

Peppard Common

The primary task on this visit was to cut back brambles and tree growth on the crossroads corner. In 2002, an award was given to the Nettlebed and District Commons Project and as the before picture shows the post with the plaque on it, as well as the bench, was being overwhelmed by brambles. Other work included clearing the two main footpaths from this corner and scraping away turf for more heather regeneration following the success of the 2008 trial. Tony



Before



After

Nettlebed Common

A large patch of snowdrops exist by the roadside and mostly they are lost under dead bracken. The area had been previously brush cut and so we were able to move in and rake up, leaving Nettlebed with its own display of snowdrops.

More raking was done on the heather glades and the path running east from Priest Hill was widened. Tony



Snowdrops



Path

Crocker End:

We were due to visit Temple Island Meadows in February but they were too flooded to work on, so we transferred to Crocker End in frozen drizzle to tackle encroaching vegetation on the green. One group removed thick holly from underneath a large old oak tree in the centre of the green and others cut back brambles and low branches along the fenced edge to reveal bluebell shoots poking through the earth. Despite the cold it was satisfactory work and we enjoyed meeting the friendly neighbours who joined in. Julia



Aston Rowant Christmas Spud Roast

The annual Spud Roast at Aston Rowant has become a permanent fixture in the SCGG calendar and this year was no different..... or was it? In the days leading up to the event it was becoming obvious that the weather was going to play a bigger role than usual, the forecast was for heavy rain throughout the day. In discussions with Bob, our AR contact, it became clear that a change to our work area wasn't on the cards but he did come up with the suggestion that he could provide a pop up gazebo and looking back on events this proved to be an excellent solution. A total of 18 members braved the rain not only doing some excellent scrub clearing work but also providing dishes for the feast. Out thanks go to TC & BG for nurturing the spuds in the bonfire, Natural England for the site, gazebo and spuds, all that brought food, Director of catering (Di) and her gang of helpers but most of all the volunteers that braved difficult conditions to turn up on the day.

Paul Forest-Jameson of TCV attended to present SCGG with a Green Heroes award.

Julia



Mill Meadows Pond

The pond by the Mill Lane car park has become quite silted up over the last 5 years, so the Green Gym had a session removing the excess silt and leaf litter which will give us more open water and better oxygenation, especially in the Summer. We hope this will improve the habitat for frogs and other wildlife. It may be rather late for the frogs to breed this year, but they should benefit next year. In addition the team started to clear some of the overgrown Hazel which was overhanging the stream and also slashed some of the brambles on the grassy triangle. Being a Saturday morning the Green Gym workers and the A-board attracted attention from the passers-by. Several people thanked us for our efforts in clearing the pond, one man recalling how 50 years ago the pond used to support frogs, newts, toads, sticklebacks and other spawning fish. Chris



Green Shoots in WATFORD: A Brighter Future for Stag Beetles in South Oxon

Robert, Julia, Robin and Brian joined the morning traffic last Tuesday to take up an invitation from Michele, the TCV-appointed leader of the Watford Green Gym. Now some two years old the group must learn to run its own affairs – Michele will be leaving her job there by next April. We were greeted by some unfamiliar and lengthy warm-up routines and threw ourselves into jobs of coppicing and clearing reeds with our new colleagues – you may well see evidence of our efforts on display in the neighbouring shopping parade, as photographers from the local college were also at work! Happily our Watford friends tell us they have gained much encouragement from our visit. There were lessons for us too – the Watford Green Gym has made an art of building housing for otters and also for stag beetles. Don't be surprised to find an outbreak of wooden stack-building for beetles across S. Oxon. Robin - March 2013



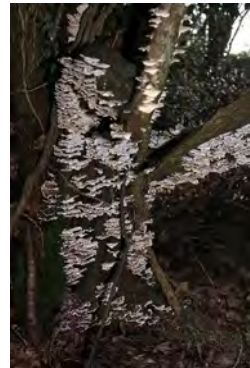
CANCER CURE FOUND ON PEPPARD COMMON?

The clearest possible sign that Peppard's secret has been rumbled will be the presence of turkeys on the common. The fact is that a remarkable fungus has been discovered: provisionally identified as *Trametes versicolor*, this valuable organism is thought by the Chinese to be a cure for cancer. On the basis that this is as likely as a spoonful of rhino horn replacing mid-morning cake as the aphrodisiac of choice, every effort is being made to conceal or camouflage the secret site.

The resemblance of the fungus to the tail feathers of the wild turkey (indeed its vernacular name is "Turkey tail") has given native conservationists the means of protecting the commons' latest treasure. Substantial orders have been placed for turkeys to inhabit the rolling heathland of South Oxfordshire, thus frustrating the quest of oriental collectors.

Next time you see those distinctive layered colours on the common remember, if it moves, it's a turkey; if it doesn't, it's a cure for cancer.

Mike Macleod
13th March 2013



Withymead: Great fun was had by all playing in the mud on a cool November morning. The tasks were to cut back some of the many overgrown willows and to re-connect the river to the lower part of the garden. Some years earlier the boatyard inlet was connected to the bottom of the garden via a small plastic hose. Although this was temporarily successful it soon blocked up, so we set about digging a trench to lay a larger diameter tube. The reason for doing this is to ensure the garden floods naturally in the winter to provide the ideal environment for the Loddon lilies and other water loving flora and fauna. Chris



Congratulations to Yvonne and Steve Hunt:

Pictured with Leo and with baby May, born on the 4th December 2012.

Yvonne sends her best wishes for 2013 to everyone at the Sonning Common Green Gym.



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Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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JULIAN (JULES) THOMSON 1938-2013

It is with great sadness we have to announce that Jules died recently in the Sue Ryder Home after a long illness.

The Sonning Common Green Gym was indeed fortunate to have Jules as its first Chairman. He became Chairman when the embryo group was forced to take charge of its own affairs. Without him it is conceivable that the initiative might have never got off the ground.

Jules was born in London and after school in Letchworth joined the RAF who paid for him to read Natural Sciences (later Engineering) at Oxford. While there he met Margaret and they were subsequently married in 1963. After graduation Jules attended Henlow RAF Technical College and was then posted to RAF Gutersloh in Germany responsible for ground signals and navigational aids. After that he was posted to various RAF stations in England and Germany including Neatishead, Locking, Cranwell, Marham, High Wycombe and Rheindahlen working in Signals and Navigation. Along the way he gained an MSc in Biophysics and

Bioengineering. He retired from the RAF in 1990 with the rank of Squadron Leader. He and Margaret had two boys – Alex and Guy born in 1972 and 1974. Margaret subsequently became a partner at Sonning Common Health Centre.

After retirement Jules became a member of South Oxfordshire District Council and was later Chairman. He was a Commons Conservator and member of the Greys Quiz Team for many years. He was also a member and honorary treasurer of Amateur Satellite UK. The Sonning Common Green Gym is now 15 years old and from the small initiative stimulated by Jules' appointment as Chairman it has grown into a thriving organisation not only in South Oxfordshire but all over Britain.



RICHARD HARRIS 1973-2013

We are equally sad to announce the death of Richard Harris.

Richard was born in Goring in April 1973. He attended local schools and then went to a school near Gloucester until he was 16. After that he worked for a number of years for Zurich Insurance in Reading and later at the Springs Hotel and Golf Club. He lived in recent years in his own flat south of Goring. He died in the Sue Ryder Home in February.

Richard joined SCGG in its early days when Yvonne was our leader. I remember his first sessions with us in Old Copse, rather shy and probably overwhelmed by a whole new group of people, as are most new members. He persevered and enjoyed getting stuck into tasks such as lopping and tree felling, and when we needed someone to help with sawing up thick trunks and heavy lifting, Richard was our man.

Richard preferred working in a pair, enquiring after our families and remembering their latest doings. If he needed encouragement in a task Fred Denton and Tony Chandler among others would take him under their wing. As time went by Richard gained in confidence. The great day came when he passed his driving test and he could drive himself to the Green Gym. If he was unsure about the route to a new site he would drive over it beforehand – no SatNav needed! And woe betide if there were any errors in the new programme – Richard was an excellent proof-reader.

Richard was so enthusiastic about the Green Gym and proud of his part in it, one of our longer-standing members. We shall miss the familiar sight of him surveying the scene, arms akimbo in his Green Gym sweatshirt.

