

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 23. January 2004

Web: <http://www.downleycommon.org.uk>. Email bill.thompson@rotherwood.co.uk

Forthcoming Meetings

This being the winter months when all right-minded people stay indoors of an evening, there is no meeting in the immediate future. The next meeting will therefore be on April 1, 2004 at 8.00pm at the Village Hall.

DCPS Treasurer

Pam Brooks, our Treasurer for the last 15 years has finally decided to hang up her ledger and retire from the position as of the last AGM. We would like to express our thanks to Pam for all her efforts over the years, keeping us on the financial straight and narrow. The role of Treasurer has been filled by Ewan Mclean of Jubilee Road (01494 444854) who will be delighted to accept your subscriptions and any other money you care to send..

Downley Community Orchard

The Orchard project is not strictly a DCPS initiative but we took a great interest in it. On 6 Dec 2003, a group of local families lead by Kristina Frydberg planted an orchard of apple trees in a corner of Mannings Field next to the allotments that will form the Downley Community Orchard

A specialist nursery grafted cuttings from two trees growing on the common onto sturdy

rootstock to produce two new varieties called Willson's Wonder and Rita's Robin. Each family sponsored one tree and came along to plant it and promised to look after it in the future.



Bridle Path – An Update



Back in October 2001 we reported on the improvement of the bridle-way at the north end of

the Common and the somewhat radical resurfacing with old tarmac that had been carried out. The photos show that the passage of time has helped considerably and that the

	Diary	
1 February 2004, 10.00am	Working Party	Bus turning Circle
6 March 2004, 2.00pm	Orchard Work Party	Community Orchard
7 March 2004, 10.00am	Working Party	Bus turning Circle
1 April 2003, 8.00pm	Member's Meeting	Village Hall
4 April 2004, 10.00am	Working Party.	Bus turning Circle



path is starting to blend into the surroundings – or rather that Mother Nature is

gradually reclaiming it's own!

The Case for Quirky Commons – Part 1

'Beat a bush and spring a thief' was an old saying of the Chilterns -well, hopefully it's not like that now, but the 'wastes' of the hills still have their oddities, their very local uniqueness. (The local burnt out car for example -is it an Astra or a Mercedes?)

Commons of course are so much part of our landscape that we tend to take them for granted, to see the Common as just a place where you exercise dogs or children, an open space with a few houses scattered around, some of them perhaps built of traditional brick and flint. But a Common is the heart of the village, the community, the means of survival in the past. Their origins and history are fascinating, and their contribution to our current way of life and landscape invaluable.

Rights of Common, people's legal rights over the Common land, rights attached to habitations, not individuals, on privately owned land have, up to now, been the essence of Commons usage. (The landowner nowadays normally accepts public use of the land for low key leisure activities.) With the new Countryside and Rights of Way Act everyone will have the right to roam on Common land. (With rights come responsibilities...!)

The quirkiness of Commons, their essential differentness from the rest of the Chilterns landscape starts off with the fascinating Commoner's user rights - such as estovers, turbury, pannage, pasturage, and coppicing. Then there is the fact that nearly all the Commons just happen to be on the most infertile and inhospitable land around! High on the Chiltern tops is the 'waste', the 'moor', the 'heath' (Moor End, Dunsmore, Turville Heath, Flackwell Heath), just an inch or so of

poor soil covering thick layers of clay and flint. One can, perhaps, with a little smile, imagine the Lord of the Manor generously awarding Common rights to a few cottages on the edge of the 'moor', next to the local 'Starvall' farm. A bit of grazing and an armful of firewood (not over 2" in diameter), better than nothing but not exactly a route to easy living. "Thank 'ee, m'Lord!". What was valuable was very often what was under the ground, clay and flints. Usually the commoner had no right to take these; the landowner would have mineral rights and would lease these to local brick and tile works, leaving the locals to be hired as day labourers if they were lucky. Many Chiltern Commons had brick and tile making kilns and associated clay pits, with flint quarries in favourable places. Remains of these are there to be seen now, and make for fascinating exploration. Our Commons were industrial sites until very recently!

And now, from the quirkiness of turbury and estovers, we can look at the Commons today. With little grazing they are in many cases reverting to the pre-Common rights: Chilterns landscape -scrub, then forest, natural forest if left alone, a haven for real (unmanaged) natural wildlife. Hurrah, say I! So let's leave some Commons alone, or perhaps a part of them. They can be refuge camps for wildlife, waiting for the time when the countryside becomes the wildlife friendly world it once was. In any case, the local Common should be cared for by local people (with a little help perhaps). "These local people are the successors to the local people who have historically always used the Common, and they want our Commons to remain local". (so said Bryan Edgley in 2002, owner of Little Common, Cadmore End, Cadmore End Common and Bolter End Common within the Manor of Fingest.). This local use has, is and can be the fulcrum of community life (the 'common' experience), and thus continue to gain an individuality unique to the local scene. (to be continued)

Bill Bowler

We would like to record our thanks for the donations to the Society made in memory of the late Bill Bowler who passed away on 4 December 2003.