

## New Sites:

Cherry Orchard Stoke Row: This new site attracted a merry band of 22, including 2 newcomers, on 12th January. The main task was to clear a 4ft margin of brambles and gorse from the edge of a mound which had at one time been the base for a bandstand. The scrub at the top was to be left as wildlife habitat, but with paths cleared through it for children to explore. The spoil was burnt in the fire trailer. At the bottom corner of the orchard a small number worked on replacing a rotten self-closing gate. Even the gate was completed the following day when the right hinges had been purchased. Julia & Tony



Croker End: A familiar task of cutting back encroaching brambles. Tony



## Hedge Laying:

Hernes Estate: Despite working on both Christmas and New Year's Eve Saturday mornings, two dedicated groups ensure that another section of hedge was laid and bound supported of course by a warming bonfire. Tony



Reading Golf Club. This year a start was made on the lower section of hedge which required some attention to access it. The three consecutive Thursdays ensured that two sections were laid and bound. There is a lot more to do!  
Tony



## Mill Meadows:

Another wet task, digging out the reeds that were taking over one of the Mill Meadows clay-lined ponds.



Mudlarks at Greys Court: on 5th January was to clear part of the field pond by the bluebell wood. Robert, Jill and Jane donned waders to pull out large quantities of hidden branches. A surprising find was a pair of cow's horns. Fiona tried



them on for size. As ever, Robert was providing the expertise and muscle in reaching down into the muddy waters to cut the willow branches. Jane was clearing and carrying wet growth safely back to the shallows and passing them on to other eager helpers. However as we followed the tree out in to the pond the water got deeper and the muddy bottom got stickier and unwary steps would find holes that sometimes brought the water

lapping precariously closer to the top of our waders. It didn't do to stand in one spot for too long as our feet got firmly trapped in the mud. The workers posed for Julia to take excellent action pictures. It was then that complacency crept in ... Robert passed a log for me to take. Instead of disengaging my feet from the mud so as to be able to take the log safely, I half turned to take the wet soggy branch but, alas, my legs didn't turn with me and I did a graceful(?) backwards flip into the brown and muddy water filling the waders with water and turning my coat muddy brown. In spite of, or because of, my incompetence I was allowed to give up for the day and a soaking and soggy figure made its way back to the car where in order to keep the car seat pond free I stripped off my trousers and wrapped myself in the dog's car towel to drive home. Thank goodness I was not pulled up by anyone en route!

Jill and Julia

Some of the history of the Chilterns Commons was presented at the end of January as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded Chilterns Commons Project.

Graham Bathe explained about the Charter of the Forest issued in 1217 which recognised the rights of the commoners. The seven main rights of common being: Pannage (pasture for pig grazing), Piscary (fishing), Agistment or Pasturage, Estover (collecting firewood), Right in Soil (mining), Turbery (peat collection), Wild animals for the pot. The origin of rights are not always recorded and were assigned to land not to people. These rights pre-date the legislature, but the act of enclosure meant the extinguishing of these rights.

Jill Ayres gave an insight into the geology and archaeology of the Chilterns. The geology shows the effects of glaciation such as 'dry river beds' as well as springs and rivers which have shaped the chalk, clay, flint, glacial sand and gravel into what we see today. The archaeology is a unique record of the past because the land is too poor for intensive farming and hence has been relatively undisturbed in many places for centuries. As a consequence we can see pits, quarries, kilns, droeways, holloways, banks, ditches, boundaries, castles, hillforts, tumuli etc.

Alison Doggett explained how the landscape evolved slowly over the centuries and the enclosures were implemented differently on the poor soils. Clay with flint is ideal for woodland which was extremely valuable as the only source of fuel and building material. The Chilterns were named in Anglo Saxon times (7thC) and the Chiltern and Vale strip-parish model was dictated by the use of the soil with settlements at the bottom of the escarpment and daughter settlements at the top for summer grazing. Thus the strip parishes are like fingers stretching across the hills.

Prof. Ian Beckett gave a summary of the military use of the commons. There was an Anglo Saxon obligation to defend the community and in 1558 this became a statutory duty and militia were formed essentially to keep the peace. The quota of men assigned to the militia depended on land ownership and they had to train for 28 days a year usually in the summer and on the common land which was usually in conflict with the commoners wanting to graze their stock.

**Can anyone remember Christmas 2011 ?**

The traditional Aston Rowant scrub bash, bonfire and spud roast was its usual success and the weather was very kind to us.



The annual Christmas Dinner at Badgemore was well attended - all our thanks go to everyone who helped organise the evening.



**Another new site:**

**Nuney Chalk Pit:**

The 'A' team (Gill, Diane, Sian and Jean) with their textbook habitat pile



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# "THE LOPPER"

**full of little cuttings.**

Number 31 March 2012

**Sonning Common**

**Kingwood Common 4th February 2012**

**Joint work party with KPCV and Green Gym**

On a very cold but bright morning the Green Gym met up with the Kingwood and Peppard Commons Volunteers at the bench in the large glade in a joint venture of raking the brush cut glades. Raking was made easy by the frost on the ground as it was clear to see where raking had been done. Everyone joined in and it was great to see so much enthusiasm. The raked material was put into jumbo bags and then dragged into the trees for



**Raking it in**

**Coffee time in the sun**

disposal. The first glade, which had the most cut material on it took until coffee break which was enjoyed in the strengthening rays of the sun. Afterwards, we moved to two other glades to continue the task.

The KPCV group was set up by Ann Pearce and she has done a marvellous encouraging volunteers onto Kingwood to help manage it. The Green Gym never has enough time to do all the work necessary and Ann's group have been a timely arrival. We wish them every success and no doubt we will be having joint sessions in the future.  
 Tony

**Oak Farm:** We had a successful hedge-planting session on 21st Jan. Although this wasn't along a hedgeline marked on the 16thC map, its purpose was to divide a field for grazing purposes. One side was suffering from an invasion of bent-grass, crowding out the many wildflowers and resulting in what Tony Austin describes as 'boring flora'. Only horses can knock it back, so Tony was going to put them in there. The other side has very little coarse grass, so the wild flowers were flourishing including squinancywort. Julia

All hail the pale squinancywort,  
 Its tiny blossoms pink and pert.  
 Asprawl among the grassy mounds  
 Of anthills on calcareous downs.

Sniff in the soft vanilla scent  
 Of this rare Chilterns ornament,  
 And if your throat with quinsy hurt,  
 Take tincture of squinancywort.