

# Green Gym<sup>®</sup>



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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## THE DAY THE TV CAME TO TOWN



On Saturday 31 January unprecedented numbers of Green Gym members appeared wearing their best bibs and tuckers- green shirts much in evidence. We all like working in Flowercroft wood which is a lovely site, but this time there was an added attraction - we were to be filmed by Meridian TV as part of their series featuring ways to get fit and enjoy the outdoors for little cost.

Presenter Rachel Hepworth and her cameraman came to join us in a mornings work clearing scrub and opening up the chalk hillside to encourage wild flowers, particularly orchids. Encroaching blackthorn, privet and hawthorn needed cutting down and some trees were to be felled to let in light and air.

Rachel joined in with a will and was filmed dragging branches and sawing and lopping cut wood. She also interviewed and chatted with many of the Gymmers to find out what brought them there. It was stressed that this was an aerobic activity which burnt off calories as well as giving mental stimulation and a feeling of well being to the participants. Everyone stressed how much they enjoyed working out in the open air, surrounded by beautiful countryside.

We thoroughly enjoyed meeting Rachel and her invaluable camera man who were delightful people and very professional. It was a lovely sunny day and, as ever, Diane performed miracles providing everyone with coffee and cake. Everyone worked very hard and a large amount of scrub was cut to the floor.

Sadly when we saw the film many of our comments had also landed on the cutting room floor but as the final film lasted only about four minutes that wasn't surprising. However the film reflected the ethos of the Green Gym very well which was further reinforced by William Bird who was also interviewed. It could only have enhanced the image of the Green Gym and above all everyone agreed it had been a day to remember.





Before

## HEDGE LAYING

The Green Gym has been hard at work to improve the hedge that lies along Pack and Prime Lane in Rotherfield Greys. The land owner, Mr Ovey, has received a Countryside Stewardship grant to upgrade the hedge and has asked Green Gym to tackle the job.. This is an old and neglected boundary, showing traces of hedge laid about 15 years ago. Green Gym has undertaken to create a new cut and laid hedge. Under the careful eyes of Tony Chandler and Chris Ash members have worked with enthusiasm, and increasing skill to create a natural barrier that will last for many years to come.



After

As can be seen the hedge has some very well grown hazel shoots that are more like young trees and there are gaps where stools have died. It is agreed that the hardest part is deciding which of the hazel are best for the job and can be sliced down and bent over to make the new hedge, and which should be cut out.

Whatever decision is made nothing is wasted. Thick bits go for logs, others for stakes to hold the hedge together, and long straight whippy pieces will be used for binders along the top of the hedge at the end. Only a very small proportion makes habitat piles or may be burnt.

Jobs include pointing stakes and hitting them into the ground, hoping to avoid roots; 'sneeding' - trimming off side shoots with a swish of the billhook; slicing the chosen hedge plants so thinly that they will bend over easily yet not cut through them - anxious moments these - and weaving the cut lengths carefully between the stakes. When the "bosses" says they are satisfied, the binders can be woven along the top and magically the hedge looks extremely professional.

Although there is still a lot left to do everyone is pleased with and proud of the start made and we may even get swifter as time goes by !!



## THE WOODLANDERS

One cold and damp winter's day a solitary rambler entered the beechwoods close by the manor house of Greys Court. The wood was alive with merry shouts and the roaring of a fire, and it wasn't long before the rambler discovered the source. It was a busy band of wood-gatherers who as they worked sang a curious wassail:

Here we go a-gathering among the laurels green.

We gather up the branches felled by chain saw gangs unseen.

We drag them to the fire-site and chop them up so neat,  
Then heave them on the crackling fire which burns them up a treat.

Here we go a-gathering among the bracken brown.

Watch your step for hidden stumps or you'll go tumbling down.

And when the wood goes on the fire don't fling it all awry,

But stack in one direction under Tony's watchful eye.

Here we go a-gathering all under skies so grey.

It looks as if this drizzle drear has set in for the day,

But we are always cheery, the Green Gym is such fun,

Especially when it's coffee time with Diane's buttered bun.

Here we go a-gathering 'mid bramble thickly grown.

We pull and tug with all our might, the prickles make us moan.

We call for reinforcements and soon they come along,

For some of us are middlin' weak and some are very strong.

Here we go a-gathering beneath the beeches bare,

While Peter's quips keep us in fits despite the wintry air.

Now our task is finished, no branches still to fetch,

So here we gather up the tools, and finish with a stretch.

JMB with acknowledgements to Thomas H !



Many thanks to Julia Booker, Tony Chandler, Chris Ash and Jill Kendal for photographs - and anyone else I might have missed. Editor

## HERE'S ANOTHER OF MIKE SAUNDERS GG ALPHABETICS

Well, Julia's suggestion for Q was **Quidditch**. But **quixotic** as I am, this did leave me feeling a bit **qualmish** as I could soon find myself in a **quaquaversal** quandary allied to a BTCV **quango**. So I'll settle **quand** **meme** for Quiet or as a noun, **Quietness**. Now it is not obvious to say GG sessions are **quiet**, we often have traffic noise, planes overhead not to mention the constant chatting and to and fro of us cutting, snipping, gathering, piling, pitching, laying, sawing, drinking and eating (cake that is). But there is a special sort of **quietness** I love about Green Gym. Hearing is as much in the brain and our perception as the ear itself and we can select out the sounds we want to hear from those we don't. Being up close to bramble and briar one is suddenly conscious of this lack of sound, the sounds from the wider world we come to get away from..

Now that's a bit philosophic so I ought to mention the occasional **Quagmire**. Now my readers will know I do like plunging in, ideally with waders on, into pools and marshes, so I do like these when we meet them. Binfield Heath, on more than one occasion, and that tussocky fen near Abingdon, as well as Ewelme King's Pond to mention three. So lovely we get the full range with GG muddy water with a film of green weed, squelchy bits with a sucking noise, soft yielding muddy patches with the 'hope it doesn't come over the top of my boots' bit. But all great fun.

And so I come readily and with no resistance to R. Straight away what hits me about our GG is **Resources**. Now I would be the first to say that whatever your level of enthusiasm, and all the other -isms I could come up with, you have to have the right **resources**. It makes a huge amount of difference to what you can do and what you can achieve in conservation with the **right** skills, tools and people. Our tools are sharp tools, the proper tools for the job. Our programme with the web site and the grid references and the map of the sites means you can plan your day. Our hot water is hot for drinks and there's always enough for a second cup. Quite naturally this takes me on to **Refreshments**. Now we have a long standing tradition of cake-eating at GG and come to that, it is nearly always home-made cake. I do like and need the break when 10.45

finds me stuck in the middle of a bramble bush trying to hack a path where no human foot has been since the late 1880s. But with GG it is not just this. It is, what is in that plastic container dimly discerned? Will there be ham rolls today? Oh, please please let it be that chocolate crunch stuff and will there be enough for two bits? Crumbs, who made the lemon drizzle, it's sort what should I say, sort of lemony? Chat, jokes, loud laughter, announcements, wry comments. It's all there. I love it.

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### THE LONG AWAITED FIRE TRAILER



WEATHER WAS QUITE A FEATURE OF THIS QUARTER BUT WE CAN PROUDLY SAY "WE NEVER CANCELLED"



### Nettlebed Common - Snow Progress

Despite six inches of snow at the site, a number of us managed to make it with Nick O'Dell taking first prize for cycling from Theale!

Overhanging blackthorn, a holly tree, aging gorse and some small silver birch trees were removed to keep the heather area open.



## LOPPINGS

### Peppard Common - January Clearance

On a bitterly cold Saturday morning made raw with freezing mist, we rake clear the ski slope. It had been brush cut the day before and there was plenty to do keeping everyone busy. Three of the group also cleared a fallen tree. The purpose of this conservation task is to control vigorous growing plants such as brambles thereby allowing grasses and wild flowers to re-establish. As this was part of an old old golf course, we had tea on the tee.

### News from the schools

#### Sonning Common Primary School

At Pip Marples' (Head Teacher) leaving bash, he thanked all those who have contributed to the school's successes while he has been there. This included the Green Gym and its value to the school. In particular, the work and effort that was put into the amphitheatre construction.

He wrote "Just a brief note to express my thanks to all members of the Green Gym for the contributions made over many years keeping SCPS looking so good. I hope you will be able to maintain the relationship with the school through Rachelle Bartlett and the new head Chris Hirst." I'm sure we all wish Chris every success.

#### Badgemore Primary School

They have now established links with Giles at Warburg and have set up a Forest School there. Mel Carruthers, the Head Teacher, emailed the following "Each week the youngest class participate in forest school and the older classes use our grounds (prepared by the green gym) to use the forest school principles. It is really having an impact on confidence and self esteem."

TC

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