

# "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

No 6 Jan 2006



REBECCA AT WORK

AROUND THE SITES  
Flowercroft woods in November. GG was clearing scrub – privet, rose, maple in order to open up some glades and encourage new growth and woodland plants. The day was bright and still warm. The steep site was warm and sheltered. Some maples massacred by the grey squirrels were cheerfully dispatched. Altogether a very worthwhile morning and much enjoyed as you can see.

### Sonning Common Primary School

This was a totally different kind of work and as usual there was a good turnout of parents working with the GG. Here we were re-routing the "trim trail" so that it could be used at all times of the year. The tasks here were to weed and remove old bark chippings. This was heavy work but well assisted by small child size barrows and little helpers. Will this be the fittest school in Oxfordshire?

### Widmore Pond

Perhaps not a very glamorous job but one that is well received by local residents. Green Gym's task was to clear the footpath. Which necessitated cutting back a huge mass of encroaching brambles, its amazing how much growth one bramble can put on in a season. As well, at the top end of the pond the task was to cut back by the water's edge so that people sitting on the seat could enjoy a clear view of the pond and its resident bird life; who took absolutely no notice of the activity round the edges and continued to forage for food quite unperturbed. The work was enlivened by watching Robert jumping up and down in his trailer flattening the bramble cuttings. This ensured all it all went in and saved extra journeys. Apparently Robert had a real job afterwards to get it out of the trailer it was so tightly packed it was like a block. – a tribute to his jumping skills?



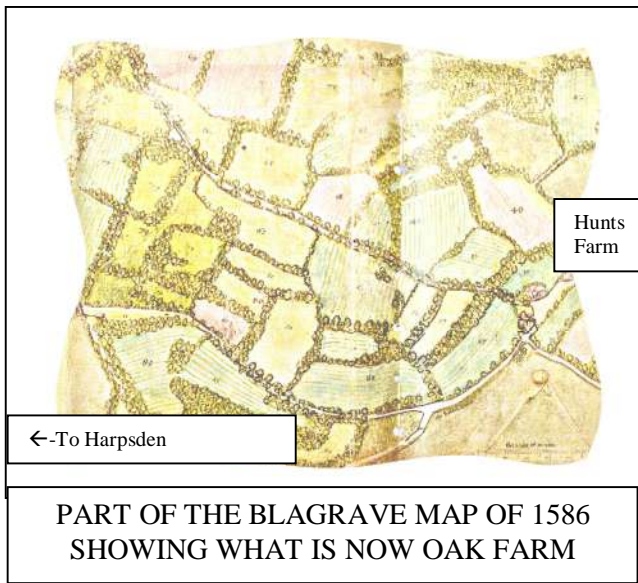
THE MIGHTY HUNTERS SHOWING THEIR PROWESS

### CLAIRE, JILL AND THE



FAMOUS TRAILER

## OAK FARM



This is another very special site where the Green Gym has been privileged to work. It is a small livestock farm of about 26ha owned by Tony Austin. It lies on a steep chalk hillside with sandy gravels at the top. Very unusually it was mapped in 1586 being only one of two such maps that exist in Oxfordshire and could well be the earliest map of agricultural activity in the Chilterns. When Tony came upon the farm there was serious deterioration of the land, hedgerows and trees and he determined to restore the farm field landscape to a close approximation of that shown on the 1586 map.

Going hand in hand with this he wishes to manage the grazed and the woodland environment in a non intensive way, without a single regimented grazing routine, so that a wide range of indigenous plants and animals will return to the site. This is a long term project which is highly manpower intensive



Which is where the Green Gym and other voluntary organisations come in.....They have had numerous sessions at the farm and have planted many, many hedge plants and it is fascinating to see the old field plan slowly coming together. Traditional hedge species are being planted to give cover for wildlife. Much old dead wood has been removed, most being left as habitat piles. Big trees have also been planted where they were on the old map. Every session has seen a new challenge and there will be more to come.

Already on the chalk hill traditional flora is returning. Non intensive sheep grazing will maintain the improvement and, of course artificial fertilisers will not be used. There is already a wide range of animal and bird life and such creatures as mice and voles are returning as the hedges spread. Owls, kites, buzzards, kestrels, sparrowhawks and many more birds are regularly seen. Deer(who can be a problem), badgers(regularly), polecats, stoats and weasels are also visitors. It is a lovely site to work on with amazing views across the valley and as one drives along the Harpsden Valley road one can look up and see the changes to this landscape and feel a pride in having played a small part.



WE ALSO HAD HELP IN FINDING RABBIT HOLES!

## More of Mike Saunders (amusing) musings

### **F is for Fred, fatigue, friends and family**

And so we come to F. F for **Fred** naturally or even for **Freddie** both GG stalwarts.

**Fatigue** possibly, but a nice sort of fatigue if you know what I mean. As touched on last time this can be a satisfying sort of tiredness, the body is exercised and toned, like the way you sleep better when you are physically tired out. But the mental aspect comes in as well. A feeling, maybe an emotion of purposeful and enjoyable fatigue, as a result of doing something you wanted to do and something you enjoyed doing. Not the same fatigue of a weary dangerous drive along the M40 to work all day in a hot boring environment. You have to feel at the end you have done something purposeful sort of morally justifiable and somehow for me GG just does it.

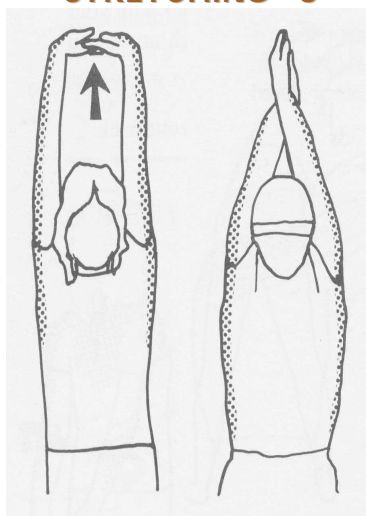
But mostly F must be for **Friends** and **Family** ( though not to be confused with BT).

Going to GG sessions regularly means working with people who become on nodding terms, become acquaintances, become joke – sharers, then friends. It's all part of the shared familiarity of working together with like-minded people engaged on common tasks.

There's something about working in the open air, lifting, cutting, digging, carrying, wheeling, whatever it is, that draws us together. It's interesting the way it works out. We nearly always seem to split naturally into several small groups or even twos and threes. So there is a sort of intimacy that encourages conversation and chat. It isn't idle chatter as you are doing some worth while work while you talk The chat doesn't seem to get in the way of the task as you seem to do more while you talk anyway. .

And another thing. The physical demands of the task and the environment, especially working in all weathers or under a particularly prickly stretch of blackthorn seems to bring out an interaction between people. The chat acts as a sort of social lubricant. The task is a focus of the conversation.

### **STRETCHING 3**



Last time, we established that we should only do valid postures as laid down by the stretching gurus. Moreover, the stretches that we do should be achievable by all. The two postures here represent the only general upper body stretches with the dots indicating the muscle area influenced.

The left posture requires you to interlace all fingers and reverse palms before pushing up slowly. If you cannot achieve straight arms then the area influenced is reduced to

fingers and wrists. If your elbows are bent then your shoulders will also be bent.

To practise the right posture, place your arms out straight in front of you with palms facing downwards and thumbs touching. Now rotate your arms so that your thumbs point downwards, cross wrists and hold hands. Raise your arms upwards while keeping them straight. When your arms reach your temples, you will feel the stretch coming on. Continue to draw your straight arms backwards to your ears and beyond if possible (remember, strain not pain). Note that the area of influence now extends down to the waist.

Most of us are not able to achieve the left posture and some of you do other non-valid postures! We can all achieve the right posture and this is the one included in the manual. Hopefully, why we need to change some postures should now be clear.

Next time, two ladies will be stretching their calf muscles.  
Tony Chandler

### **A LOVELY DAY AND A LOVELY FIRE IN SPRING WOOD** **Photo by Mike McLeod, Note the phantom Lopper editor on the R.**



## HENLEY SHOW

As usual the Green Gym had a stand at the show and Len Saunders kindly reported on it for the Lopper.

" This was my first Henley Show experience with Green Gym and it was so enjoyable that I eagerly look forward to next year's event.

Our demonstration plot and exhibit table had only a marquee wall between them and folding back a flap resulted in a very convenient set up.

A kissing gate and accompanying dead hedge laying were the tasks for about ten of us. The ground was like iron but Rebecca put in the longest spell of vigorous post-hole digging I'm ever likely to see. She and Mark subsequently wove the hedge and capped their efforts with the only kiss the gate saw!

Well done Robert, Julia, Tony et.al. for setting the scene etc. It was a good training session for all of us - and the gate swung shut first time of trying!

The afternoon held two surprises - firstly Julia dashed off to see a wedding attended by royalty; secondly there was a thunderstorm, the torrential rain soaked the back fill of the post holes, so much so that when it came time to extract them the posts almost popped out and said "Hello!"

Given that our local competition included a dancing sheep, pygmy goats, black miniature llamas and two wolves I think we did very well."



## FROM THE EDITOR

*This is our sixth edition of The Lopper with all its cuttings. I am very grateful for all the input from the Gymmers, particularly the splendid photos you give me. (photos with no acknowledgement are taken by yours truly). However it is now time to find out what more you want in the news letter. I, personally, would be very pleased to receive more written contributions with your comments. Please let me know what more you would like to see featuring and any changes. ( I can't promise too much re the layout as it has been a STEEP learning curve for an old brain!)*

## THE RELUCTANT LEADER

By Robert Watson

Many of you are aware of my feelings on task leadership. This is why my name does not appear in the new programme for 2006.

After leading over 150 sessions during the last six years I have finally decided it is time for a break.

With several new leaders in training and many other members more than capable of getting involved, I feel that I can step back with a clear conscience.

From 1st January 2006 my new Green Gym designation will be "Footsoldier, Third Class".

## THINGS TO DO----

1. Collect my P45/discharge papers.
2. Join the N.U.G.G.F.
3. Re-start my search for my optimistic hat-things can only get better, can't they?
4. Investigate the cost of courses at the special foot soldier academy- I've a lot to learn.

## NEXT TIME - THE DIARY OF A FOOT SOLDIER.

(Well as long as you keep coming to show us how it should be done properly and giving us the benefit of your experience we might just accept a new status of

## TRIP TO ISLE OF WIGHT

The joint work session with the IoW Green Gym is still on for Wednesday March 15 but the venue has been changed to the Botanical gardens in Ventnor. The site has a micro-climate of its own being warm and sheltered from the north and east by the Undercliff. The gardens themselves are well known and cover 22 acres of varied plantings. The Green Gym tackles the heavier work there and we have been promised there will be plenty to do. I am now checking out accommodation for the night of Tues 14 March and will do my best to get us a good deal.

Julia Booker.



## HEDGE LAYING COURSE

SODC is sponsoring free places on a hedge laying course to be held in the new year. The first day, on Sat January 7 covers the theory of hedge laying. It can accommodate any number of applicants, but we can only have six places on the second, practical, day in High Wycombe on Sat Feb 18 (maximum 12 attendees). If more than six apply the lucky ones will be chosen when the date is confirmed. The organisation providing the course runs other practical hedge laying days, so the Green Gym will sponsor everyone else who has attended the theory day on to one of those if they wish to do the practical.

If you are not already on the list please tell me if you would like to do the course.

Julia Booker



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