

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 14. December 2000

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Thanks

Thank you to all those who contributed towards the running of the Bonfire and torchlight procession this year including Neil and Dan at Hughenden Manor National Trust for building it, Virginia and her school for the guy, John Mayger for supplying wood for the torches, lots of people for answering my last minutes call for cans and to the crew that assembled them. Finally thanks to those who ventured out in storm conditions to take part on the night. We sold about 150 torches, which while less than normal, was a very impressive total under the circumstances

Posts on Commonsides

The vexed question of posts on Commonsides was debated at our AGM on 4 October. Almost everyone now agrees that there needs to be some means of preventing vehicles driving onto the Common except for legitimate purposes and a majority agreed that posts are better than a ditch, bank or rocks. A smaller majority was then obtained for locating the posts along the edge of the road from the High Street to Narrow Lane and then set back 1½m from there to Coates Lane so as allow limited parking. However this last point was hotly debated and subsequently the decision of the Parish Council is to fund the posts only if they follow the edge of the road all the way subject to the constraints of the

A Childhood Memory

Happy childhood memories
Of sledging in the sun
Up and down the dells all day
Didn't we have fun

Chair legs for a penny
From a local factory yard
Oil a rag and wooden seat
Oh! it did get hard

The Common then our paradise
Places safe to play
Down the hills, back up again
We kept it up all day

Racing all both boys and girls
Over the bumps we sped
Bruised and battered home to Mum
When time to go to bed

Now there stands the cricket pitch
All the dells are gone
I am left with memories of
My days of childhood fun

Molly Green

Highways Department's requirements that posts do not come closer than 0.5m to the roadside curb.

As the consultation exercise clearly preferred that posts be installed rather than no barrier at all, the committee has decided to propose the installation of posts in accordance with the Parish Council's preference in order to ensure that the funding is available.

Diary		
7 January 2001, 10.00am	Work party, cut back hedge to track to Chilton Cottages	Bus turning circle
11 January 2001, 8.00pm	Quarterly Meeting	Village Hall
4 February 2000, 10.00am	Working Party, coppice planting	Dairy
4 March 2000, 10.00am	Working Party, TBA	Dairy

Mannings Pond

Some of you may be aware of the work that has occurred in and around Mannings Pond at the north end of the Common in which the pond has been dredged and the resulting spoil deposited in places around the periphery under the auspices of an organisation called "Plantlife".

This reason for this goes back to the time during the 1980s when the starfruit was discovered in the pond. The story goes that the Preservation Society decided that the pond was a mess and needed a good clear out. Assisted by a local Council grant, one of the then members hired a JCB which did a very good job of dredging the pond (depicted being almost lost in the mud) and piling up the spoil around the perimeter as the dumper truck couldn't get along the bridle path. Later in the same year, Alan Showler, a botanist from BBONT discovered that the rare Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) had appeared in Mannings Pond and was one of only two sites known in the country. The cessation of grazing and the lack of traditional use of ponds by livestock had caused Starfruit's



dramatic decline. In the few places where the plant survived, it was threatened by non-native invasive species such as New Zealand pygmy-weed. In great excitement he arranged a visit by a team of botanists from the University of Cambridge and two weeks later they duly arrived in Downley. However, in the meantime, a further work party organised by the DCPS, ignorant of the recent momentous discovery, continued the good work of digging out the sweet grass that was growing rampantly in the pond. The University team arrived to discover that the famous starfruit had been removed by the well-meaning attentions of the Preservation Society. One can imagine that they were not best pleased.

However, a silver lining exists to the tale as the following spring when the vegetation around the pond had recovered somewhat, the

whole pond suddenly sprouted with large numbers of starfruit flowers. It seems that the plant tends to go dormant unless its environment is regularly disturbed as is normally the case in a drovers pond frequently trampled by cattle. In the case of Mannings Pond, the absence of cattle had caused the Starfruit to go dormant and only the disturbance caused by the JCB brought it back to life again. The Cambridge botanists were of course, delighted and Mannings Pond became renowned for the famous Starfruit "discovered" by the DCPS.

Seeds from the pond (and from neighbouring Daisy Pond on Naphill Common) were used to populate a pond at Black Park Country Park, Iver Heath which was created specifically for starfruit in February 1992 with funds from English Nature's Species Recovery Programme. In the autumn of 1993 when Plantlife's *Back from the Brink* species recovery project for the plant was initiated.

During the summer of 1995, 140 plants emerged. However, each year since then the population has dwindled. In 1999, only one plant was found.

As concerns grew among experts about the fortunes of starfruit, it was decided to employ experimental techniques to mimic the actions of watering cattle to improve the plants' prospects. In November 1999, therefore, a work party of eight volunteers spent the day removing vegetation from the pond side to improve access for the livestock. This action also resulted in the area being trampled, thus providing Starfruit a chance to germinate. Since then about 18 plants have re-appeared.

As a result, Plantlife decided that they would attempt the same approach at Mannings Pond in order to revive the Starfruit, hence the activity at the site.

We will therefore await the coming of Spring with anticipation in the expectation of seeing the Starfruit emerge once more.