

Green Gym[®]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 28 June 2011

Jules Thomson and John Hasler

At the AGM in April, it was agreed by all that Jules Thomson would take the role of Vice President and that John Hasler would take the role of Chairman.

In recognition of Jules contribution to the Sonning Common Green Gym since 1999 he was presented with a photo album recording some of his leadership role at the sites we have visited; in addition Robert presented a summary of Jules role within the group over the years - see below.



To fully understand the considerable contribution that Jules, (our retiring chairman), has made to the Sonning Common Green Gym it is necessary to have a short history lesson. When the group started in the late 1990s, we were lead by Yvonne and her BTCV staff and we didn't have a care in the world. All we had to do was turn up. There were no tools to be collected; no health and safety forms, no dealing with Mr. and Mrs. Angry. It was all done for us. It was too good to last!

One day Yvonne arrived and said that she was off to Portslade to get the next Green Gym up and running, so if we were to continue we had to run the group ourselves. This meant that after the initial training and support from BTCV we had to be self supporting financially, administratively, practically, technically and promote ourselves to our customers and act as a successful model for future Green Gym groups!!!!!!

We were told that what we needed was a committee to oversee and action all the necessary tasks involved in running a volunteer group, and most importantly we needed a chairman to oversee the operation; no chairman - no green gym. At that time the Green Gym had neither the numbers nor the skill base that we have now and there was a period of soul searching (panic).

Cometh the hour; cometh the man ... Jules agreed to become chairman to add some order and the rest as they say is history. This was a seminal moment in the history of not only the SCGG, but of the Green Gym nationally. It gave us a chance to not only show what we at Sonning Common could do, but to show other groups that followed that it was possible.

Fast forward to the present day; we have a large group with skills in both administration and practical matters and Jules can now step back knowing that we are safe and secure for the future.

I am sure he will be around in future to keep us on our toes. After all, who else would remind us that from William Bird's original concept: "We are not a conservation group, we are a health and longevity promotion group; and don't you dare forget it".

Robert.

News From Parmoor and Flowercroft



There have been two more sessions at St. Katharine's Parmoor this quarter and the Victorian walled garden is really starting to look good. The volunteers from the Tea Warehouse (for homeless people aged 18 - 65) in High Wycombe were visiting every week until the end of February and digging two of the beds as well as planting seeds in the old greenhouse. Unfortunately in March a gust of wind lifted the entire greenhouse roof from the brick base and displaced it a few feet, luckily not injuring anyone. The photograph shows that with a bit of muscle and ingenuity it was replaced and stabilised enough for occasional use.

The Green Gym have continued to work on the top vegetable patch digging out the couch grass roots and all the other pernicious weeds. This was done both in April and May and as you can see at the last session (see Nick's report below) we filled large plastic sacks with weeds to an estimated weight of about 120 kg, as well as finding many old rusted metal fittings and a 'vintage' pen with a gold nib discovered by Julia.

Our contact on the garden committee, Keith Chanter, has himself been putting in a lot of hard work, digging and providing cuttings for the herb patch; which is also taking shape nicely as seen in the photograph. One of the polish residents is working in the garden full time and with a co-worker has managed to plant hundreds of potatoes as well as prepare and plant the



raspberry canes and supports as can be seen in the photograph. All the box hedge is sprouting well with no casualties from the very cold snap before Christmas, the honeysuckle hedges are also sprouting well as expected - it is hoped in time to replace these with box which is less labour intensive to keep in trim.

A Morning at St. Katherine's, Parmoor Saturday 21st May 2011

This morning we were working in the walled garden of this attractive manor house, seemingly far away from the madding crowd! It was marvellous to see that vegetables had been planted since our last visit, and it was reassuring to discover that the box hedges which we had cut down drastically last year were already showing signs of new growth.

Although our task of digging and weeding quite a large area seemed daunting at first, everybody applied themselves conscientiously to the task, and by the end of the session remarkable progress had been made with only a short section left to attend to in the future. As always the backbreaking task was made all the more agreeable because of the cheerful bonhomie and friendliness of the Green Gymners and the lovely weather which has made the Spring of 2011 unforgettable!

The coffee and cake break was again much appreciated, and it is amazing how that useful pause in proceedings gears everybody up so well for the remainder of the time. At the end of the session, although the muscles were aching, there was a sense of achievement, and irrefutable evidence of how successfully organised is the



Sonning Common Green Gym is.
Nick Odell

Flowercroft Wood: Message from Chris Webster:

We met in your woodland yesterday. I'm not sure if "Flowercroft Wood" is the name of all of it, or whether it becomes Kents Hill at some point. I had a look for Skipper Butterflies, and found at least 6 Dingy Skippers, though none of the Grizzled ones. There were also a couple of Holly Blues and a Green Hairstreak. However the real find was a Cranefly, a spectacular one I've never seen before. I sent a photo to an expert, who identified it as *Ctenophora flaveolata*. This is a rare insect, found only in ancient woodland. Its larvae are unknown, but probably live in rot holes in Beech trees, as do some Hoverflies. An important habitat therefore! Photos I took of these 4 species are shown on the right:



Don't Forget Andrew Hawkins' Butterfly Walk

In Flowercroft Wood on Sun 17th July. It starts from Rotherfield Peppard church at 2pm. There have been silver washed fritillaries and white admirals in the wood in previous years, and this year there have already been sightings of several unusual butterflies.



The Joyce Grove and Greys Court Ha-ha - or - What's so funny about a ha-ha wall?

What is a wall? A simple structure, built to serve a purpose – surely that's all there is to say?

Not so in the case of the quirky breed of walls called ha-has, built in the 17th and 18th Century on country estates of the landed gentry.



Tea Time at Joyce Grove

Ha-ha walls typically formed a boundary between the estate's well tended gardens and open grounds which were normally kept under control by animal grazing. These walls were constructed so that they were invisible from the house, ensuring a clear view across the estate. Ha-ha walls consist of a sunken stone wall – its top level with the garden, with a deep ditch on the far side: an effective barrier to livestock. Sometimes known as a "deer leap".

The unusual name is believed to have derived from exclamations of surprise uttered by those who encountered these hidden walls.

Ice houses are sometimes found built into ha-ha walls because they provide a very subtle entrance way that allows the ice house as a structure to be less intrusive.

Eric

The Withmead action teams

When the branch is bigger than the saw:
get in the heavy brigade.



Get that shed up and the new fence.



Scales, Scars and Sticky red things - training for winter tree identification

You see it is all to do with buds. Are they opposite each other in pairs, are they alternately spaced along the twig or do they spiral round it? Passing samples of various small saplings around the room we worked through the various questions and answers to identify the specimens of winter trees and shrubs handed to us. So here we were, 12 of us, in a training classroom of the Forestry Commission offices at Aston Cantlow near Wendover, on a one day BTCV course.

What we were using was a 'dichotomous key'. Despite the high sounding name this means a series of questions to focus on things like buds, bud scales, bark and such like, eliminating what it isn't and picking out what it is, using a description and picture as a further guide until you come to a final identification. This could be any one of the 43 species of British Native Trees and Shrubs. Sounds easy but then you come to realise how much we rely on leaves, form, shape and colour and these are not around in the winter.

Outside in the woods after lunch and things got tougher, lots of hybrids, buds out of sight but with lots of help from the tutor we got some of the basic types in clear focus. Lime, two types; ash, lots of those; hornbeam and beech, closely related.

A very interesting day with lots to think about and yet another dimension of our GG activity. Mike Saunders

A message of appreciation from Katrina and Martin

We have made the decision to move into London and live next to where Martin works. We have a house in Sunbury-on-Thames to rent until we find a place to buy. It has been inspiring working with you all, you are a great group of people and we're sorry it has been so short a time we have spent with you. We hope that you get an influx of new members who are able to stay longer than us. We really appreciate the time you spent guiding and teaching us. We also appreciate the opportunity to get out and see different parts of the locality that we would never have discovered by ourselves. Thank you.

I had a brief look and I think you are still the nearest Green Gym to our new home, unfortunately it is unlikely to be practical to maintain membership at that distance. When we have settled however we may review our lives and start up our own group, who knows!!

Best Wishes to everyone in the group and Long Live Sonning Common Green Gym!

Katrina Desborough and Martin Honeywill And many thanks to them both for brightening our group with their presence.

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