

## Peppard Common



Following on after contractual machinery had been used to clear large areas of Peppard Common, we set about clearing brush cut brambles. For some the opportunity also arose to fell a cluster of smallish silver birch trees. Further contractual work has been done since we visited. Tony

### DWARF GORSE

There's Gorse on Peppard Common -  
The usual kind of course,  
Which grows all big and rangy -  
But also  
Dwarf Gorse

Oxon's heathland sites are rare  
So we must have recourse  
To slashers, loppers, forks and shears  
To clear round  
Dwarf Gorse

No matter winter winds and rain  
We'll toil without remorse  
To flatten bracken, bramble, birch  
And save our  
Dwarf Gorse

On the Common's open spaces  
The brambles grow in force.  
They easily hide the elfin spears  
Of Ulex:  
Dwarf Gorse

In past times folk would gather  
whin  
As fodder for their horse  
But now we cut the tall whin  
down  
To favour  
Dwarf Gorse

Julia



## New Tools

We have a new telescopic pole saw that can reach to 14 feet and four Azadas. We have a number of new faces so it is a good opportunity to take a look at three similar tools which do similar but different jobs. In both pictures you can see the three tools. On the left is the Azada with a spade front and a two pronged fork on the other side of the shaft. In the middle is the Trenching Hoe with a single spade. On the right is the Grubbing Mattock with a narrow spade front and an even smaller spade on the opposite side of the shaft which is rotated through 90 degrees. Note the variation in shaft thickness.

The Azada is a light weight tool best used for getting small roots up using the forked side and using the spade side as a platform



in order to lever the roots up. The spade can also be used to cut through small roots. Its narrow shaft clearly indicates that it is the most delicate of the three and should only be used on lightweight jobs.

The Trenching Hoe, often seen in Third World countries is ideal for making a trench in easy going soils and for turf stripping.

The Grubbing Mattock has the thickest shaft and is designed for the heaviest work on difficult soils and tree roots.

As with all tools, there is no place for brute force. Let the tool do the work by using it properly. Tony



## Nuffield Place

There was a light sprinkling of snow on the ground when we set to work at Nuffield Place in February to make a new dead hedge by the bonfire site. Our task was to fell holly trees to bring in more light into the beech wood then use the arisings to weave between the hedge poles already set in place by the NT gardening team. These poles being too far apart, we cut new ones to insert into the gaps. Using holly as dead hedge material was a new and prickly experience, so we lopped most of the side branches and fed them to the bonfire.



The central hedge poles were somewhat taller than the outside ones but, rather than reduce them to a uniform height, we decided to be creative and ended up with an artistic arch.

Julia

Blessed with sunshine, we continued our work at Nuffield Place clearing more of the lower laurels. Tony



## Nettlebed

Thanks to the raking done by the Green Gym, the snowdrops are again on full display by the roadside at Priest Hill. Tony



## Reading Golf Club

On a bright sunny morning we walked across the golf course to the 'Bugs Bottom' area of Caversham to continue with the hedge laying task that was started the previous week. This part of the hedge is 'very mature' so there were some substantial Field Maple and Hawthorn trees to lay in. This was only really possible with the occasional use of the chain saw to get



between the cramped trunks. The advantage of a mature close packed hedge is that the final laid barrier will be impenetrable. The work was sporadic at times as we had to pause for the occasional passing horse on the adjacent footpath and of course the regular passing of groups of golfers (as we were working next to one of the greens). Because of the long walk from the car park, one of the green staff kindly transported the tools to the work site.

## Temple Island Meadows

The meadows are starting to look very different, much more open and well managed for the return of the appropriate flora and fauna. The stagnant stream parallel to the River has been overgrown and almost



lifeless for many years. The over-shadowing trees have now been felled and the scrub on banks cut down. This should enable the light back in and along with some



dredging of the stream should allow river water free access and the life to return. Our task on cold sunny day was to move as much of the brash and logs from the stream to allow access for the dredger.

the majority of the felled trees were lifted out of the water or



dragged out using a towing strap. There were however some trunks too large to tackle by hand - these will have to wait until the ground is dry enough to pull then with the Land Rover. There certainly was some sign of life, Robert spotted from frog's spawn and Julia found some holes in the bank. We did get a glimpse of a small rodent vanishing into the bushes, but not enough to identify it. Although it was very muddy and slippery only Jill got a bootfull and she didn't lose her keys.

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# Green Gym



# "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

## Sonning Common

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**For some reason it's heart-searching time at Green Gym**

### Why I do it

There was a dusting of snow the sky was heavy with grey cloud, but the air was cold and fresh and the ground soft under our feet. The cold wintry landscape stretched mistily before us as we stood on the hillside in Flowercroft woods. The trees stood black against the green of the fields across the valley. Yes snowy showers blew in our faces, toes were numb and the fingers in gloves were stiff and cold but it was an exhilarating feel.

We were there to plant trees on the steep slopes of the woods where mature larch trees had been felled to open up the hillside. It is always good to come and work in Andrew Hawkins' wood. He is a committed naturalist with great interest in all things environmental. To extend the diversity of trees in the wood we were there to plant some wild service and small leaved lime trees. It was a very good turn out in spite of the wintry conditions and working in groups we were soon digging holes, treading in the small trees and sliding on the protecting tubes. Gloves became thick with clay and chalky soil, boots claggy but we finished the job in quick time. We were warm and glowing as we squelched back. What a sense of satisfaction at the end with a job well done! .....That's why I do it.

Jill Kendal

PS One might also think that I have a watery affiliation. I think I am the person who has fallen in the water more than anyone else – such as falling over in the Ewelme brook, on several occasions; going full length in the pond at Greys Court; and, most recently, sinking one leg and boot in the ditch at Temple Island. What next I wonder!

Is that why I do it?!!

### Tell me, what is Green Gym?

I don't know about you lot but when I tell people I do Green Gym twice a week I get a puzzled look (the last one was my dentist). Then the above question usually followed by 'is it with a G or a J?' So I thought I'd help out with a few possible responses you could use (I was a bit limited at the time by a mouthful of novocaine or whatever they give you these days). So here goes.

1. Sleeping in the chair after lunch and not feeling guilty. (Editor's Note: Shame on you Mike!)
2. Doing up your shoe laces without propping up your foot on a fence rail.
3. Fiddling with a bonfire without worrying about complaints from the neighbours
4. Munching Diane's warm bread pudding thinking 'I'll burn this off in a few minutes'.
5. Having a good gossip leaning on a hay fork and knowing it's work.
6. Having a nose at other people's gardens over the hedge
7. Getting gloves wet and muddy knowing Tony will take them home and wash them
8. Putting off your own gardening as you are working for a 'good cause'.
9. Wearing old clothes and messing about in mud.
10. Aching all over but happy in the knowledge that you'll live to 92!

Mike Saunders