

Green Gym[™]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

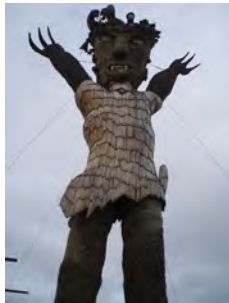
full of little cuttings.

Number 30 December 2011

[Return to Greys Court](#) this year we had an early start on the bluebell wood, in glorious weather and cleared the brambles and some of the bracken between the entry gate and the path through the wood. It was good to start early enough that we were not trying to avoid trampling the shooting bulbs. This year we hope with the help of Rachael, Jane and the other volunteers to get the brambles more under control.



[Aston Rowant](#) - As a diversion from the fencing tasks we tackled the sunken way next to the motorway and cleared the elder scrub form above the rabbit warren (the rabbits didn't seem to mind). The task was supervised by the watchful gaze of the wicker man installed on the hill on the other side of the motorway. The wicker man constructed by Dan Barton and schoolchildren from Oxford was to be transported back to town for burning on Guy Fawkes night to reveal another sculpture beneath. Chris



[Kennylands](#) - Choosing November the 10th enabled us to avoid the snow of the two previous years and we managed to clear lots of overgrown blackthorn. The team of 20+ split into three groups and worked in three corners of the field. The leader should have borrowed Nick's bike!

At the same time, the Sonning Common Village Gardeners planted loads of wild daffodils behind seats and along the north hedgerow and in our informal wildflower area.

Tony



"Eric's team at the Bird in Hand corner -where's Val?"

Freddie and Jean's late Summer Party

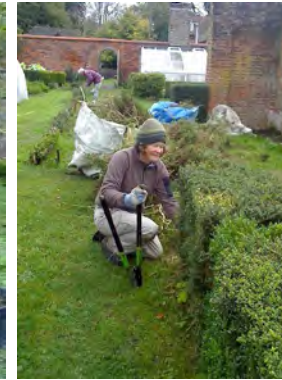
On a glorious day in October the Green Gym members and partners helped Freddie and his family celebrate a decade of working with SCGG. Freddie explained how working with the Green Gym had helped him during a very difficult period in his life, which was wonderfully gratifying since that was one of the original purposes when William Bird founded the Green Gym. Freddie and Jean's house is absolutely delightful situated near the Thames at Shillingford/Warborough. A possible history of the house is:- Originally belonging to the owner of a brewery it (and other buildings) were built on the site before any of the surrounding land was developed. Searches on-line indicate that this was



Field and Sons which operated in the 1880's before being taken over by Morland: "Morland became a limited company, registered in 1885 as United-Breweries and the company's trademark became a pyramid of three beer barrels. In 1889, Morlands took over O. B. Saxby & Co of Stert Street, Abingdon and Field & Sons Brewery in Shillingford. On the end of each of Morland's barrel was the initial of the old breweries with whom they had amalgamated. All the breweries that Morlands closed still had their own name and trademark added to their own beer labels, even though all the beer was brewed in the Abingdon Brewery." Other records seem to show that the Fields were associated with Long Wittenham: "The

Vine in Long Wittenham - It is known that Vine Cottage, as it was known until around 1890, was operating as a beer shop in 1847 and was run by Thomas Thame, who was a wheelwright and carpenter. Thomas Thame was born in Didcot, however all his children were born in Long Wittenham between 1826 and 1854. He died in 1852 and his daughter Martha succeeded him in the running of the beer shop. Martha married in 1856 and her brother Thomas then took over retailing beet while continuing the family trade as a carpenter. At this time the Vine was owned by St. Johns College, Oxford and was leased to a Mr. Field who was a brewer from Shillingford. The Enclosure maps of circa 1812 shows the cottage as being on a copyhold lease to Anne Field."

Parmoor - The Victorian garden at Parmoor was almost fully planted this spring and summer and producing masses of vegetables most of which were used in the kitchens, although some were sold to the public. Green Gym have been concentrating on extending the vegetable patches into the areas previously occupied by espalier pear trees. We have also been attacking the remaining overgrown box hedges (the ones we cut down a year ago are regenerating well). At the end of the last session Diane checked that no-one was taking any produce home for lunch!



Lasers and Loppers - SCGG joined two other Oxon Green Gyms to man a stand at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory in Harwell at an event on 9th November. The event was set up by RAL's health and safety department to promote fitness and environmental issues among their 2,000 employees, and they invited the Green Gym to participate as eminently suitable for the theme. Robert, Diane, Gill and Julia took it in turns to help on the stand together with members from the Abingdon and Wallingford GGs. It was a good opportunity to publicise the Green Gym as well as exchange ideas with the other two GGs. - Julia



Wendy (Wallingford), Robert (SCGG) and Margaret (Abingdon)

Watlington Hill - we returned to Watlington Hill after a long interval to help Jerry and Joe the National trust Rangers with scrub clearance. The aim is to open up the overgrown West and South facing slopes to allow the chalk grassland to regenerate.



Rokeby Play Area, Chazey Heath

We filled Robert's truck and trailer 3 times over with hedge prunings on Sat 29th Oct, and there were 4 bags more to be taken away at the end of the session. Robert took them all back to his house for a massive bonfire session helped by Diane. - Julia



Cleeve Court Streatley - Work is progressing well in the clearance and regeneration of the water meadows. We have been concentrating on construction of the boundary fences by the Thames path using dead hedging techniques. Spoil from the willow felling has been used to make the internal paths passable in the winter.



Where sheep may safely roam overcoming another of life's hurdles

Part 2 Making a hurdle So much for the theory

As mentioned in Part 1, I had signed myself up for a two day course in hurdle making so duly turned up at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton, West Sussex on a fine October morning all raring to go. Well, coffee and biscuits appeared for the 6 of us on the course, on a makeshift table, just like Green Gym (except for the cake of course, but that came later for the included lunch). Our tutor was a professional hurdle maker, Andrew King, all dressed up for the part in countryman's brown and greens.

After an introductory chat about hurdles we walked through the woods to the work site where Andrew had set up a number of frames, tools, gallows and chopping boards. All this equipment I have talked about earlier on.

Our first task was to use the bill hook to cut a section out of two sides of the working post to be used for pushing the hazel rod through thus splitting them down the grain. Off we went, but soon 'I've run out again' came the cry from almost all of us. You try, it's not so easy. You have to make an even split, applying a bit of pressure to this side and that side easing the split round a knot, keeping it steady. The piles of 'spent' used rods got bigger.

Let's get weaving Once we had some good split rods we could cut off lengths to make the sails and shores, The shores are the two end rounds, the sails split and put into the frame alternately bark side out bark side in. There are seven sails and two shores. With an even number of sails you can make a hole (a twilly hole in Sussex dialect) for passing a pole through so a shepherd could carry several hurdles over his shoulder. Then come the cross rods, rounds at the bottom and top and splits, bark side outwards, inner side towards you giving a stripe effect. By the end of the day we had got about half way up our individual hurdles.

The next day we started with a tutored visit to the tool artefacts store specially opened for us in the basement of a wonderful building called The Gridshell. The Museum has an extensive collection of vintage tools, building materials and farm items very much along the lines of the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University. The Gridshell is a modern building used for conferences and indoor courses and for various reconstruction and conservation projects. It has been built from many tons of green oak in a diagonal cross hatch way balancing strength with space, no intervening pillars and maximum use of the floor area.

As an aside (yes, I know I'm wandering on a bit) the idea is exactly the same as the way the fuselage of the wartime Wellington bomber was built and for the same reasons. This can be seen in any number of old black and white films such as in 'One of our Aircraft is Missing'.

Later that day Here we are then leaving the site carrying our hurdles and wondering 'will it fit in the car with the seats down?' We completed our set pieces turning the top rods back with a double twist round the shores and tucking in the end piece. A key skill is twisting the rods making them break close up to the shore so there is no gap but without splitting right through. You need strong wrists. A very useful tool for finishing off is a small axe called a knob axe though we cheated a bit using the non traditional loppers.

With my usual enthusiasm I bought my own in the museum shop, Swedish made by Gransfors Bruks, expensive but superbly made. I gather the Swedes are the world's most famous axe makers. Well they do have a lot of trees.

Mike Saunders

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