

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 24. August 2004

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Forthcoming Meetings

There will be a Member's meeting in the Village Hall on Thursday 2 September at 8.00pm. An agenda will be posted on notice boards shortly.

The DCPS AGM will be held on 7 October at 8.00pm also in the Village Hall. This will follow the usual format of conducting the formal business at the start of the evening followed by an entertaining lecture on a topic of local interest. This year the topic will be Badgers.

Committee

We would like to welcome Bob Cook to the committee and look forward to him making a valuable contribution.

Any other members who would like to join the committee would be most welcome as the numbers are starting to diminish slightly. The duties are not onerous – there is a committee meeting once a month at my house where we decide mostly what to do at the next few working parties. This is aided by the consumption of chocolate biscuits which are

needed to persuade at least some members to turn up!

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are due in October this year. Those of you who have filled in the standing order forms can relax as the bank will do the work. Those who pay cash may wish to come along to the meetings in September or October and pay in person. Otherwise, perhaps you could pop your subs in the post to me (address at the bottom).

We have a number of inactive members on our list. If they have shown no wish to renew by the end of the year, we will remove them.

Joyriding

There have been a number of incursions recently by car drivers particularly at the north end around the dells. Recent working parties have installed some defences including posts and logs but it is all too easy for determined joyriders to get past these. If members can be vigilant and let the committee know when incursions happen then we can arrange work parties to respond.

	Diary	
2 Sept 2004, 8.00pm	Member's Meeting	Village Hall
5 Sept 2004, 10.00am	Working Party.	Bus turning Circle
3 Oct 2004, 10.00am	Working Party.	Bus turning Circle
7 Oct 2004. 8.00pm	AGM	Village Hall
10 Oct 2004, 10.00am	Working Party – Building bonfire	Bus turning Circle
17 Oct 2004, 10.00am	Working Party – Building bonfire	Bus turning Circle
24 Oct 2004, 10.00am	Working Party – Building bonfire	Bus turning Circle
31 Oct 2004, 10.00am	Working Party – Building bonfire	Bus turning Circle
5 Nov 2003, 6.30pm	Bonfire and Torchlight Procession	Commonside

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The D Day celebrations in Normandy this summer reminded me of the valuable contribution that tank traps can offer, but I suppose they're a bit environmentally unfriendly for our Common! Still, if anyone has better ideas than what we are currently doing, we would be glad to hear from you.

The Case for Quirky Commons – Part 2

Our local Common is Downley Common, owned by West Wycombe Estate and locally managed with the owner's blessing by Downley Common Preservation Society (DCPS) in partnership with Downley Parish Council. Situated high up on a Chiltern ridge to the north-west of High Wycombe, between the Hughenden estate and West Wycombe estate it is a classic example of the roughest, most exposed land becoming the local Common! Local names give hints of Commons landscape and usage. We have Moor Lane and Moor Cottage, Commonsides and Common Wood; Flagmore Wood, Littleworth Road and Littleworth Common; Moorland Cottages, Kiln Pond and Kiln Pond Lane, Sandpits Pond and The Dells (old clay pits). Golf Link cottages and Golf Link villas are a record of a home-made golf course that existed here in the 19th century, after which its members moved on to form Flackwell Heath Golf Club. There is the Bricklayers Arms pub, and the Downley Donkey pub; I think the name referred to the donkeys on the Common, not the local inhabitants -but the Naphill folks on the other side of the Common dispute this!

Then, more recent quirkiness: in the last war a flying bomb (a doodlebug), carefully aimed at Downley Common, almost scored a direct hit and damaged some of the nearby houses (ours included). A local person said to me a few years ago, "Wal, mate, d'you know why there's so many blackberry bushes around here? No? Wal, that doodlebug blew them blackberries orl across the Common!"

Mannings Pond at Top Common, a drovers' pond, is now home to Starfruit. A very rare and now protected plant, it was discovered a few years ago by BBOWT, and then only a week later almost destroyed unintentionally by the

DCPS during a pond restoration project (the DCPS didn't know it was there, honest!). However the disturbance so invigorated it that it flourished in large numbers the year after and is now the subject of a major BBOWT, English Nature and Plantlife project.

Below Sunnybank, or Butterfly bank, a cheerful name given to a south facing stony slope, is Moor Lane Chapel, built in 1824, just six years after Samuel Treacher began Methodist services in a cottage nearby. 'Chairs, chapels and children', a local description of High Wycombe folk, is also very appropriate to Downley.

At the corner of the cricket pitch, on either side of the road, is the tank crossing made up of reinforced concrete slabs. During the Second World War, tanks, after repair at Broome and Wade's in High Wycombe, were tested and crossed the road on the Common here. In the woodland the tracks made can still be seen, a fascinating piece of local archaeology. The remains of First World War practice trenches can also be found, and some of the claypits were used for Second World War bridge building practice.

These examples are just a taste of local commons' quirkiness; more can be discovered through the DCPS Millennium Trail, and the DCPS website.

So try to keep a touch of wildness about your common, manage it locally for and by local people and never take commons for granted! John Clare, the Peasant Poet, who lived through the common land enclosure of his village, wrote:

*'Ye Commons left free in the rude rags of nature,
Ye brown heaths beclothed in furze as ye be,
My wild eye in rapture adores every feature
Ye are dear as this heart in my bosom to me.'*

Thanks to John Willson for permission to reprint this article