

# Green Gym®



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

## full of little cuttings.

Number 55 March 2018



This year, the Sonning Common Green Gym celebrates it's 20th Aniversary and what a 20 years it has been! Set up by Dr. William Bird, a local GP, to try and encourage people to stay fit by volunteering on local conservation projects, the Sonning Common Green Gym now works on a wide variety of sites and has about 40 active volunteers.





## THE FIRST 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ON THE 13TH JANUARY 2018

Our first 20th Anniversary Celebration was held appropriately on the Millennium Field – the one of only two sites actually in Sonning Common where we work. Together with a few guests (including Dr William Bird) there were 38 of us. Our task was to coppice the small copse of hazel we had planted at our tenth anniversary at the bottom corner of the field.

Prior to the session, Tony had cleared the access which had been partly blocked by bramble and other scrub. So with this large number of people we completed the coppicing in record time and processed the material into stakes and binders for future use. After this we walked round the perimeter of the field admiring other work we had undertaken at previous sessions.

After that it was over the road to the Bird in Hand for a very enjoyable buffet lunch. A magnificent cake had been produced by Sandra Rhodes – the wife of one of our members – washed down with a glass of prosecco. In fact we couldn't eat all the cake so the lower part was saved for the next celebration on Watlington Hill!

John



*Before and after the hazel copse was coppiced in a record time!*



## Sonning Common Green Gym 20th Anniversary

The Sonning Common Millennium Green Trust (SCOMIT) was delighted that the Green Gym chose the Millennium Green for its 20th anniversary task. We were keen to bring the hazel copse into a ten year coppice rotation and what a better way to achieve this than to ask the Green Gym who planted the copse ten years earlier.

By products of coppicing are stakes and binders which were used for hedge laying at Dunsden Church, broad bean and pea sticks, fire wood, and leftovers. Most of the last was placed on top of the coppiced hazels to provide some protection from rabbits.

Hazel, along with willow and chestnut, are woods that, after being cut to a low level, will sprout quickly with many shoots which can again be harvested in the future.

We would like to thank the Green Gym for their efforts on the day.

Tony





National Trust / Hugh Mothersole



National Trust / Hugh Mothersole

## Two Decades and Counting

Back in the autumn of 1997 a meeting was held in Sonning Common village hall to stir up interest in a new way of keeping fit through practical nature conservation: the Green Gym. The aim was to set up the first group in Sonning Common, and we heard Dr. William Bird say "try this out and you could be pioneering a new movement". Quite a few of us on present on that day did try it out the following spring when SCGG got going, and of those there are still a handful of regular participants.

Over the years more Green Gyms have been set up, at first in our county and then further afield, and we still get a kick out of the thought that there are now 140 groups benefiting from and enjoying something we started 20 years ago. So it was an especial pleasure for us to host on 8th February a giant anniversary work session on Watlington Hill with representation from 5 other Green Gyms: Abingdon, Bicester, Chipping Norton, Wallingford, and Newbury/Thatcham.

Three TCV staff members also took part and of course William Bird, who enjoyed seeing how well his idea was still working 20 years on. There were just under 50 people and 3 bonfires on site, all under the watchful eye of Jerry Page, the National Trust Ranger for Watlington Hill on his last day before retirement.

It was good fun meeting Green Gyms new to us, catching up with others we have met at joint sessions and networking. Each group had brought their own tools and extra thermoses, and everyone helped serve coffee in our new SCGG mugs. Needless to say there was plenty of cake available, including the bottom layer of the Sandra Rhodes' anniversary cake. At the end of the session we lunched on jacket potatoes expertly baked in one of the bonfires by Tony. All the visitors were impressed by our smooth running of the session and the welcoming atmosphere.

Our joint exertions resulted in a large area of scrub being cleared and burned, thus helping the many species of wild flower which grow on the Hill. Amazingly enough, when all was packed up at the end, there were no reports of missing tools!

Julia



National Trust / Hugh Mothersole



National Trust / Hugh Mothersole



*"It was an inspirational day and well worth the journey from Chipping Norton."*

- Heather Leonard, Chipping Norton Green Gym-

-Craig Lister, MD Green Gym-

-Bea Foster, Bicester Green  
Gym-

-Kevin Thorne, Abingdon Green Gym-

-Helena Barker, Newbury and Thatcham Green Gym-

-Graham Nowell, Wall-  
ingford Green Gym-





### TALKING TO OXFORDSHIRE ON WATLINGTON HILL

There we were, the three of us – Julia, Imogen and myself – standing in the Watlington Hill National Trust car park with Jerry Page, The National Trust warden. We were waiting for the man from BBC Radio Oxford to record some thoughts on the Green Gym as we approached our second 20th anniversary celebrations. . Goodness, was it cold; Jerry said he had 10 layers of clothes on.

Assuming our interviewer, Phil Mercer-Kelly, would appear in a smart BBC vehicle, we were slightly surprised when he arrived in a car just like ours. Having introduced ourselves we set off in Jerry's NT land rover, bouncing around in the mud and then proceeding in a precarious fashion along the hill and down to Thursday's worksite. Here the air was even colder – the wind seemed to go right through us. How long could we take it?



But as you all know the view from up here is fantastic and today was no exception. The sky was clear with red kites and ravens circulating overhead and below us. Watlington was down below us and to south, past the remaining Didcot power station chimneys, we could see the Berkshire Downs and the Ridgeway. So Phil got out the recording equipment – not some impressive piece of kit but just a microphone and a mobile phone. After that we moved to different parts of the site for different bits of the broadcast and just chatted – sometimes on air and sometimes not. I'm not sure by the end whether we knew when the microphone was on. Perhaps that's how it's meant to be.



Finally we got back in the warmth of the land rover and Jerry drove us backwards and forwards (and sideways) over most of Watlington Hill finally cruising slowly down the steep hill to the bottom where the Ridgeway path crosses the Watlington road. The broadcast seemed to come out well even if he did refer to me as John Lloyd at one point. Maybe he thought I was Imogen's grandfather! Well, anyway it made for a different Monday morning!

John

### Hurst Water Meadow

Don't be fooled by the sunshine. It was a freezing cold December day on Overy Mead Piece, part of the Hurst Water Meadows Trust, where we planted a hedge of native species. Despite the layer of frost the ground was not hard. We enjoyed working alongside their local volunteers and completed the task in good time.

-Julia-



### Dunsden Church

Two sunny but cold days kept us busy again continuing with the hedge laying project, this time starting from the entrance. Others made good work on cutting back the previously laid hedge sections and dragging the materials to the fire.

Next year we are planning to finish the hedge laying project before their snowdrop weekend.

-Tony-



## JERRY PAGE

On February 8th, at our 20th anniversary celebrations on Watlington Hill, we said goodbye to Jerry Page, one of our favourite site wardens. Jerry, who unbelievably is approaching 60, has decided to hang up his loppers and take life (a little) more easily. We have been working with Jerry for more than a decade and have enjoyed clearing scrub and trees with him and in particular clearing out the hollow way on the south east side of the Hill some years ago. Hopefully this part of the Chilterns looks a bit better as a result of our joint work. It's because of people like Jerry that we can enjoy this magnificent local scenery. At the celebration we presented Jerry with a card signed by Green Gym members and one of the new Green Gym mugs.

In his email to us after the event Jerry said "Thank you for all the work you've done on the hill, over the years. I really have appreciated it and looked forward to your visits. I'll be sure to pass on the SCGG contact details to my line manager and hope that my successor will maintain the NT link with your group"

Now, he wants more time for family commitments and some part time contract work. So he's not putting his feet up entirely. We hope he enjoys his retirement – he could come back as a Green Gym member if he finds he has any spare time!

-John-



## THIRD SESSION CANCELLED IN A QUARTER

For the third time in the first quarter of the year, a Green Gym session had to be cancelled. As the snow was gently falling on St Patrick's Day, it was agreed the session at Temple Island Meadow would have to be called off. But this was not due to the snow but to a major accident at the site entrance so there was no way of proceeding.

So the two leaders - Robin and John – joined the Oxfordshire County Council employee at the entrance to the Marlow Road to identify the Green Gym workers and send them on their way. As it happened there were only four. The rest had obviously looked out of the window at the snow and thought better of it!



## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FAUNA KIND

One of the pleasures of the Green Gym is discovering all manner of insects and small beasts in their natural habitat. After we came across an injured dormouse during a session on Kingwood Common, Alison has ascertained from the Oxfordshire Mammal Group (of which she's a member) that we should return any animals to where we find them so they can be found by their family rather than us taking them away from the site. Also if we find any mammals especially dormice etc that may be injured, we can ring or text Amanda Lloyd, their Berkshire group secretary, for advice on 07768 905745.

Whilst bracken-raking on Peppard Common ski slope we uncovered two toads and a ground beetle, both of which scuttled away to safety after being duly admired. The beetle's wings had a blue tinge, raising the possibility that it could be the rare Blue Ground Beetle found only in Devon and Cornwall. Could we have made a new sighting? Watch this space!

-Julia-





## South Stoke

Our second visit to South Stoke was heralded by a fine sunny morning in great contrast to the previous day with almost continuous heavy rain. The auspices were good for the two considerable tasks presented to us.

First task was to erect a series of fence posts round an inset portion of the car park. This called for our usual range of post tool, the favourite 'sugar tongs', the claw and pounder not to miss out fore and aft spirit levels. Tony and the fencing stalwarts worked marvels and made good progress so the essentials were in place by coffee break.

The second task was a typical GG challenge namely to reduce the hugely overgrown privet hedge along the side of the recreation ground and bordering the area of waste that we cleared on our last visit. To achieve the right level of pruning we pressed into service a conveniently available, three pairs of steps. The job was considerable as the hedge in places had grown to almost tree-like proportions and thicknesses.

Chris representing the village Amenities Committee was delighted with what we had achieved in such a short time and we packed up at lunchtime secure in the knowledge of yet another successful Green Gym session.

-Mike-



## Withymead

On the Thursday before Christmas we limbered up for the impending festivities with a series of tasks at Withymead. One group cleared away nettles from the car park, thus freeing up more parking space, and carted the debris to the mound for lizards behind the visitor centre. On top of these they piled reeds stacked in the bonfire area which had been cut from the boardwalk. Meanwhile a second hearty contingent shovelled an amazing 2 tons of scalpings into wheelbarrows and filled in all the potholes in the road through the Reserve. When the reed-carting was finished there was just time to level out a mound of earth beside the path to the visitor centre. Phew

-Julia-



Lopper Editor: Imogen Lloyd  
imogen.lloyd@dbmail.com  
Tel 07557 917884

C/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane,  
Sonning Common

Enquiries- Robin- 0118 9723528