

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 22. September 2003
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Forthcoming Meetings

The AGM will be held on 2 October at 8.00pm in the Village Hall. The main event will be a lecture by Stuart King (www.stuartking.co.uk) on the subject of bodging. A short article on bodging appears below.

Subscriptions

October is time to renew subscriptions so please send your subs to me or anyone else on the committee. Standing order forms are available if you haven't already done one.

Commons Day

This year's commons Day was held at the Memorial Hall in Rotherfield Pappard on 20 September at 10.00am. The subject of the day was "Caring for Chilterns Commons" and the afternoon featured a guided walk looking at the wildlife, features and planned project work on Peppard and Kingwood Commons.

Bonfire Night

Bonfire Night is fast upon us and working parties will be starting to cut material (all approved by WDC) in October. As usual local residents will be able to contribute their cuttings to the bonfire site at the same time.

Please remember that only wood or woody material such as hedge cuttings should be left. We find that bricks, glass and old prams don't burn very well. We even raked the remains of an exercise bike out of the embers last year.

This year the bonfire and procession are being organised under the auspices of the Parish Council although the Society will be performing most of the work. However, this means we are being required to provide stewards along the route and around the bonfire and to restrict access to the bonfire by means of a taped barrier. However, we believe this will not detract from the enjoyment of the evening and we ask all visitors to respect the new arrangements.

	Diary	
2 October 2003, 8.00pm	AGM and talk on Bodging	Village Hall
5 October 2003, 10.00am	Working Party.	Dairy
12 October 2003, 10.00am	Working Party.	Dairy
19 October 2003, 10.00pm	Working Party.	Dairy
26 October 2003, 10.00am	Working Party.	Dairy
2 November 2003, 10.00am	Bonfire Build.	Dairy
9 November 2003, 10.00am	Clear up Working Party.	Dairy
7 December 2003, 10.00am	Working Party	Bus turning Circle

In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we have heard of the death of DCPS member Cyril Green. Our sympathies to the family at this time and many thanks for the kind donations to the Society.

Cyril was born on Commonside on 29 Dec 1920 and as a young man he enjoyed riding his Matchless motorcycle and going shooting. Cyril was the youngest of 6 with sister and four brothers. He was apprenticed to Cubbages as a plumber. He lived for a time in Oakfell and married Molly on 20 Dec 1947. They built the bungalow (Windrush) in 1953.

His main interests were his family (Hilary & Nick), walking his dogs in the woods, carving and making walking sticks as well as tending his garden and growing vegetables. His main claim to fame seems to be being fined for speeding down the Pitch (Plomer Hill). He was devoted to Molly and never really got over her death in 2001.

He died in Wycombe Hospital after a short illness on 11 August 2003 and we propose to plant a hazel on the Common opposite his front gate in November or December in his memory.

Owen Rush

A Short History of Bodging

The craft of bodging has a history dating back at least five hundred years. The bodger was basically an itinerant woodland worker who specialised in making cheap, but high quality, legs, back spindles and stretchers for Windsor chairs.

A pair of bodgers would buy a stand of trees in a woodland. Trees were selected, marked and felled during the winter months, leaving gaps in the wood where new seedlings could grow, and allowing young trees to mature further. This enabled the bodgers to extend the useful life of their stand of trees. After felling the wood they required, the craftsmen moved into the clearing left in the woodland, and lived in a primitive hut, thatched with brushwood, which they constructed themselves from materials found in the wood. Nowadays, these huts have been replaced by tents or corrugated shelters.



The bodgers worked in the woodland throughout the year, turning wood into its finished form as close to the place where the timber grew, to avoid unnecessary labour costs and the expense of moving raw materials and waste. Working twelve hours a day, a pair of good bodgers in the early 1900s could produce legs and frameworks for 360 chairs, from the raw tree trunk to the finished article, in a five and a half day week.

As the wood was worked 'green', the bodgers stacked the finished legs and stretchers in open piles in the woodland to season. The length of seasoning depended on weather conditions, as well as the greenness of the wood. When the seasoning process was complete, the bodgers would transport their finished products to one of the big chair-making centres, like High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, or Worksop in North Nottinghamshire, to sell them to local factories where the components were assembled.

In 1914-1918, each man would earn between eighteen and twenty shillings a week, including any money that he made from selling waste wood for firewood, little more than a general labourer earned at that time. Not all bodgers, however, worked full-time or were self-employed. They were often employed by a local farmer and only worked at bodging between other jobs on the farmer's estate, including mowing, reaping or thatching.

You can hear more about the old practice of bodging from Stuart King at the DCPS meeting on 2 October at the Memorial Hall in Downley.