

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 60 June 2019

Peppard Common

Weeding heather at Peppard Common is always very worth while despite the continual bending and pulling. It is so easy to see where we have been. The bracken came out very easily and often with some rhizome attached too. Even the brambles came out with some roots as we have actually had a little rain at last. There were a few insect finds including a moth, but no idea what it is and not a good photo, possibly some sort of blood veined one; a beetle, which one volunteer insisted on holding to enable me to get a better photo; and when the sun shone there were small heath butterflies flitting about. We were asked to weed round the dwarf gorse, *Ulex minor*, as well as the heather as this gorse variety is quite rare in Oxfordshire. Heath bedstraw, *Galium saxatile*, was making white carpets across the area, interspersed with some swathes of red flowering Sheep's Sorrel, *Rumex acetosella*. This latter should not be confused with Common Sorrel, *Rumex acetosa*, which is three times as tall and looks more like dock with red veins in its leaves. And the only time it rained was when we stopped for coffee and cake!!



-Susan-



Badgemore Primary School

We enjoyed a delightfully sunny morning and had three major tasks to do. The two remaining sides of the greenhouse base required digging out, cutting and installing sleepers, levelling and back filling. One compost bin required the compost material moving to the raised beds and the remaining material consolidating in one bin. The small pond surround needed clearing and soil barrowed in. -Tony-

Tuc says "I dropped my sons off this morning and saw all your labours for myself. I was amazed at your productivity. As always, we are incredibly grateful for your support and it now allows us to start erecting our greenhouse and planning for vegetable planting in the raised beds. The old pond area looks so neat now and all those old weeds will allow us to create plenty more compost in the newly tidied compost bins."



Visitez le Tumulus!

Thursday 14 March and a gusty wind is hard in our face hindering progress as we battle our way to the site. This was the tumulus at Greys Court known here as the Prospect Mound. And a prospect it is with wide ranging views towards Rotherfield Greys and far beyond. The mound is (most likely, to be hedging my bets) a tumulus or burial ground, sometimes called a barrow, tumulus being the Latin word for 'mound' or 'small hill'. A burial with grave goods is often found within a stone chamber inside the earth mound. Barrows are found in many countries and in UK most notably in the area of Stonehenge but also in many other parts. Such round barrows as our site often date from the late Neolithic period to the end of the Bronze Age ie 2900-800 BCE. One outstanding tumulus near Carnac in Brittany is so big visitors can go inside and the chapel of Saint-Michel is built on top of it.

Years ago an aged retainer would emerge from its gloomy portals ringing a handbell whilst croaking 'Visitez le Tumulus' to any passer-by. Not many though despite the close proximity of the Hotel Tumulus.

Most barrows have been excavated many years before the use of modern archaeological techniques. Men with flat caps, collarless shirts, and shiny waistcoats would dig down into a barrow as ordered by the land owner. Victorian picnic parties with ladies in their carriages would assemble to watch and see what was discovered. Reports and sketches of the barrow and excavation often appeared in The Gentleman's Magazine or The Cornhill Magazine contemporary publications.

Well our visit was more prosaic. Scrub clearance, bramble lopping, clearing and raking and no grave goods whatsoever!

-Mike Saunders- (Photos- Martin Rhodes)



Rhodi -bashing! Even better than Ragwort-stripping!



I have always enjoyed ragwort stripping, that endless slow move across Gillotts Field creating one's own small cleared circle or square. It has such satisfaction in it seeing the couple of strands you cast aside gradually grow to form a pile of consequence hopefully for another GGer to collect and move it on.

But in my mind Rhodi bashing is even more satisfying. Now fortunately for me we have two such sites Home Farm in Binfield Heath and Borough Court Wood for the Forestry Commission.

So here we are at the Home Farm site where the great satisfaction of clearing a piece of ground nice and tidy is so obvious. The compact clear cut heap of cut material. The stark contrast of the trees that clearly emphasise the area we have cleared and the remaining mass to be worked on.



Some of those strong in the arm do even better using mattock or pick to uproot the stuff. Satisfying again to see a huge lump come away and with a long length of root to be dragged out attached to it.

Even the stumps we leave for Kevin to come and chain saw off have a strange poetry. Such angular structures, such strange beached monsters. No wonder I've relegated ragwort stripping to my number two and rhodi bashing to my number 1 favourite. Well it's obvious isn't it?

We have some wonderful azaleas in the Home Farm Wood, what a gorgeous splash of colour. It's not often a Green Gym session reminds me of a Two Ronnies sketch but this one does remind me of one hilarious such example!

-Mike Saunders-

Aston Rowant March 2019

Last year a new fence was put on one side of this compartment so it was not grazed. Brambles had regenerated and our task was to clear as much as possible.

The cutting crew had lots of practice previously and were soon putting slashers, mini slashers and loppers to good effect. The designated fire site was made up of tall brambles and wild raspberries and took till coffee break to clear. By then mounds of cut material were piled up. After the break, Brian soon had a fire going and some of the cutting crew changed their roles to carry to the fire site. Thereafter raking our cut area leftovers became necessary. This further reduces soil nutrient level and brambles left lying around can hook onto sheep and be a nuisance.

After lunch, the remainers (sorry) continued the task of raking and burning. Two small pockets of bramble were cut and cleared to complete an impressive large area.

Steph says "Thank you and the team for your work last Thursday. I had a walk round that compartment on Sunday, and it is now looking in much better condition. Please pass on my thanks to the team."

-Tony-

BABY BRACKEN PULLING

Green Gymmers have learned yet another skill – pulling baby bracken shoots. Sessions at Peppard Common and Moor End have allowed us to tackle yet another outdoor activity to add to our repertoire .

Instructions for correct technique

Approach the bracken stem, stand squarely over it, bend down and carefully encircle the stem with your hand(s) then swiftly grasp the shoot and pull.

On a very few occasions, to your surprise, it might come right out of the ground.

However if it breaks off neatly at ground level, congratulations, you have mastered the art and can confidently proceed with the job.

Move steadily across the terrain scouring the ground to see the next unwary plant for your attention – but every so often turn and out of the corner of your eye you will see escapees you have missed the first time. Spare them no mercy, turn, bend and grasp yet another victim. Well done.

Unfortunately the window of opportunity to do this activity is very small so remember this technique to be able to practise it again next April with equal success.

Beats ragwort pulling every time.....

-Jill K-

Binfield Heath

We spent a very useful morning at Binfield Heath removing the dreaded *Rhodendron ponticum*. I would compare it with hacking one's way through to Sleeping Beauty's castle, as at first sight the site looked impenetrable with masses of stinging nettles behind which flourished the dark foreboding rhody's. The only good bit was that they were happily flowering away. It is sometimes quite amazing what 15 people can achieve in a few hours. The daylight was soon allowed in with huge piles of our loppings along the track to be removed later by the estate. Hopefully now indigenous plants will take over, such as bluebells. A vacated thrush's nest was found under the rhody bushes. These are quite distinctive with a mud lining and very round. Tea break was back in the field by our cars with the most beautiful roses flowering at the edge of the wood. I think they are Sweet Briar rather than Dog Rose, as they were more of a cerise pink with a wonderful smell. Our Duke of Edinburgh awards student found a tiny frog and left it by the pond in the wood. Our aim was to eventually clear all the way to the pond....but that will be another day.

-Susan-



Burnt Platt

What is a Platt? And why a burnt one? The first question one asks-or at least me- when visiting this woodland site belonging to the Forestry Commission. Well after a bit of research all I can say is something like a 'flat area cleared by burning'. But I'm sure anyone who knows better will enlighten me.

Well we here we are for two consecutive Saturdays in April the first in squally conditions with heavy rain at times the second much better quite warm once you started moving. We had been here around two years before when we had the task of clearing bramble and infant birch-yes that woodland weed, from both sides of the main track leading into the woods from the approach road.

Back then we were tasked with clearance to allow the heather to colonise and the evidence of this is substantially viewable today. On the present occasion we progress further into the woodland on both sides of the track, clearing more developed



birch on one side and conifers on the other side. The objective is to clear a wider glade getting rid of obstructive trees (including

one vast rhododendron (is that really how you spell it?) rapidly colonising a bare patch as well as raking clear dead and dried out bracken.

We also, by request of the client, constructed a dead hedge with the brash a very attractive and useful way of dispersing it.

All together a very pleasant site to work upon. We had lots of tree felling, sawing and lopping, mattock work on roots and holly clipping back. Looking forward to coming back already!

-Mike Saunders-

Bishopswood in early summer

Ivy, ivy and more ivy. That was the task facing us – all the way down the right hand side of the playing field. So while others were in Horseguards Parade on the Queen's official birthday, we set out with loppers, saws and wrenches to strip the trees. What to do with the waste? The wind seemed to be blowing a force nine gale. In the end, as the wind was coming from the West, Brian got a bonfire going. Then, horrors, the footballers appeared! Luckily the smoke largely missed them.

But then the coffee break. A fantastic barbecue organised by Tony with the assistance of Fiona. Tony knows how to cook sausages. Including vegetarian and gluten-free and supplemented with cakes from Trevor. We dragged ourselves back to work reluctantly and got a fair number of trees stripped.



But we weren't finished yet. A game of Aunt Sally introduced by Tony involved attempting to knock a skittle off a swivel post by throwing sticks at it. It's fair to say we all (except Tony and Fiona) need considerably more practice. So a new annual event for the Green Gym.

-John-

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