

# Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 13. September 2000

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## AGM and Subscriptions

The AGM will be held on 4 October 2000 at the Village Hall. As the Preservation Society is being asked to present a proposal (see below) regarding prevention of vehicle access to Commonsides at the Parish Council meeting the following week, this will be the last opportunity to debate the issue. As this has been a contentious issue in the past, please come.

Also we are attempting to streamline the collection of subscriptions by including with this newsletter a standing order form which I would request that you complete and return to our deliverers who will be calling for it. Of course, you can still pay cash if you wish, but a standing order would make life a lot easier for us!

## Vehicle Access

You will find with this newsletter, a proposal for preventing and controlling vehicle access onto Commonsides for the purpose of preventing access by joyriders and travellers. We are currently consulting with DCPS

members and the residents of Commonsides to produce a proposal that most people can live with and would appreciate it if you could complete and return the form the Post Office.

## Electronic Mail

As secretary, I am starting to collect email addresses of those members who have gone on-line. To those who don't know what I'm talking about, don't worry, I will still be using paper. To those who can supply email addresses, you will receive more up to date information as it comes to me and will be able to make your views known easily when the society has an issue that it wishes to debate.

## Pond day

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September around 30 people met at the memorial hall to spend the day learning about and investigating ponds in general and our local Mannings and Daisy ponds in particular.

The event began with an illustrated talk about the biodiversity and historical importance of ponds from Jeremy Biggs, the director of

<b>Diary</b>		
4 October 2000, 8.00pm	Annual General Meeting	Village Hall
8 October 2000, 10.00am	Working Party. Coppicing	Dairy
15 October 2000, 10.00am	Working Party, coppicing	Dairy
22 October 2000, 10.00am	Working Party, coppicing	Dairy
29 October 2000, 10.00am	Work party, Bonfire building	Dairy
5 November 2000, 6.15pm	Bonfire and Torchlight Procession	Commonside
12 November 2000, 10.00am	Clearing up	Dairy
3 December 2000, 10.00am	Work party, TBA	Bus turning circle

Pond Action which is a research group based at Oxford Brookes University. We learned that ponds typically contain greater numbers of species than lakes and rivers. Many of the species in today's ponds are similar or identical to those in ponds at the end of the last ice age.

The two main factors contributing to biodiversity in a pond are the water quality and the physical features of the pond.

For example a steeply banked round hole will attract a relatively small number of species, whereas an excavation with broad shallow margins and a complex profile is likely to house a much more complex community. Pond Action now suggest a complex of varied ponds in preference to single stretches of open water where maximising the wildlife is the main objective of a new installation.

We spent the rest of the morning at Daisy pond which was reclaimed by English Nature in the early 90s. The group had opportunities to survey the plant and animal life which included Yellow flag, Water lillies, Rushes and Duckweed.

Diving beetles, Leeches and Dragon fly larvae were some of the many creatures identified in the water. We were treated to a fine acrobatic display by the many Dragonflies swooping around the pond on the fine sunny day.

After lunch at the Le de Spencer Arms we considered the propose drainage of the adjacent footpath into Mannings pond as a group 'exercise'. This is a suggestion of the council to deal with the waterlogged state of the footpath after prolonged rain.

A very interesting and thought provoking day with a lot of practical implications. Thank you Chris Woodley-Stewart for organising it, and all participants for making it a success.

Kristina Frydberg

## **From Mighty Oaks Little Acorns Grow**

Question. What connects George II to Elizabeth II ? Answer. Downley's millenium acorns.

The timber for some seven hundred oak acorns given to Downley's schoolchildren to

mark the millenium was taken from two trees on Downley Common with an age difference of about 250 years.

The darker coloured acorns were taken from a tree which was an acorn itself when King George II was on the throne. This once had been a magnificent tree with its first branches over 4 metres from the ground and a girth in excess of 3 metres. I do not know when it fell, but it has lain for many years shrouded in ivy, nettles and bracken; home for all kinds of insects. The oaks play host for more insect species than any other British tree. According to the Forestry Commission there are over 400 oak loving insects. These include the deathwatch, longhorn and cardinal beetles. As well as the acorns, this tree has provided the two 'hewn' benches on either side of the cricket pitch. One of these benches commemorates the life of a former Downley resident who was as much a being of the woods as the tree itself.

What, I wonder, did this part of the Common look like in those far off days? My view is that our tree probably stood well apart from other trees on a heavily grazed area bounded on one side by a drovers track and on the other by the Le De Spencer's Arms of the day. Drovers from Naphill area and beyond would overnight their beasts here before dropping down to High Wycombe cattle market the next morning.

The other tree. of which the timber is much lighter in colour is much younger and it's full life falls within the reign of our present Queen. It was only about 20 years old when it was felled by the society as part of our bridleway maintenance works. The tree was felled the old fashioned way using an axe and two handled cross cut saw. Although, in relative terms it was a small tree, it was exhausting work. How they managed the big trees I do not know. Apart from the acorns some other items were made from the trees and sold to Downley residents to raise cash for the Society. The remainder of the tree is left undisturbed to play it's part in the ecology of the woodland.

More acorns were on sale on Downley Day; all profits going to the Society's Tractor Fund.

More about oak trees another time.

Don Murray