

MORE ALPHABET FROM THE DEPTHS OF RURAL HAMPSHIRE...

Well you wondered what I would come up with for 'I'. Bet you thought it would be **Ivy**. Well we do indeed see a lot of that, not only in the desperately clinging multi-clawed version on wall and fence, but the age-wrinkled and sere inexorable creeper as it girdles a tree trunk with a mass of leaves, arms and legs. Oh the delight of sawing a bite out of the messy mass to get at the tree itself.

No, not the ivy, however inviting. Nor the ibex (ibices?), iguana or ichtyosaurs as we don't spot many of those at GG. It's incredible that identical inchoate incunabula are inherently incombustible not innately inflammable inasmuch as I incline to infer they are in essence inappropriate, ineffably ineffective and incontestably incongruous.

No, not really. What I had in mind was **Idyllic**. At least in my **Imagination**. You know, a peaceful and happy rural scene. Far from the madding crowd and all that haymaking, Mike McC with his peasant garb bent low with a fork load, All good 'et ego in Arcadia' stuff and we do get a bit bucolic.

So strange, we are not really that far from 'civilisation' but maybe deep in a wood, on a hillside, on the far side of a field you get a feeling of remoteness. Thinking of some sort of primitive community clearing the forest, building a fire, getting together the rudiments of a shelter for the night. Well I did say one of my 'I's was Imagination, didn't I?

So let's squeeze in a bit on J. Lots of J's in my lexicon. There is the J of He Who Wears the Jeans and Braces nodding sage-like at our efforts and J for the Jester among us who enlivens many a mornings with his jocund jocosity. So much lovely jolly josh, everyone joins in, making a **joke**, capping it, jollying it along with a laugh here a wry grin there, a groan over there. It's the cement of group identity and cohesiveness. But in truth it has to be J for **Joining**, **Joint** or just **Join**.

That's the whole point; we do things together jointly, you on one end of the saw me on the other. I saw away, you two push against the tree trunk; two of us slashing the nettles, one rakes into piles, another lifts a load and carries it away.

Something so satisfying here, sort

of poetry in motion, sort of time management, sort of smooth rhythm, sort of joined up task processing. Great stuff? You bet.

MikeSaunders.

BUILDING A BOARD WALK AT WITHEMEAD

Brian Shaw wants to be able to take groups out into the marshy sedge of the reserve and to do this in safety he needs to build a board walk. So on a beautiful sunny autumn day the Green Gym spent a morning squelching in the mud to lay the supports and boards to enable visitors to walk dry shod into the marsh where they will be able to see birds and flowers at close hand. and enjoy one of the remoter areas of the reserve..

The job involved much fetching and carrying of planks, posts and cut boards before the installation work could begin. Brian had laid out where the walk was to go, then everyone got going on ramming in posts and uprights so that the cut boards could be hammered on to the uprights by more (or less) skilled members of the group. A thoroughly satisfying morning's work it was generally agreed.

AS A FOLLOW UP - the rain poured and thunder crashed on our next visit but undaunted some intrepid Gymmers continued the task of extending the walk far out into the marsh, watching anxiously as the water



CARSHARING

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT MORE OF US COULD SHARE CARS TO TRAVEL TO SITES.

WE DO AFTER ALL CONSIDER OURSELVES CONCERNED FOR THE ENVIRONMENT!, YET HERE WE ARE USING UP FOSSIL FUELS.

PLEASE TRY TO GET TOGETHER AND CAR SHARE IF YOU CAN

level rose and nearly reached the top of the wooden slats they were nailing in place. Wellies were the order of the day as laying the uprights necessitated wading into unknown territory through mud and reed. In spite of the weather another long stretch of walkway was successfully completed..



Green Gym - The New Generation

In November, Diane and Jean visited Withymead to meet the "Rising Fives" from Forest school who were playing in the orchard which, as you all remember, we changed over the months into a safe play area.

Unfortunately, the rain arrived during the morning but nobody seemed worried as the kids were fully kitted out in bright coloured wellies and waterproofs - great fun.



Five adults to ten children meant the children were kept fully occupied. One task was planting bulbs under the fruit trees which entailed lots of close inspection of holes. Another task was "Scavenging for Autumn" where each child was given an egg box and had to find coloured leaves, flying seeds, hard seeds and berries to show "Signs of Autumn". At the end of this task the children were awarded a certificate to take home. They were so busy hunting and exploring that they didn't worry about the two grandmas under a big umbrella taking photographs and notes.

The third task was quite a surprise. Kate, the co-ordinator, was teaching them to use a bowsaw to cut up "logs" to put into the fireplace in the middle of a "fairy log" circle. Future Green Gym workers? Definitely!

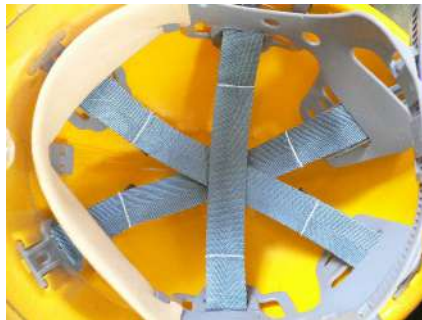


It was a delight to watch everyone running around in complete safety and freedom, making pictures with sticks and leaves and playing tag. If someone got "lost" we heard a cry of, "1 2 3 I'm lost - where are you?" To which everyone called out, "1 2 3 we're here".

We left them at "snack-time" when everyone had a cushion to put on a log and, of course, out came the "wipes" (but no chocolate cake). We had an hour of real enjoyment and can report a great Green Gym success.

Thank you Kate. This is a new Green Gym generation.





Safety Helmets

We have two types of safety helmet and the yellow JSP MK VII is shown here. The others are white and older. Safety helmets do not last long when worn throughout the year on building sites as the plastic deteriorates when exposed to ultraviolet light. Ours are used infrequently, primarily during the winter and are kept out of sunlight in a bag in a dark shed and should last a long time. Both have retractable eye protectors. On the white ones, remember to use the two black levers to lower or raise the protectors. Both types also have soft forehead bands. The yellow ones are superior in that they have soft webbing to rest on heads and have an easily variable adjuster. It is possible to dismantle the helmets and wash them. The forehead bands and webbing are detachable and can be put through the washing machine. If, for any respected reason you do not wish to wear a safety helmet that others have used, we must insist that you purchase your own and bring it with you at all times as the activity may change at short notice. Please ensure that it conforms to EN 397 and keep it out of sunlight. We can advise on types and places of purchase. Tony Chandler

INSPIRATION+PERSPIRATION= TRACKWAYREBORN

The Sonning Common Green Gym has already paid a few visits to Watlington Hill NT reserve to clear out an old sunken trackway, and in the course of next year we aim to complete the task as our contribution to a countywide celebration of 1,000 years of Oxfordshire: Oxford Inspires 2007. The many activities happening under this title cover music, dance, art, exhibitions, festivals, sports, community projects, river and water – you name it. Our project waves the flag for conservation and the Green Gym, started by us in Oxfordshire, where there are now four Green Gyms. It also connects with the county's history by revealing an old road used for many generations.

The track runs through chalk downland which supports a rich diversity of wild flowers, mosses, butterflies and other invertebrates.

Unfortunately the yew trees planted



centuries ago have grown into a forest which has invaded the track, making it impassable. The footpath now runs along its southern bank, and the passage of feet is eroding the flower-rich grassland. Our task is to restore the original track so the downland habitat is not lost.

There will be a meeting in Watlington Town Hall to inaugurate this project on Wednesday 17th January at 10.30 am, and all Green Gym members are welcome. There will be a display of old maps and photographs and short talks from Jeremy Page, the site warden, and Robert Barber of the Watlington Environm-

ent group, followed by a question and answer session. Representatives from other groups that work on the site (Friends of Watlington Hill, Oxford Conservation Volunteers) have been invited, as well as an archaeologist from the National Trust. The Town Council is very supportive of the project, which we hope will attract new local volunteers.

Please let me know if you wish to attend this meeting, which is not intended to last more than an hour.

Julia Booker



WISHING ALL OUR READERS
A MERRY XMAS
& A HAPPY NEW YEAR

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Green Gym[®]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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WELCOME PACK

This is now available for all regular and new Green Gymmers. If you have not had a copy please contact Julia Booker or Robin Howles. It is an interesting read and gives a very good picture of what the Green Gym is all about. Well done the authors!

NEWS FROM THE SITES



NO ITS NOT NETTLEBED!!

GREYS COURT

At the last session, as well as hay raking - rather late in the year - the team decamped to the site of the Ice House.

Ice houses were underground pits or chambers where large lumps of ice were stored in the cold winter months and then used at the big house all year round. The ice kept frozen very successfully in these pits. They were covered over sometimes by a stone or brick roof, sometimes by a thatch. The ice house at Greys has been restored with a conical thatched roof and it is now possible for visitors to look in at the gloomy interior, which is illuminated using solar power.

The area is fenced off from the cattle, and consequently weeds, and particularly nettles, grow rampantly. Clearing them then was the Green Gym task for the day, which was as usual willingly and enthusiastically tackled. Some people did find that their gloves and trousers were not as nettle proof as they had believed. (Anyway its all good for the arthritis someone was heard to mutter).



DIANE & JEAN CUTTING
HEATHER

KINGWOOD

A hard working session in which one gang cleared grass and brambles and opened up patches of soil while the other group cut heather for its seed.

They then came and spread the seed on the cleared patches. It is hoped that by next season some of this seed will have set and the heather will be returning to this section of the common where it was before - there are still some healthy clumps growing on the site.



JOB DONE !



SEED SOWERS AT WORK

