

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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Hurst Water Meadow

Recent rain had partially softened the summer-baked ground to help us pull nettles on the Hurst water meadows in Dorchester. And what a sea of nettles awaited us by the bridge! We decided to work from the western edge in strips of 2 metres, so by the end of the morning it was easier to judge our progress – minimal in comparison with the total of nettles remaining. Pulling the nettles by hand was the only way to control them as the meadow also contained many teasels which were to be left as winter food for the birds.

Some of the group worked instead near the entrance gate, pulling nettles from the hedgerow which had been planted with mixed native trees the previous year. As usual the local volunteer group joined in the session, concentrating on deepening a ditch on the other side of the bridge. At coffee break the splendid array of cakes brought by them and Diane fortified everyone for a further onslaught on the nettles. Let's hope that next year's growth in the patches where we worked will be markedly thinner – oh yeah?

-Julia-

STREATLEY CHURCHYARD

Streatley Church is situated near the banks of the Thames across the river from Goring and was probably originally built in the 13th century, but extensively renovated some 500 years later. The churchyard had become somewhat overgrown – a perfect site for us to clear. A large amount of scrub built up around some of the edges, so that in places it was impossible to see where the fence was. Indeed, one or two graves had become completely submerged with the advantage that the lettering had been preserved, unlike some of the others exposed to the air. Many



overhanging tree branches to be cut off and a considerable invasion of holly dealt with. So, after two sessions there was a considerable amount of stuff to be burnt. In order to preserve the graveyard grass turf had to be removed at the bonfire site before burning could begin. But in the end, we simply couldn't burn all the piles of vegetation so we had to plan for a few people to return later to complete the task. A really enjoyable site to work on and John Rogers, one of the churchwardens, was delighted with what we had achieved.

-John-



Cherry Orchard- Stoke Row

We are making good progress with our 20th Anniversary year project at the Cherry Orchard in Stoke Row. The trustees of the Maharajahs' Well, of which the Cherry Orchard forms a part, want to restore the grounds partially to their layout when the Well was built, and they have asked Sonning Common Green Gym to clear back the vegetation encroaching into the open area around the mound.

The cherry trees were planted originally to provide an income for the upkeep of the well and the custodian's cottage. Few if any of those first trees remain, as cherry trees only last about 40 years, but there have been subsequent plantings arranged by the trustees.

Brambles are the main problem, but when we started work in August there were also 2m high thistles in the long grass threatening to set seed. We heaped all the cut materials in large piles ready for burning in the autumn. Eventually we shall start clearing the margins of the overgrown pond, tackling one quarter per season to cause the least disturbance to any pond inhabitants.

-Julia-



Fern on Nettlebed Common

While clearing out birch saplings from the heather on Nettlebed Common in early August we came across this specimen of Hard Fern *blechnum spicant*, also known as Deer Fern. It is native to Europe and has two types of leaves, the larger ones sterile and the smaller ones bearing the sori, the structures which contain the spores.

Hard Fern is in a new book called Oxfordshire's Threatened Plants came out in May. It says it is 'uncommon in Oxfordshire and has decreased' but according to Sally Rankin it has increased on Nettlebed Common in recent times.

-Julia-



Singing in the rain

After a relentless hot summer, our August visit to Aston Rowant was different, it rained all morning. Our task of continuing to fit a metal fence around a part of the perimeter of the reserve was placed on hold due to slippery conditions on the chalk. Instead we cleared a whole fence line both sides. We discovered that many of the old intermediate posts were broken so we may well get a sizable fencing job in the future.

-Tony-



Borocourt Wood

It was great to be back with the Green Gym for a session of clearing Rhododendron at Borocourt Wood before my next adventure in North Yorkshire. We had a visit from a lovely Brimstone, possibly a female due to it being pale green, whereas a male would be lemony yellow.

-Imogen-



Trying to spot the very well camouflaged Brimstone!

Mudlarks!

Does the sun always shine at Ewelme? Certainly we had two sun soaked mornings there this quarter. You notice I do not say water soaked although some of us did get our feet and boots very wet on one session. We were as usual clearing channels in the river which involved removing invasive rosebay willow herb and other weeds that had colonised the stream and which were blocking the bridge and channels. Just clear this area, said our leader indicating with a generous wave of his arm the forest of growth. And of course we did!

However much of it involved pulling at plants that weren't keen to give way and had accumulated a thick muddy barrier round their roots which had deep potholes in some places. The squelching noise that came as one pulled a stubborn plant out of the mud was very satisfying even if you did step back into a hole that brought water over the top of your boots. Still its only a few drops you thought, nothing to bother about. But of course the dripping wet foliage had still to be carried across the stream to put on the bank.... I think there must have been a few T shirts abandoned that day. And did so many people really have freckles or was it something else?

And that is what made us think of Mudlarks. ... But the sun was shining, the water was gleaming and the cake at coffee time was delicious so we all agreed that it had been a morning to remember. (And don't forget that mud is very good for the complexion).

-Jill Kendal-



Giles Alder

We have previously spent many sessions at the Warburg SSSI working under the guidance of Giles, the warden. After seventeen years, Giles is leaving BBOWT and him, Tess and Jack are moving to the Cotswolds. Jack is going to secondary school so now was a good time for them to move. We wish them all the best for the future.

-Tony-

PEPPARD WAR MEMORIAL HALL

The Hall was built in 1921 in memory of the eleven men from the parish who died in the first World War. There were additions in further years. For a while there were tennis courts here and after they finished a bowls club was established. That too has folded leaving those responsible for the Hall with the whole of the bowls green to manage as well as the surrounding car park.

The Green Gym returned in September to complete the clearance of the boundaries. There was a large amount of scrub to be removed down the side of Chiltern Road including old tree branches and more at the end of the main car park. The bank below the car park hedge needed clearing and the whole lot was burnt in a bonfire at the end of the overflow car park. It proved impossible to burn all the stuff from a previous visit which is still piled up out of the way at the far end.

For once we had tables and chairs to sit on for the coffee break. And we got on with the work so fast that we finished early. But we did have 21 people working at one point!

-John-



Hot off the press...

The Sonning Common Green Gym was featured in Saga Magazine in July, in celebration of its 20th Anniversary. What a 20 years it's been!



Badgemore Primary School

"It was great to see you on Saturday together with the team. We are really pleased with all your work and especially given the heat. We could not achieve the progress we are making in our grounds without Sonning Common Green Gym, you have become an essential part of our plans."

-TAUQIR AHMAD-

We worked in two locations. Before coffee break, we were at the far end scything the orchard, raking up the cuttings and taking them to the compost heap, clearing the embankment, and bramble runners encroaching through the palin fence. After a much needed break, further scything and raking was done in the wild flower area and a fig tree out growing its space was cut back. Given the heat it was great to see so many willing hands.

-Tony-



YELLOW JERSEY

It was neck-and-neck at the front of the peloton in the Tour de Stoke Row, but the winner was a familiar figure who posed afterwards for a victory photo next to the elephant on the Cherry Orchard mound.

-Julia-

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