

# Green Gym®



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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### Julia's Photo Memories



**(Post-) Christmas Spud-Roast:** Thirteen of us braved the temperature of minus 5 at Aston Rowant in early January, warmed by the thought of a lunch-time hot potato. The Christmas spud-roast was celebrated as planned after Christmas with the usual spread of goodies. Fingers and toes gradually thawed as we cleared dogwood and wayfaring trees encroaching on the footpath, the arisings being disposed on the bonfire. The sun even got round to our work area, just when it was time to go home!



We returned to **Emmens Lane Wood** in January, after many years, to cut back thick holly at the back of the wood. Halfway through the wood we found this **shepherd's hut** which is used as a shelter by the owners.

Frosty morning on **Nettlebed Common** at the end of November



Back to old stamping-ground in November in **Kennylands Field**, where we went back to familiar work: tending the lavender hedge.





## Update from Cleeve Water Meadow



Charlotte looking for her **Green Wheelie Bin** which had floated away

**Flooding**, though it may seem disruptive, plays a crucial role in maintaining this meadow's delicate balance. Flooding creates temporary new habitats like ponds, helps distribute wetland plant seeds and promotes growth by carrying nutrients and oxygen throughout the habitat. It also acts as a **natural flood defence**, protecting surrounding areas from high water.



**King Canute** did not have much luck holding back the waters either



**New digs for little owlets?** Charlotte's friends from the **British Owl Project** recently installed two **Little Owl** boxes in the hopes of attracting a breeding pair. Little owls are fascinating - the male and female prefer separate boxes but work together, with the male bringing food for his partner and their chicks.

**martinB**



**Spring Wood:** Some of the work party paused briefly under the arch formed many years ago by a layering branch of holly



**Park Wood:** Fair inroads had been made into the bramble patch, so when it poured with rain we called it an early day.

**Julia**



## Ewelme's Willow Wonders: A Day Without Wellies.

In the quaint village of Ewelme, where wellington boots are as common as the morning dew, a different kind of Saturday unfolded. The air was crisp, and the sky a clear winter blue—perfect for an adventure not involving wellies, but willows.



The joy of using the new loppers was undeniable. Each snip and saw brought forth a sense of accomplishment as we revealed the trees' hidden beauty. The bundles lay on the grass, a testament to our morning's work, neatly tied with binder string, ready for their next chapter.



As the morning gave way to afternoon, we gathered with fellow volunteers in the Visitor Centre, our hands warmed by mulled wine, our spirits lifted by shared laughter, and our palates delighted by the sweet taste of mince pies. It was a morning well spent, in the company of good people, for a good cause.

Tom, our spirited guide, led us to a serene double row of willow trees. Mike M, our mentor for the day, tasked us with a simple yet satisfying job: trim the new growths, clip them into manageable sizes, and bundle them up—25 to a group, sorted by thickness.



Though the ultimate purpose of these willow strands eluded me, the sight of a young visitor collecting the thinner ones for weaving stars brought a smile to my face. It was a reminder that our labour, however small, was part of a larger tapestry of community and creativity.

I regret not capturing the 'before' shots, but the 'after' images will have to suffice—showcasing the fruits of our labour and the delightful transformation of the willows.

**Mike S**

## Crocker End Green Common

The first day of February broke clear and sunny. Hurray!!

Today we were off to Crocker End Green Common to undertake a session that was set up at short notice to replace the published one at Cleeve Water Meadow and which had to be cancelled due to swampy conditions underfoot.

Crocker End is a beautiful hamlet, so close to Nettlebed yet seemingly miles from anywhere.

They have a problem with bramble (as do lots of our sites) and on our previous visit in April 2023 we had started a process of removing it in carefully defined areas from the edge of the common.



This time we were going to remove a further section of bramble by cutting it to ground level and when we return next year, we will complete the cutting of the final third section of the bramble, by which time the bramble we first cut in April 2023 should have started to grow again and require re-cutting.

The cunning plan is therefore to have brambles at different 3 stages of growth, thereby providing a variety of different habitats for different species. At least that's the theory.

Accordingly, before break we worked on the common edge carrying out this primary task. We also cleared bramble from an area around a footpath sign and a salt bin (which was full, so indicates how mild this winter has been so far).

All of the cut bramble material was sidelined to the boundary of the common where it could decompose in peace.

At regular intervals, a few of the locals enquired as to what we were doing and most appreciated the purpose of the work as well as the final intentions.

We had a leisurely break with cakes provided by Geoff and then it was off to start part 2 of the work.

An adjacent bridleway leading off the common had become considerably narrowed due to growth of brambles (again!) and was starting to impede the passage of walkers, riders etc.

This time we cut the brambles back hard and then dug out as much of the root systems to slow down regrowth. This work was a little harder, but we sang some songs and told tall stories and before we knew it the work was completed and it was time to pack and depart.

A great day was had by everyone and we all went home satisfied that we had, in a small way, helped the world become a better place.



**Martin Rhodes** (with Photos by Julia)



## NEW COPSE - A Historical Gem in Sonning Parish

### Palmer's Legacy: A Beechwood Bonanza

New copse may well have been new (comparatively). It was owned in the 1800's by [Robert Palmer](#) (1793 -1872) who was a landowner who owned a huge area in Sonning Parish. He lived at Holme Park, Binfield Heath. It was the most northerly of his possessions and I have a theory that he planted this woodland with beech as a cash crop. There aren't many other old species – such as oak – and none of the beeches are old specimens.

### From Rifle Butts to Brush Handles: A Wood in Demand

I don't know who owned the wood after him but in the early first world war beech was sold to make [rifle butts](#) and later the Kleeneeze brush company owned it for making [brush handles](#) so the beech was regularly renewed. Sadly there is little value in beech nowadays and it now goes for chipping and pulping.

### A Changing Landscape: Storms, Diversification

Some great swathes of trees were uprooted in the [Great Storm of 1987](#) and lots of new planting went on which included other deciduous trees such as ash, oak and even chestnut. Cherry has always grown wild and there was a stand of larch planted earlier. So now it is a more [mixed woodland](#). It was about this time that the big track in the wood was opened up and the bridle path declined.

### Holly Wars

As you all know [holly has invaded everywhere](#), and about 10 years ago an amazing machine moved in part of the wood which was able to cut and shred the holly into tiny pieces in no time at all. Beech has regrown in this area and there are lots of small golden trees which look lovely.

### A Public Playground: The Bridle Path's Transformation

As for the [bridle path](#), in the early days it would have been used for hauling out the timber for sale. Then it was a private road in the Copse. It became a [public path](#) in the 1950's along with the other footpaths as a result of the far seeing National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 that opened up our countryside for walkers and ramblers to enjoy.

**JillK**

### Clearing the Bridle Way at New Copse

Clearing back a [bridleway](#) at New Copse in Sonning Common. This new site for us is conveniently placed across the road from our tool-shed, and there is plenty to do! Horse-riders haven't used the bridleway for many years because of close-growing holly at the sides and overhead. The path is popular with walkers, who voice appreciation for our efforts so far. We hope there will be fewer muddy patches when more light and air reach the ground.

**Julia**



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