun for riders (with agreement with CBC).
- Diversion of a Downhill track so riders no longer get spat out at the end of the run onto a sensitive grassland area.
- Complete overhaul of the dirt jump site in Daisybank fields with equipment support from CBC and volunteering from local Dirt Jump riders.
- We have created a new website (www.thecorrective.com) specifically aimed at local mountain biking, and we have a page dedicated to making riders aware of why Leckhampton Hill and the surrounding area is special and important to look after.
- Established a partnership with the Leckhampton Police station in exchanging information about bike thefts and reporting suspicious groups possibly targeting mountain bikes.
- We have helped a similar project to ours be set up near Haresfield where riders are now partnering up with the National Trust who are the landowner where quite a bit of riding takes place.

We are at the stage now of gradually trying to get riders on board with what we are doing in terms of promoting responsible riding and trying to make sure that only authorised track maintenance and construction takes place. We have a good working relationship with CBC which also helps.



At this stage, myself and Alex Hazle are unofficial Hill reps so to speak, but we have an aim to bring local riders forward to take this on. I am always available to assist with issues brought up by riders but also anyone in the area who would like to comment on our activity. We put a high priority on wanting to integrate within the whole community that uses the hill and are always open to suggestions and comments, both good and bad. So please get in touch if you think I can help.

Rich Teague shredding the newly reconstructed jumps in Daisybank Fields.

Roger Smith 07840 823655 or email corrective@blueyonder.co.uk

The Dexters Continue their "job" on the Hill

The cattle grazing project has continued through the seasons. A good degree of relief has been realised through the introduction of the automatic drinkers for each of the paddocks. But the hard graft continues with the regular need to move the fencing. This system of management is only made possible by the unstinting time and effort put in by several regular stalwarts of FOLK. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to all those who have turned out winter or summer, in winds, rain or sun. Without their efforts this regime could not continue.

I believe the grassland is beginning to show the benefits, but there is still a long way to go before the Common is considered to be "recovering favourable" in the eyes of Natural England.

Despite the fact that Gloucestershire is a bad "hotspot" for TB, our small herd has, so far, been lucky to have had no reactors. The Vet believes this may be due to the use of electric fencing and having spoken to Defra staff, they also believe that electric fencing can play a significant part in keeping badgers and stock apart when feeding. As well as the worry of TB, we now have the added threat of Blue Tongue which does not affect humans but can prove fatal to stock. So one has the added expense of vaccinating all susceptible species – cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, llamas, alpacas and deer but thankfully not horses.

We have been unfortunate to suffer some mindless irresponsible vandalism of the electric fencing which could have had disastrous results. I hope people in time will come to realise that the cattle grazing on the hill is probably the most effective way to protect our precious limestone grassland.

Anne North

Work Party Report Summer 2008

Our work parties continue to be supported by a loyal band of workers and we have been pleased to welcome some new faces. Earlier in the year a start was made on resurfacing the worst areas of Brownstone Car Park. Unfortunately, due to the fact of inadequate drainage of the site, this can only be a short-term measure until further funding is available. In Daisybank Car Park a post and wire mesh fence has been erected on the northern boundary adjoining the road to prevent unauthorised vehicle access. A gate to the car park, which can be locked at dusk, should help to reduce vandalism and fly tipping. We were helped in this project by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who, incidentally, celebrate this year their 40th anniversary of working in the Cotswolds.

We've continued with the usual tasks of litter picking, ragwort pulling and repositioning of grazing paddocks. In addition to the usual relocation of the cattle to fresh paddocks, they have also had to come off the hill for TB testing, and twice for Blue Tongue vaccinations. There was also a serious act of vandalism when a section of the electric fence was removed allowing the cattle to escape. About fifteen hastily assembled volunteers scoured the hill in the dusk in a futile attempt to find them all. Should we have them fitted with cowbells? Fortunately their homing instinct saw them back at the North's farm in Daisybank Road early next morning. This is an opportune moment to ask anyone walking, biking or horse riding on the hill to report any act of vandalism in respect of the cattle to Anne North, on 01242 522767.

To have any success with our scrub control programme, all of the cut stumps need to be treated by spraying to suppress regrowth. Current legislation decrees that our sprayers should have a certificate. To comply with this, one member has already successfully completed a course at Hartpury College, funded by FOLK, and another member will attend the course in the autumn, this time funded by Cheltenham Borough Council. John Paul North also successfully completed the course under his own funding.

We have recently purchased a further selection of tools, ranging from replacement saw-blades and pitchforks to safety goggles and gloves. If you want to try out any of these, join us on our work parties listed below. No knowledge of cattle rearing required!

Dates of Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Tuesday 21 October 2008
Thursday 13 November 2008
Tuesday 18 November 2008
Thursday 11 December 2008
Tuesday 16 December 2008

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 26 October 2008
Sunday 23 November 2008
Sunday 28 December 2008 *

* This work party is especially for those who have over-indulged at Christmas. Meet at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools but wear stout footwear and bring your own gloves. If you require any further information please contact me on 01242 233116. We'll look forward to seeing you there.

Allan Wood

WORK PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER 2008 TO MARCH 2009

	FOLK		CBC		Others	
	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A			Mountain biking - leaflet & code of conduct/guidelines - crossing points and signage.	Re-erect all warning/no fires/no motorbikes/no camping signs.	Seek funding for 1. 2. adjacent.	1. Carry out Baseline Archaeological Survey
B		Investigate areas of hazel for coppicing next winter.				2. Carry out structural survey of Limekilns
C		Routine path clearance esp. gallops/Grassie's/Sandy Lane.	Continue consultation & investigation over wheelchair access			
D	Discuss possibility of "Quiet Lanes" over the gallops, Sandy Lane, Db Road & Hartley Lane. See CPRE web site.	Mow & remove arisings: area 35 (Brownstone Quarry) area 14 (Butterfly motorway) area 23 (horse circle)	Apply for combined Modification Order for Rights of Way: a) As recommended in the SMP b) To provide Bridleway access from South West of Site c) Progress or combine application for re-classification of Sandy Lane & 'The Gallops' by means of a Path Creation Order (without necessarily seeking a Traffic Restriction Order on the old Turnpike Road)	Scrub reduction by contractor (as detailed in SMP action plan & already agreed) areas 8, 9 & 15 to restore view to Devil's Chimney - leaving a low buffer stabilizing strip at bottom.	CBC or FOLK to liaise with GSA re possibility of exposing stone blocks that supported the tram rails in the depression next to DB Road.	BTCV youth group - remove & treat ash seedlings 1. Areas 2 & 3 (above Hartley Lane) 2. Area 25 (first paddock) 3. Above top of Sandy Lane. 4. Eastern edge of area 16.
E	Establish what fees, if any, may be payable for agreed Modification Orders for Rights of Way-meet on site with GlosCC Highways Dept. and CBC.	Decide on positions for Fixed Point Photography for biodiversity monitoring.	Arrange for Fixed Point Photographic Survey of the Site covering: a) Vegetation; b) Geoconservation; c) Historical. Especially in grazed & mown areas.			
F			Report on progress of DEFRA HLF scheme.	Take photos for Fixed Point Photographic Survey in July & collate photos from other sources.		
G	Apply for funding from Community Pride up to £5,000.	Scrub clearance on Hill Fort ramparts in agreed areas.	Review Job Description for Project Officer & discuss possible sources of funding, in consultation with FOLK & LHCG. Apply for funding when a suitable grant fund has been identified. WS.	Organise cropping and fencing of arable reversion fields and look into provision of water.	DB to prepare plan for repair of eroded area of rampart & surface round Topograph. Plan to be discussed with FOLK together with possible sources of funding (?DEFRA Conservation Plan)	
H		Assist grazer with erection/dismantling of electric fence. Leave a 5M strip above the gallops ungrazed. Maintain a monthly review of the grazing regime.	Grant a 1 year grazing agreement (well before February).		DB to report on results of geophysical survey of Hill Fort to FOLK AGM - Wednesday 12 November 2008, Leckhampton School 7pm?	
I	Keep records of where & when grassland is grazed.	Scrub reduction & coppicing (as detailed in Site Management Plan Action Plan & already agreed) areas 25, 21, 35, 36, 32, 33 & 17.	Continue to discuss with owners, management of & footpath maintenance in DB2 & adjacent land.	Investigate the best materials (type 1 hardcore?) & supply stone to finish repair of large pot holes/puddles at Brownstone Quarry Car Park & other gateways. Spreading to be done by FOLK & CWS.	Develop & publicise guidance on the collection of specimens of rock & fossils. LHCG & Geo cons.	
J		Re-erect notice board Hartley Lane.	Contact local schools with a view to trying to get Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates to participate in conservation work. Send CD of SMP & interpretation leaflets.	Continue repair of stone boundary walls as required under ESA agreement. Priority: 1. On rampart 2. Sallerley to CKC 3. Others.	LHCG to review action plan. Develop revised 5 year plan & roll forward by 1 year.	
K	Fix date for AGM and organise amplifier. ? Wednesday 12 November 2008 at Leckhampton School 7 - 9pm.	Cut & treat or pull ash seedlings anywhere.	Organise a LHCG meeting for Sept/Oct.		Natural England to report on Grassland Survey.	
L	Organise walks/talks for members & general public. Ask members at the AGM if they would like a talk after Xmas and what topic they would like.	Litter picking	Discuss what to spend ESA acreage payments on with FOLK.			
M						

OLD MASTS ON "THE PEAK" BIRDLIP AND LECKHAMPTON HILL

Older residents of the Cheltenham area may remember the substantial squat wooden lattice structure that was prominent on "The Peak" Birdlip Hill (map ref. SO922152) for many years after World War II. Discussions on recent walks which passed nearby arose as to its purpose. It was suggested that it was the site of an early metric Radar, but why build it there and facing west? Enquiries led nowhere until we found a copy of Brian Johnston's book "The Secret War" (BBC publications 1978), where an intriguing story provides the answer.

During 1940 much scientific effort was concentrated on thwarting the German bombing raids on Britain. The Germans had developed a system of blind bombing using a pair of radio beams which were directed so as to intersect over the target area. The bomber pilots flew along one beam and when their radio receivers indicated they had reached the intersection, the bombs were released. The physicist and scientific military intelligence expert Dr (later Prof) R. V. Jones (1911-1997) was in charge of British research for counter measures.

By November 1940 several experimental Bromide jammers of the German X-Great radio beams were operational and one had been installed on Birdlip Hill over-looking Gloucester. On 11 November Jones received intelligence via Enigma decoded messages and from prisoner of war interrogations that huge raids were imminent on the Midlands and X-Great beam stations were to prepare for operations against 3 targets from the Luftwaffe's list. On 14 November radio intercepts detected beams but exact technical characteristics could not be established. Later that night some 500 German bombers, preceded by pathfinders, set off from Brittany and encountered little opposition. They crossed the Dorset coast, flew over the Downs near Lambourne, and over the Cotswolds to Coventry. Some 500 tons of high explosive, bombs, landmines and incendiaries killed 500 people and injured a further 1200. A third of the region's aircraft and components factories, three quarters of the residential property and the Cathedral were destroyed.

But what of the Birdlip jammer? It was switched on but unfortunately was set incorrectly so caused no interference to the X-Gerat beams. It's quite a thought – that Birdlip might have affected the fate of Coventry!

There used also to be an installation on Leckhampton Hill. All that remains now is the service road from the car park on Hartley Lane via Hill Farm, a line of telegraph poles (the wire goes underground short of the hill fort and is exposed by the trig point on the earth ramparts) and, mostly over-grown, the concrete base near the trig point (ref SO 948183) inside the old hill fort. It consisted of a small hut surmounted by VHF "yagi" aerials and it was there in the 1960's. It was built as an outpost of the Birdlip HF (short wave) radio communications receiving station when VHF began to supersede the original HF system that provided communication with civil aircraft world wide. (The military had their own system.) The associated transmitters were at Winstone, necessarily 3 miles apart. The hut on Leckhampton Hill was a transitional facility as aircraft and local airfields became equipped with VHF radio and short-wave communication was phased out along with the need for airborne wireless operators.

Does anyone know anything more about the Leckhampton Hill installation and when it was dismantled?

Shelagh Hallaway with information from "The Secret War" by Brian Johnson and the recollections of Norman King (long time member of Cheltenham Rambling Club)