

# Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 25. March 2005

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## Forthcoming Meetings

There will be a Member's meeting in the Village Hall on Thursday 7 April at 8.00pm. An agenda will be posted on notice boards shortly.

## Subscriptions & Gift Aid

Thank you to those of you who have paid their subscriptions and a gentle reminder to those who haven't got round to it yet.

We are also planning to participate in the Gift Aid scheme whereby we recover the basic rate of income on all our donations (which includes subscriptions). This will entail distributing Gift Aid forms for you to complete and return to us. If there isn't a form with this newsletter, please ask for one – we can send them in paper form or by email if you prefer.

## Downley Walk

The Downley Walk will be held on Rogation Sunday as always, which this year is on 1<sup>st</sup> May. Leaflets will be distributed to all houses in the village so look out for yours. Again, if you don't receive one, ask for another or just turn up anyway at 2pm on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May. I look forward to seeing you there.

The traditional day for beating the bounds of the parish was Holy Thursday (Ascension

Day) 40 days after Easter. The rogation days fall on the four days from the fifth Sunday after Easter which itself falls on the Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. In different places these may be called Cross Days, Gang Days or Grass Days. Rogationtide is the ancient festival to invoke a blessing on fields, stock and folk emerging after a sequence of natural disasters in fifth century France. By the eighth century in England it involved parishioners 'ganging' after the Cross around the edge of the parish. This helped everyone to remember the boundaries before maps were commonplace. Along the way prominent trees often became places for preaching - Gospel Oaks. Locations of various landmarks - stones streams, hedges, ponds were impressed upon the children: in the past by ducking them, ritually beating them and then giving them a treat. Grown ups seem to have fared better: in 1595 a parishioner in New Buckenham in Norfolk said that he 'better remembreth' that the boundary went to St Andrew's Church 'for that he had druncke Beare out of an hande Bell' (Norfolk RO/PD254/71).

The enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries which 'fixed' so many lands into common, field and bounds killed many of the perambulations. But where they do survive they prove a wonderful way of getting into the countryside, different domestic customs are still practised or have been revived in secular

Diary		
3 April 2005, 10.00am	Working Party.	Bus turning Circle
7 April 2005, 8.00pm	Member's Meeting	Village Hall
1 May 2005, 10.00am	Working Party.	Bus turning Circle
1 May 2005, 2.00pm	Downley Walk	Village Hall
5 Jun 2005, 10.00am	Working Party	Bus turning Circle
3 July 2005, 10.00am	Working Party	Bus turning Circle

ways to offer a friendly way of looking at the place from its edges, checking its corners are in good heart whilst getting to know people. On returning 'home' you may be lucky enough to be offered *ganging beer* and *Rammalation biscuits*, although at Downley it's just tea and biscuits at the Le Despencer!

## Bonfire

We had another successful bonfire last November and the feeling is the recent changes to the organisation have made little difference to the enjoyment of the event.

However, one problem we are grappling with is the sheer volume of material that is brought along to the bonfire in the weeks leading up to the night itself. Much of this is commercial waste some of which is not burnable or is unsuitable (plastic window frames for example). The quantity of material is now so great that it is difficult to physically pile it into a heap. This has to be done mostly by hand as we cannot risk the tractor getting a puncture on the many nails and other sharp metal objects.

As a result we will have to place a restriction on the access to the bonfire site and to take steps to prevent people lifting posts to get at the site outside of those times. Please bear with us while we make these changes – there should be little impact on local residents wanting to dispose of small amount of garden rubbish so long as you come at the time when we can control it.

## Pann Mill

Several people have asked what information we have on Pann Mill and although it is not within the remit of the Society, we felt it would be interesting to our members to hear a bit about this local landmark.



Only 600 metres from the old Cornmarket and including delightful water gardens, Pann Mill is a heritage site in the truest sense of the word. For nearly 1000 years locally grown grain has been milled here, with power from the River Wye, using traditional millstones. The High Wycombe Society proudly continues this very basic production activity on three Open Days each year: the 2nd Sunday in May and July, and the 1st Sunday in September, selling the wholemeal flour that is made on the day. This Society maintains and improves the site on behalf of its owners Wycombe District Council.

Funds for the present mill were obtained by the Society in 1984, mainly from Marks & Spencer. Parts of the earlier mill demolished in 1971 are cleverly incorporated in the mill building: the cast-iron waterwheel, a pitwheel and shaft of pulleys, and some walling. On Sunday mornings, working parties of volunteers have since 1984, restored these remains, and installed traditional milling machinery rescued from a farm mill in North Bucks. After top quality hundred-year-old French Burr millstones were dressed and put in place, flour production was revived in the year 2000.

In early Victorian times over 40 waterwheels were busy along this 10 mile river valley. Today, Pann Mill's waterwheel, made in a Lane End foundry in about 1860, is the very last to turn and provide free power.

Peter Hazard