

Green Gym®



"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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Preparing the Way: A Winter's Tale at Streatley Church Yard



The run up to Christmas often means adding—decorations, gifts, busy calendars. Yet at our recent Green Gym session in Streatley Church Yard, the season's spirit was found in clearing away and preparing the ground.

Advent is a time of anticipation, and our work among the ancient stones echoed that. We weren't just gardening; we were opening the earth to future promise, breathing space into a place heavy with history and winter silence.

Our mission was to let the light back in. By cutting back boundary verges and pruning shadows, we encouraged spring flowers to stir beneath the cold soil—a quiet act of faith for March's reward, like planting hope in frozen air.

Escape plan foiled by John and Julia

The team also tackled "**Holly and the Ivy**," removing invasive plants, trimming hedges, and restoring order to wild corners. Most moving was uncovering overgrown graves, revealing names long hidden and offering remembrance, as if the past itself sighed with relief.

We left the churchyard **brighter, cleaner, and more open**. Muddy boots and tired muscles carried home a sense of peace.



Proof of a productive day!



Restoring the memory

We had prepared the way—not only for Christmas services, but for **snowdrops and daffodils** waiting just below the surface, ready to rise.

Merry Christmas to everyone at the Green Gym! martinB

Mud, Sweat, and Sleepers (AKA Whacker Plate Envy)



The deluge had finally passed, leaving the **Hurst Water Meadow** in a state of squelching, sodden beauty. On Saturday, a band of intrepid volunteers arrived at Dorchester on Thames, trading the memory of the previous day's monsoon for a grey, mercifully dry morning. The meadow was soft underfoot—soggy, but safe from the rising floodwaters.

Gone were the brambles of previous weeks. Today's mission was structural, demanding a firm disposition and **muscles of steel**. We split forces to battle soil erosion across the bridges. One team wrestled heavy kerbstones into fresh dugouts at the large bridge, while the other

sixteen-inch nails into sleepers at the smaller crossing.

The air filled with the scrape of shovels and the rumble of wheelbarrows laden with hardcore. Then came the **'whacker plate'**—a vibrating beast used to compact the earth. We watched with deep envy as the pros operated it; it looked like thunderous fun, but alas, we were not permitted to play with the heavy machinery.

As the heavy lifting concluded, we turned our saws to the encroaching brush, carving out clear access for the season ahead. We finished with aching backs, a restored path, and—perhaps most importantly—an exceptional **round of cakes**.



Martin R

Into the Woods: A Halloween Mission



Stakes for the Undead?

With **All Hallows' Eve** creeping closer, we dared to forge a mysterious path through the shadowy copse at Rokeby, ready for brave children to explore. We hacked away at the **skeletal** grasp of overhanging holly and dug out tripping stumps, leaving behind a mountain of brash to be **spirited** away by the ground staff of the neighbouring golf club.

Meanwhile, a great hazel was severed and coppiced, its limbs transformed into sharp stakes and binders—ostensibly for future hedge-laying,

though one can never be too careful when **vampires** are about!

Finally, we opened the gloom next to the hazel by felling small trees, entombing the timber in a habitat pile for the **creeping, crawling things** of the earth.



Julia

Battling the Holly Horrors

CHRISTMAS CAKE

It was Christmas Eve, and Jane was running over all her seasonal tasks before settling down for the night. She had stuffed the turkey, peeled the potatoes and the pigs in blankets nested in neat rows in their baking tray. The presents were wrapped and sacked under the tree, including an interestingly-shaped package marked 'To Jane, from Santa'. It had the shape of wellington boots, and she hoped they were steel toe-capped for wet days at the Green Gym.



Ah yes – the Green Gym cake rota! Every slot had been filled for the next three months except one. The volunteers would be their usual friendly selves until they saw her approaching purposefully with a clipboard, when they would back away for an urgent appointment with a bramble thicket. Plenty of them had signed up - she was looking forward to Will's loaf cakes and Giuseppe's apple cake among the

delicious offerings – but there was still an empty date.

Jane sometimes wondered if the Green Gym was really a patisserie-lovers group who did some nature conservation on the side, but really everyone would work their utmost on the day's task and deserved good sustenance half-way through. When gathering at the start of the session they would check that the tools had arrived, followed by the hot-drinks car, but there was always anxiety as to who was bringing the cakes. Consternation all round until the cake-bearer on the rota arrived. Jane couldn't let them down. Luckily she was able to put that worry aside for now, warmed by a soothing bedtime Christmas toddy by the fire, and she soon drifted off to sleep...

What was that weighing down the blankets above her feet? A Christmas stocking adorned with twinkling lights spelling out JANE! Somewhat bemused, she delved inside to find: a **diamond tiara** (this'll come in useful for my trips to the Co-op, she thought); a pair of **sexy stilettos** in just her size (ditto); a **Green Gym thong** (you must be joking Santa); and a neon-lit clipboard sporting a completed cake rota (now you're talking, Santa!). She scanned the sheet to find out who had filled the empty slot. Mary Berry.

Surely not! How exciting, the Green Gym will be thrilled, she thought, I can't wait to tell everyone. We'll get a massive turnout, people will be clamouring to join, and they'll tell their friends to put the date in their diaries too, perhaps even the press. I'll have to ask both coffee ladies to each come with treble thermoses – in fact it'll be a scrimmage. Oh dear, what a nightmare!



She woke with a start making something drop to the floor. It was the cake rota clipboard, with no blingy stocking to be seen. The sheet had indeed been completed, but the name filling the empty slot was – hers. Beside it was a note:

**“Your cakes are as scrumptious as any made by a famous baker.
Happy Christmas, Santa”.**



**Well, she thought with a sigh of relief, Happy Christmas indeed.
Julia**



And so to Tartary.....

I love the name Tartary. Actively used in European sources from the 13th to the 19th centuries, the **toponym** served as a vague description for a vast part of Central Asia—a land defined by the exotic and the intriguing.

Then came Peter Fleming, a special correspondent for The Times. He wandered from India to China, reporting on and peering into the heart of the region. His adventures are delightfully summed up in News from Tartary (1936).

And so, we descend from the exotic to the prosaic: to Tartary Wood on the Nettlebed Estate. If we are here, it implies only one thing: **bramble pulling. Delight of delights.**

But there is always a preliminary, high-stakes question: Has it rained, or have we endured days of baking sun? Rain means soft soil and an easy yield. Drought means mattocks, forks, and warfare. Today? Hooray. The ground is soft.



Help! we have nosy bullocks prowling round our parked cars. Nosy enough to gnaw off a wing mirror. Peter decides to stay en garde. The rest of us 13 in number proceed downhill to the wood.



We came, we saw, we weeded. The brambles are history, setting the stage for a wildflower takeover.



Meanwhile the herd have moved off but seeing our intended departure they're coming back to head us off. You can't say a Green Gym session isn't fun!



Me, Surveying our handiwork

Mike S

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