

Green Gym



THE LOPPER

full of little cuttings.

Issue 70 Christmas 2021

Merry Christmas

Welcome to the 2021 Christmas edition of the Lopper. Hopefully this edition reflects the time of year with a virtual Christmas Dinner thanks to Julia. A chance to look back at the fantastic work the SCGG has done over the past years courtesy of Jill. Plus a time to remember a friend who is not with us this Christmas.

[martin b](#)



Robin always loved working and walking in woodlands especially during the bluebell season so this bench is a very fitting tribute to our friend as are these wonderful bluebells in the woods at Greys Court.

Thanks to Leo for the photos

What, no Green Gym Christmas Dinner this year?
Noel Coward could have remembered some like this:



I went to a marvellous party
An open-air harlequinade.
The Green Gym was host
And we all made the most
Of the caviar on toast
From a spade.



Dear Tony had built a big bonfire
To enhance the bucolic décor,
While Carol mulled options Christine mulled the wine,
Then we all danced the conga in sinuous line
And agreed Brian's friandises were simply divine.
I couldn't have liked it more.



I went to a marvellous party
I must say the fun was intense
While the hot-dogs were grilled
We all had to build,
Then pole-vault, a post-and-rail fence.
Jill Kendal arrived in a ballgown
And said she was Zsa-Zsa Gabor.
Robert was worried he'd rip his new suit
So Jill said "But Darlink, I wouldn't give a hoot.
Just try my new knee-pads, they're sequinned to boot!"
I couldn't have liked it more.



I went to a marvellous party
We did a hilarious quiz
Martin's spreadsheets went well
Then they got hard to spell
What with copious servings of fizz.
Proceedings were waxing uproarious
Till John played his musical saw.



We scoffed crêpes suzette Jane had generously made
(She bonfired the brandy to make them flambéed),
Then we draped fairy lights on the willow stockade.
Oh the Green Gym is never a bore.
I couldn't have liked more!



Julia



Kidmore End Memorial Field



Planting whips in the hedge bordering Kidmore End Memorial Field was only my second or third outing for Green Gym, a good skill to learn as well as all the slashing and burning!. My passion is geology and so to my surprise and delight I found a **fossil** in amongst the soil and stones. The photographs show an internal cast in flint of an echinoid or "**sea urchin**" called *Conulus albogalerus*. Echinoids are characteristic fossils of the Chalk and this one shows a flat-bottom, almost circular outline and a typical conical shape. It is about 80 million years old.

A rare find but not a rare fossil.

Carol



Greys Court Boardwalk

Leo sent in this photo of the completed first stage of the boardwalk at Greys Court with thanks to the joint effort of the SCGG and NT volunteers over past months.

Leo also made a video of his work at Greys which includes building the boardwalk, which can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTtGjPbkPY>

(Naturally Buddy is the star of the video)



Something to get you noticed!



Our usual visits to Priest Hill Nettlebed usually involve-you've guessed it bramble pulling bracken trimming raking. All of those. And we were once more so doing on one of our recent Thursday visits.

But an additional task for Peter and Jane. Noticeboard firming up and consolidation. The very informative noticeboard tells of the geological strata underlying the whole site, absolutely amazing and mind blowing in its way. The noticeboard had become a little awry and needed straightening up to its former position.

This meant digging down to locate the support posts then back filling and tamping down to consolidate the surround.

Do we need a notice next to it saying Green Gym did this?

Mike S





Fiona at the GG stall in Henley's Big Green Week display



More good things coming in threes: Mike Ross, Mike Macleod and Mike Saunders basking in the winter sunshine after a morning of heavy channel-clearing at Ewelme.

I just love nettles - well pulling 'em up or cutting 'em down!

One of the many great pleasures of our visits to Cleeve is the sheer variety of tasks. And not only that. The pure joy of starting on one task and when that particular set of muscles you're using makes you look at your watch and wonder if it's nearly 1145, moving round the site and starting something else. But some of the jobs like twiddling and weaving willow slips round stockade willow posts or carting wood chippings are so attractive one wants to carry on doing it well past coffee time.

Which brings me to **nettle bashing**.

Last time out at Cleeve we had a huge expanse of newly 'springing up' nettles, green. Luscious, all the same height (more or less) and densely packed.

Introducing the new **'midi' slashers**. Light, easy to use in a great forward sweep and beautifully sharp. And perfect for this mass of nettles just waiting for the chop.

Now my tactic, faced with a huge mass of vegetation, is to make an island, or a series of islands in order to break up what seems like a vast sea stretching before you where you seem to be making scant progress. In this way you can work round the islands then come back to clear them.



Well, this is wonderful, a sensuous swish, a slight crump as the crop falls, a clean cut and

satisfying sharp break of colour and texture between what is still standing and what is a mass of leaves and stems behind and beside you.



But these are not the only nettles. We are also clearing elderly growth, tall thick stems, some almost two metres high, just where the Loddon lilies are already, mirabile dictu, pushing green buds through the topsoil. Now these can be **pulled out**, a two hand job and a leaning back of the body. Different nettles, different actions. And out they come, easy peasy, but mind your face.

Who thought nettle-bashing could be so much fun? Market it properly and maybe people would pay to do it!



Mike S

What a difference' two' years make- as they say.

We hadn't been back to this glade on **Nettlebed common** since 2019 (PC – Pre Covid) and Nature had reasserted itself with six foot high bracken completely masking the glade we had cleared back then.

However as usual we plunged fearlessly into the green jungle clearing bracken and as we progressed there were calls of, 'we scalloped out this space'. 'Oh yes I remember this space we cleared for the Adventure Trail'. 'Then there must be a dead hedge'. And true enough it wasn't long before someone fell over the remains of said hedge. So we progressed across the space and the dead hedge became a living one as we piled the bracken and bramble on it.

At the end of the session the open space was open to air and light. This revealed lots of Male ferns that had been hidden. (There is also a Female fern and both of these have male and female versions apparently, or something like that). There were also lots of foxgloves – greeted with delight, and small shoots of Pendulous sedge, the delight here was shown by immediately digging it out as being an unwanted invader.



So, all in all it was a very satisfying mornings work. (Though I think the brambles might be the most happy residents – lots of strong shoots could now regrow.....).

Am I right in remembering clearing this space on a very wet and muddy morning and getting soaked; and finding a rather special red fungus ...? Anyone?

Jill K



Looking Back

As a long term member of Green Gym, it is extremely pleasant to look back and see how we have, in fact, made a considerable difference to some of the sites we have been visiting for years. At **Ewelme**, although we seem to have to repeat many jobs – clearing channels, pulling bullrushes



– we did plant a hedge at the edge of the meadow that is now a large barrier full of greenery, and that meadow is full of wildflowers.

The hedge at **Rokeby Drive** playing field, planted with tiny whips back then, is now full of large sturdy trees, just right for hedge laying.

On the commons the heather display on **Peppard Common** in the autumn can be spectacular, very largely our efforts to firstly spread seed, and lately and regularly, to pull bracken and bramble. There is a similar transformation on **Priest Hill**

Nettlebed; an area that I remember being covered by trees and now flourishes with our efforts at birch removal and (again) bracken pulling. Not to speak of the open corridor we created on **Kingwood** – in our tree felling days.

And as for **Spring Wood**, the holly has been decimated and bluebells have spread steadily in from the edges. Robin Howles particularly loved seeing the blue bells increasing year by year.

So, in fact, although our hearts sink when the job is, once more, bracken pulling we do in the end make a difference!

Jill K

Lopper Editor: Martin Barrett
mdb.scgg@gmail.com

The Sonning Common Green Gym
c/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane,
Sonning Common

Enquires: Martin Rhodes 01189 724228