
Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society - Issue 2. March 1997

Are You a Member?

Now is the time for all of you who enjoy and make use of the Common to join the Common Preservation Society. If you wish to renew your membership (and we sincerely hope you do), then come along to our next quarterly meeting or send a cheque to Don Murray (Membership Secretary) at 31 Plomer Green Avenue, Downley. Fees for individual members are £4, family members are £6 and senior citizens/students are £2. Please remember that if your subscription has lapsed and you carry out Society work on the common, our insurance cover only protects paid-up members.

Horses on the Common

We all tend to assume that we have the right to roam on the common however we please. At the same time, it can be frustrating at this time of year to pick one's way along muddy paths churned up by horse's hooves and it would be preferable if horses could keep to bridlepaths. The Society has recently received clarification in the form of a letter from the Open Spaces Society as follows:

"If horse-riders are on the common and not on the bridleway, they are committing a trespass (a civil offence) unless they have the consent of the landowner. If there are byelaws affecting the common then they might be in breach of those as well."

Similarly from Smith Woolley (agents to the West Wycombe Estate): "Common land is privately-owned land over which a number of private individuals have rights in common. There is no

general public right of access apart from public rights of way. As such, the rights of the public are restricted to the public rights of way.

The freehold owner can grant specific rights of access as it is his own property. I am very happy for you (the Society) to continue to "police" the horse riding on the common."

The Society would be grateful if riders could therefore keep to the bridleways.

Tree-felling at Mannings Pond

Some of you may be aware of the tree felling that has been taking place around Mannings Pond at the top of the Common adjacent to Naphill Common. Members of the Society were rapidly on the scene upon hearing the chain saws and were informed that this was being carried out by Tilhill Forestry on behalf of the West Wycombe Estate and advised by English Nature. The intention has been to open up the area round Mannings Pond and thin out the trees and the undergrowth. There is no intention for this work to encroach on the Dells. The Society was reassured that the work was all in the best traditions of conserving the Common. However, the Society hopes that Tilhill will be back soon to clear away the brushwood that

has been left where it was cut.

Footpaths around the Common

Nine years ago, the Parish Council made an application for the registration of a number of footpaths in Common Wood and the National Trust area adjacent to the east side of the common. Recently, an inspector from Bucks County Council has been interviewing claimants to this application in order to establish the basis for the claim and the County has agreed to support the application to the Dept. of the Environment. The next step is for Bucks CC to serve notice on the landowners and, if there is an appeal, the DOE will set up a public hearing. The end is not yet in sight, but after nine years, a beginning has been made.

Paths and the Disabled

Downley has a new footpath and tree warden in the person of Owen Rush assisted by Bill Thompson. Part of their intention is to identify those paths that need repair and maintenance and then to either arrange for that work to be done or to organise some voluntary labour to do the work immediately. If anyone is interested in helping to maintain our paths then call Owen on 01494 534558.

Owen would also like to hear from anyone with views on how the disabled in wheelchairs could enjoy the countryside using our network of footpaths. Most footpaths are not suitable for wheelchairs and indeed wheelchairs are not suitable for

Diary Dates

2 April 1997, 8.00pm	Quarterly mtg, Sunnybank
6 April 1997, 10.00am	Sunday work party
16 April 1997, 1.30pm	Mid-week work party
4 May, 1997, 10.00am	Sunday work party
14 May 1997, 1.30pm	Mid-week work party
1 June 1997, 10.00am	Sunday work party
11 June 1997, 1.30pm	Mid-week work party

All work parties will meet at the Le De Spencer Arms

footpaths. However, it appears that it is possible to obtain kissing gates that will admit wheelchairs and likewise it is possible to find all-terrain wheelchairs. How can we put this to use? Is there a demand for wheel-chair access to footpaths? Anyone with ideas on this subject should contact Owen.

Survey Report

The Society has just received a draft copy of the report on the Conservation Survey of the Common being undertaken by Dr Chris Smith. A copy of this draft is being circulated for comments. If you wish to see a copy, please contact John Willson on 01494 525966.

**“The Hawthorn”
by Don Murray**

As I write this, it is not long past the Winter Solstice and I am busy and cold in the workshop preparing some offcuts of hawthorn salvaged from last November’s bonfire, These will be turned on the lathe for sale at the Society’s stall at Downley Day on a date very near the Summer Solstice.

In these dark cold days, it is nice to look forward to summer. William Morris, remembering his childhood near Epping Forest said “Whenever I smell a May tree, I think of going to bed by daylight”. Marcel Proust, thinking of Normandy, said the same (in a hundred times more words).

The hawthorn is a dense, wild-looking tree, rarely very big. Its flowers in a sheet of hauntingly-scented blossom in May. Its blossom can be pink, is occasionally red but (say the sentimentalists) should be

white. It is fiercely armed with needle sharp thorns and covered in dark red berries, or haws, as the year goes on. In northern Europe it is the hedgerow tree, or rather, it is the hedgerow. Careful laying makes a hedge impenetrable to both man and beast. Its name means hedge thorn and long before the advent of barbed wire it made it very clear where one property ended and another began.

Otherwise known as “May” or “Quick”, the common hawthorn has a long association with country dwellers. In a safer world when children could roam the countryside, “bread and cheese” was a favourite nibble in season and for those enjoying the rights of estover (the right to collect tree loppings, gorse and underwood) the dense pale pinkish wood has a high fuel value and when dry is excellent for turning. The haws can be used to make hedgerow jelly and were also valued by the local “wise woman” who made an infusion which had a gentle strengthening effect on the heart.

In country lore, the hawthorn is rather ambivalent. To bring its blossom into the house foretells a death in the family, while sitting under the tree on midsummer eve or hallowe’en can cause fairy enchantment. Fortunately, our common is blessed with many hawthorns.

“The hedges of quick are covered with may blossom,
And the dancers advance on the leaf-covered King.
'It's off with my head' says the Green Man,
'It's off with my head' says he.
(from the Green Man)

working as self-employed forester/treefeller. He became well-known in the village, always greatly enjoying conversation which usually consisted of a rich mix of leg-pulling, philosophy and tales of working in the woods. If you were lucky, epic stories of felling giant oaks and elms in the Vale of Aylesbury were an added delight!

When he retired, if that’s the right word, he managed a large garden/smallholding, several beehives, and experimented in chair-making even building a J.B.-designed steaming apparatus for bending chair backs. He was completely at home with his bees, garden and chair-making, working instinct-ively with nature.

He lives on in the D.C.P. Society with his instructions on bonfire-building - “always lay the branches the same way and roll them on, there’s no need to lift them. Then when they burn through, just pull out the ends and put them back on top.” And of course, if John had had his way, there wouldn’t be a tree left on the Common at all.

He will be very much missed.

John Willson

Obituary - John Brandon

John Brandon died on 27 December 1996. He was born and brought up in Lacey Green, then marrying and moving to Downley,

Membership Application Form

Membership Application Form	
Name	
Address	
Grade of Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Individual <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen/Student