

AGREENGYMMYSTERY

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It was 10.45 in the morning
In the woodland beside Nuffield
Place.

Diane poured the brew
For the hardworking crew,
But of Pete's cake there wasn't a
trace.

He'd stowed it alongside the tool-
bags,

Then it disappeared into thin air.
Freddie and Jules

Made a check through the tools,
But nary a cake-crumble was there.

We searched high and low for that
cake-box

(We need more than hot tea at the
break).

Our heaps of cut holly
Were all fine and jolly,

But were they concealing that cake?

The fire trailer burned up the
cuttings.

It was Tony who stoked it the most.

Had he thrown in Pete's cake

By some dreadful mistake?

Was Margaret's creation now toast?

Jill Kendal then gave us the answer

-

We should have been able to guess.

Our two quiet mice

Had consumed every slice -

Robert Thompson, Mike Leonard:
confess!

Julia Booker

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Had the phantom thief struck again?
'Where is my bottle of water', cried a
thirsty Rebecca. 'I placed it carefully by
that tree. Whatever has become of it!'

'Ah!' replied a shame faced Robin, as he
delved in his litter sack, 'Perhaps I was a
little over zealous in my tidying up'.

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WEATHER

We have worked in all sorts of weather
this quarter but it never puts the Green
Gym off.

A select band worked in the falling snow
at Warburg raking dead grass off a field.
As fast as we cleared a strip it would be
covered with white flakes - as were the
workers.

Hedges at Clayfield Copse were cleared
in the mist. The group had to wait while
the iron hard ground thawed out at Oak
Farm. That day ended in beautiful sun-
shine (and an icy wind). Willows were cut
back in a bitter wind that appeared to
emanate from Siberia. A sudden sleety
downpour at Reading Golf Club did little
to dampen the spirits of the record
number that turned out at this new
venue.



DOUBLESIDEDHOLLY

ILEX AQUIFOLIACEAE

Lovely evergreen foliage with a real
shine; berries conspicuous red,
yellow even black that brighten the
winter gloom; willing to be cut
pruned and shaped without complai-
ning; not bothered by frosts or
biting winds; a deterrent if a hedge
to cats if not to badgers. In such
variety too - Golden Queen (dense
male), Golden King (bushy female),
Wilsonii (bushy vigorous female)
and so many others. (Propriety will
not allow me to provide the RHS
description of Atlas!)

SQUELCH

How about this for an int-
repid group of mudla-
rks?

The task was to clear the
pond at Withymead
which was choked with
weed and rushes and
make a good habitat for
frogs and pond creatu-
res.

This will be an interest-
ing feature when school
groups come to visit Wit-
hymead



However in the last few months I've
learned of another holly, a holly
with a darker side - rampant, berry-
less, one that obscures woodland
vistas and narrows and darkens
footpaths. Its name, invasive holly!
Fortunately for society it has a
fierce local enemy.. A band of steely
men and women, all with the most
honourable intentions who will
uproot, lop, saw and burn the inva-
der, thus relieving the gloom and
uplifting the surroundings for all
who walk by.

Unfortunately, those enthusiastic
purchasers of holly plants charmed
by the offerings of the garden
centre are generally ignorant of the
invasive brother (or was it sister ?).

Can we do anything to dispel their
ignorance? I guess not, just carry on
the good work leaving others char-
med to look only on the bright side
of holly!

Bert Gill

In spite of all the inclement wea-
ther, numbers have been stead-
ily rising with attendances of 15
plus a regular feature and once
or twice there have been 20 wor-
kers- the coffee never runs out
however!!

So much copy was received this time
that I have had to withhold some items
until next edition Thank you very much.

But _PLEASE keep the pieces rolling in -
LET THIS BE YOUR NEWSLETTER.

Editor

Tony, thank you for the page
insert about the work on the
Common, its such a splendid
project and everyone loves wor-
king there.

HEDGE MANAGEMENT COURSE

by Mike Macleod

Hedges are designed for a specific purpose and the purpose determines the design. For instance, the Midlands method which we learned on the course, is designed to keep bullocks in. It is therefore particularly robust.



1. First the hedge is trimmed on one side by Claire and Jules, then around the base of each stem-the pleacher.



2. The pleacher is cut near its base and bent over at about 35°. On the far side of the hedge the brush is left, forming an additional barrier against grazing animals. The heel is then removed.



3. Pointed stakes are driven into the hedge by Fred about a cubit (length of forearm) apart to steady the pleachers and to form a base for heatherings.



4. Heathering or binding the top of the hedge secures the pleachers and forms a further barrier against wayward cattle. a simple weave would involve a single rod of hazel ash or willow but the Midland hedge requires three rods which are woven or twisted like the strands of a rope.



6. Diane saws off the tops of the posts at an angle.

5. Claire trims the ends of the hazel rods.

7. Job done.



WHY I LIKE GREEN GYM

The A to Z of a confirmed BVAP

We come to the all important G so central to a confirmed (like me) BVAP. To newcomers, if any, that's 'biovertagoraphiliac' or a lover of all things green growing in wide open spaces. To include closed but open spaces like woods of course.

Well of course G is for **Green** and that covers everything from green wellies, to green grass, to green hedge clippings, to green waste disposal bags, to green plastic wheelbarrows, to greeny gold tool handles. All indispensably part of the double G of GG. I really like green things, I like wearing green, I like eating green vegetables and I did have at one time a Kielder Green coloured car. If you want to come along and enjoy GG you have to enjoy your greens even though you may be a bit green and work possibly a bit too hard on a steep upland slope and go slightly green. It's ok just green and bear it.

Green is also for **Gathering in Gloves**. Funnily enough if you did a frequency analysis of GG activities over 4 or 5 sessions, gathering would come out high. This means raking cuttings, twigs, branches or vegetation together. Dragging a mass of thorn and wild rose prickly bits down a hillside or from around hedge roots. Building a big pile for a warming fire in winter. It is soooo satisfying!!!!!!

Like nibbling away around the edges of a dark mass and inexorably making a wider and wider piece of cleared ground then raking and scraping to make it as 'clean'? as possible. So nice to look back and say, see what it was like when we started and now look at all that cleared space. Somehow the satisfaction is the contrast of done and to be done and the feeling of achievement when you can see what a difference your efforts have made.

Gathering and gloves go together. Prickles and gloves love each other. And when I say gloves I mean not those soft things with leather patches for wearing down town or for a country walk but the all-encompassing GG gloves, huge, rough, green and red, unconquerable and death to all stinging nettles, thorny growths, sharp flints and errant saw blades. So satisfying to wear and just right if your mug of tea is a little bit hot to hold. I sometimes wear and

and just right if your mug of tea is a little bit too hot to hold. I sometimes bring my own but quickly cast these aside in favour of delving into that pile of gloves for all occasions in the blue plastic box. There's always more than enough for all in that one size fits all so astute is the Sonning Common GG Glove Purchasing Officer

G is also for **Gardening**. Some of our tasks are a little bit like gardening, a little bit of thinning out of a lavender border or some weeding round a hedge. More to the point is doing our gardening back at home. What is so strange is that many of us say, what am I doing here on a Saturday morning when I have my own gardening tasks piling up at home? Maybe GG could come round to my place for a couple of sessions. So strange that it's a far greater satisfaction for me working on a GG site or project than mowing my own lawn. Why should that be? Maybe working in a **Group**, maybe the **Gossip** and the **Gas**. The **Gastronomy** of the cake break? Well whatever there is a sort of **Happiness**...?..but that comes under H, also Henry in my next twittering!

Mike Saunders

New Year Resolutions!

Not a favourite subject of mine, but this year I decided to make two. Oh what folly, I hear you cry, all in the heat of one day – gone by.

I vowed to get fit and to eat less cake, to set my heart racing and whittle my waist. Well the first one was easy for I joined the Sonning Common Green Gym, the second not so – the homemade and wonderfully scrumptious cakes provided for us when we stop for elevenses are not to be missed. Goodbye dear waist for tomorrow is another GG day.

I have found a new life with the SCGG, such wonderful people who made me feel welcome and useful on my first and every day. The arduous task of cutting back shrub, clearing ponds and generally helping to keep the Hawthorn in check is an ongoing task, with satisfaction at the end of the day on seeing the results.

Oh and have I mentioned the climbing? No? how remiss of me..... Sir Ranulph Fiennes would have been

proud of us, no ropes or fancy climbing gear, nor oxygen to be found. We are like the short-legged sheep that you hear about in the Welsh hills, there we are gently going about our business with one leg shorter than the other, in order to stay upright on the slopes.

So may I say to everyone that I have met and still to meet, I am having a great time with lots of fun and laughter, I have made some fantastic new friends and of course those fabulous cakes. Zeah

FIRST AID REMINDER

If you have any allergy or other condition that needs medication - i.e. asthma, you are reminded that it is your responsibility to carry the necessary medication with you and to inform the leader in case of emergency.



IMPORTANT DATE

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Sonning Common Green Gym will take place

on Mon 24 April

at 7.30pm

in Rotherfield Greys Church Room

Please make sure you are there. (A 3 course dinner will be served by Gordon catering ---no, not really Diane, Unless of course you feel like it!!!)



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Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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BTCV GREENGYM AWARDS CEREMONY 2006

This is being held on 30 March to celebrate the eighth birthday of the Green Gym. To celebrate this BTCV have decided to hold the first English Green Gym Awards Ceremony.

Sonning Common entered in various categories and at the time of going to press had heard that Tony Chandler had reached the last three in the Voluntary Leader award, and Robert Watson had been similarly selected for the Volunteer Commitment award. They will be going to Leeds for the ceremony on March 30.

The group has also been selected for the Group Sustainability award. (After all we were the first and have been going from strength to strength for 8 years).

We wish Tony and Robert the best of luck but whatever the outcome they have done brilliantly and we know what a debt the group owes them both..

A VISIT TO THE GARDEN ISLE

Ten of us took a trip to the Isle of Wight to do a joint session on 15th March with the local Green Gym. We worked in the exotic surroundings of Ventnor Botanic Garden, which is sited in the Mediterranean-like microclimate of the famous 'Undercliff'. They run a very large group, and we made 40 all-told to help a delighted Curator and staff clear and level an area in the Americas Collection, make a path with bark chippings and rake out prunings from surrounding beds.

The IOW group were very welcoming, and we found they operate in a similar fashion to us, although we did wonder where the warm-ups went! We had all met up the night before for a pub supper and a talk given by Ray of the Footprint Trust. Ray worked in conservation in Reading when

Yvonne was setting up the Green Gym.

We all thoroughly enjoyed our away-day, and we came away really pleased to have seen another group continuing the Green Gym idea so successfully.

EWELME

The Long Legged Wellington (LLW) Today of Ewelme, I began the daunting task of donning a pair of waders, not to be outdone by this impossibly long pair of Wellingtons. I proceeded to hang on to the nearest rail and climb in, one leg at a time you understand. I am proud to say that I can now walk in the same fashion as a penguin on stilts, which requires waddling from side to side and staying upright at the same time. Actually it was not that bad and I do exaggerate just a tiny bit.

So to the deeds of the day: - oh boy it was cold out there, the cress beds still had a covering of ice over the 'puddles' in parts and this I fear contributed to the feeling of being even colder than it was.

Lots of jobs to do today, first the wheelbarrow needed pushing to and fro, heavy work but enjoyable all the same, I then swapped my barrow for a rake.

The rake was quite a comfort for me when, getting stuck up to my ankles in silt the LLW decided it was staying where it was! Here we go I thought - a disaster about to happen, me flat on my back in the silt, one leg in the air and a Wellington silently laughing to itself. But no! A reprieve came just in time, the LLW decided to free itself and me from the jaws of humiliation and hand me back to my ever-faithful rake - phew!

The moral of this tale: is there one? Of course - a great time was had by all. Zeah.



Ewelme Feb 2006 (Thanks to Henley Standard)