Buildings Design Awards

Tour of Britain tackles the Chilterns

Getting fruity
A revival of local orchards
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The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1965 and covers 833 sq kms. It is one of 46 AONBs in the UK which, along with National Parks, are protected as the finest landscapes in the country.

The Chilterns Conservation Board is the public body established in 2004 to conserve and enhance the Chilterns AONB. Its 27 members are drawn from local communities and it has a staff team of 11.

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To find out more about the Chilterns AONB and the Conservation Board visit www.chilternsaonb.org

Photo credits: Chris Smith, John Morris, Chilterns Conservation Board

Main cover image: The Tour of Britain race near Saunderton, Bucks.
Small cover image: Autumn beech leaves, Ian Robertson.
Walking

North Chiltern Trail

The Chiltern Society has launched a new circular footpath in the north Chilterns, the ‘North Chiltern Trail’, to encourage people to explore this lovely area on foot. This builds on the success of the Chiltern Way, the long distance walking route around the Chilterns, established by the Society in 2000.

The North Chiltern Trail has been created by combining part of the Chiltern Way with other footpaths to form a 67km/42 mile loop through the delightful Chilterns countryside in Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire, some of which is in the AONB. The route includes Lilley, Warden and Gailey Hills, the nature reserves at Sharpenhoe Clappers, Barton Hills and Pegsdon Hills, Great Offley, St Paul’s Walden, Whitwell and Breachwood Green.

There are extensive views and outstanding landscapes, plenty of wildlife and some intriguing industrial and agricultural archaeology. The route can be divided into 9 sections making it ideal to walk over a series of days. It is fully waymarked.

To find out more including details of the route and the guidebook to the Trail visit www.chilternsociety.org.uk/about-NChltnTrail

New circular walks

The latest addition to the Chilterns Country walk series is ‘Walks on commons near Berkhamsted’. The Chilterns Commons Project has devised two circular routes of around 8 miles each, one starting from Berkhamsted and the other from the National Trust Visitor Centre at Ashridge. The two can be joined to make a 17 mile route. The walks take in some of the biggest commons in the Chilterns and some stunning views. You can see the remains of WW1 training trenches, historic Berkhamsted Castle, the imposing Ashridge House and walk alongside the Grand Union Canal.

Download the walk leaflet at www.chilternsaonb.org/walks-rides

Promoting the Ridgeway

The promotion of the Ridgeway National Trail is being revitalised by a new partnership which is keen to raise the profile of the Trail as a route that can be enjoyed on day visits and weekend breaks as well as by long-distance walkers. The Conservation Board has played a leading role in setting up the shadow Ridgeway Partnership which includes Oxfordshire County Council (who host the Trail’s staff team), the Chiltern Society, the Friends of the Ridgeway, English Heritage and the North Wessex Downs AONB. From April 1st 2015 the Partnership will be fully operational, bringing new ideas and energy to promoting one of the UK’s flagship walking routes.

More views and avenues at Tring Park

Lots is happening in the historic parkland at Tring Park as a result of a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Woodland Trust, which manages the Park, and the Natural History Museum at Tring are working on a project to restore some of the Park’s historic features and help more people to enjoy this gem of the Chilterns. A new car park has been created off Hastoe Lane and there will soon be a natural play area for children. Some of the tree avenues created by the Park’s former owners the Rothschilds are being restored and views along the Ridgeway National Trail where it passes through the woodland are being opened up.

The Chilterns Country Beacon View Walk goes through Tring Park – download it at www.chilternsaonb.org/walks-rides
Cycling

Tour of Britain 2014

Were you one of the thousands who enjoyed the spectacle of the UK’s biggest professional cycle race as it zoomed through the Chilterns on September 12th 2014? Local communities gave huge support to Sir Bradley Wiggins, Mark Cavendish and all the other riders, leading the organisers to declare that it was “the best stage ever”. The benefits of the race will be long-lasting, according to Sara Randle of the Cycle Chilterns Project which helped to bring it to the Chilterns: “The Tour of Britain showcased the Chilterns as a great place for leisure cycling as well as offering challenges to those that want to test themselves against the pros. Local pubs, accommodation providers and shops will all benefit from the area’s increased profile.”

If you fancy trying out the Chilterns section of the race route the Cycle Chilterns Project has put together a 93 mile circular ride from Hemel Hempstead whose last 50 miles follow the route. It uses large sections of the Chilterns Cycleway providing a really enjoyable weekend’s riding.

Find the ride details on www.cyclechilterns.co.uk

Get on your bike

There’s no excuse to ignore your bicycle this winter - the Cycle Chilterns Project is offering plenty of opportunities to people of all ages and fitness levels to get out on two wheels.

The Project is offering a wide range of guided and self-guided bike rides over the winter. There are Ladies Rides aimed at women who’d like to get back into cycling or who just want to enjoy an easy relaxed ride in company. They are led by an experienced female cyclist and are about an hour long, starting from a number of Buckinghamshire market towns.

Rusty riders of either sex can join a Health Ride to brush up on their skills and regain confidence. These are short, led rides of about an hour which use bridleways and quiet country roads and travel at a leisurely pace.

For those that enjoy a longer ride with an incentive to get to the finish why not try one of the popular Brewery Rides. The Project has teamed up with a number of local breweries to offer self-guided circular routes that include a brewery en route or at the finish. On arrival you’ll be rewarded with a free pint or a soft drink and there may be the chance to do a tour. Check the website for details of the latest events.

All the latest Cycle Chilterns activities and events can be found on www.cyclechilterns.co.uk

The Cycle Chilterns Bike Hub has opened at the Bicycle Workshop in Great Missenden. It has bikes available for hire, including electric bikes, and is a good place to take your own bike if needs repairs or a service.

Visit www.bicycleworkshopgreatmissenden.co.uk for more information.
**NEWS AT THE BOARD**

**NEW BURSARIES ON OFFER**

The Conservation Board has launched four research bursaries worth £250 each. They are available annually to anyone who wants to carry out a study or research project of relevance to the Board’s aims and which would benefit the Chilterns AONB. The bursaries are divided into four themes:

- The Shirley Judges Bursary for Historic and Cultural Environment
- The Roger Emmett Bursary for Landscape and Land Use
- The Steve Rodrick Bursary for Enjoyment of the Countryside
- Water Environment and Wildlife

To find out more and apply for a bursary, please visit [www.chilternsaonb.org/bursaries](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/bursaries)

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**NEW CHAIRMAN AND BOARD MEMBERS**

Cllr Ian Reay of Hertfordshire County Council was appointed Chairman in June. Helen Tuffs was appointed Vice Chairman. Three new members have been appointed by the Secretary of State: Gill Gowing, from Rickmansworth, was formerly Director of Planning and the Environment at Chiltern District Council, Elizabeth Wilson is Reader in Environmental Planning at Oxford Brookes University and Ian Waller farms at Hampden Bottom Farm near Great Missenden.

There are two new parish council members: Anthony Penn from Buckland, elected by Buckinghamshire parishes and Simon Deacon from Markyate, elected by Hertfordshire parishes.

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**SHIRLEY JUDGES 1949–2014**

The Board was saddened by the death in July of Shirley Judges, who had been a Board member for over 10 years. “Shirley was one of the first members appointed to the Chilterns Conservation Board. During those 10 years she made an outstanding contribution. Her tireless efforts to stop the ravages of High Speed 2 were matched by her desire to share her passion for the history and archaeology of the Chilterns. We have lost a dear friend and will miss her enthusiasm, dedication and infectious humour,” said Ian Reay, Chairman of the Board.

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**CHIEF OFFICER RETIRES AFTER 20 YEARS**

Steve Rodrick will be retiring at the end of 2014 after 20 years, first as AONB Officer and then Chief Officer of the Conservation Board. During Steve’s tenure the management of the Chilterns AONB has undergone huge development, with the establishment of the Conservation Board in 2004, one of only two such Boards in the country, and a staff team which has grown to 11.

The Board’s Chairman, Ian Reay, paid tribute to Steve’s enormous contribution to the conservation and promotion of the Chilterns: “Steve has been an inspiration as the first Chief Officer of the Chilterns Conservation Board. With a sure hand he has guided its formation and early development and has made it a model of how to protect special landscapes. A few of the Board’s achievements under his management include the long-term project to conserve and improve the condition of chalk streams, raising awareness of red kites as a wildlife spectacle, a major project to increase the enjoyment and conservation of commons and a project to preserve the box woodlands of the Chilterns. In recent years he has fought hard and successfully to maintain the viability of the Board in the face of significant financial and development challenges. We shall miss him.”

The Board’s Countryside Officer Kath Daly has been appointed Acting Chief Officer for a six month period from January 2015.

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**NOTICE BOARD**

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**Board celebrates 10th anniversary**

On December 14th 2014 it will be 10 years since the Chilterns Conservation Board was established. This pioneering body is one of only two organisations in the country set up to conserve and promote an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the other being the Cotswolds Conservation Board, established on the same day).

In 2000 the Countryside and Rights of Way Act gave the go-ahead for a new type of independent organisation, led by local people, to care for AONBs. The benefit to the Chilterns AONB of having its own independent body committed to protecting it long-term was summed up by Chief Officer Steve Rodrick at the launch event: “Becoming a Conservation Board represents a new and exciting era for the Chilterns AONB – it gives us a powerful voice in securing the best possible future for this protected landscape – for both the outstanding quality of its landscape and for the people who live and work here.”

**What has the Board achieved in its first 10 years?**

Here are a few facts and figures:

- Organised over 90 events on conservation, farming, planning, history and rights of way.
- Supported 201 local projects with grants totalling £438,000.
- Distributed over 730,000 information leaflets.
- Handed out 32 awards for good building design.
- Won over £0.5 million in grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund for projects on commons, wildlife, history and box woodland.
- Carried out 172 radio and TV interviews promoting the Chilterns.
- Established the Chilterns Cycleway.
- Won a national award for the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project.
- And much, much more!

Find out more about the Board’s achievements at [www.chilternsaonb.org/annual-review-accounts](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/annual-review-accounts).

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**New pot of money for rural businesses**

From 1st January 2015 farmers, foresters, rural businesses and communities will once again be able to apply to the Chilterns LEADER programme for grants. The programme has a new pot of funding from the EU and will be giving out grants during 2015–2019.

A LEADER grant helped Hill Farm near Eaton Bray to diversify into glamping with two luxury wooden wigwams.

The exact priorities for the new programme have not been published yet, but the overall aim of LEADER is to strengthen the rural economy. Projects to diversify farm businesses, add value to timber products, create environmentally-friendly tourism facilities or improve the assets of rural communities are all of interest. They must be located in the Chilterns AONB.

The previous round of LEADER funding from 2008–2013 awarded grants of up to £50,000 to 65 projects in the Chilterns. “During the last round we were able to help a significant number of businesses to start, expand, to get more value out of their products, become more secure and take on more staff,” said Nick Phillips, Programme Manager. “Now we are looking forward to new funds coming on stream we are really keen to hear from anyone with a good idea to improve a business, tourist or community facility in the Chilterns.”

Find out more about LEADER at [www.leader-programme.org.uk](http://www.leader-programme.org.uk) or contact Nick via 01494 568969 or nick.phillips@leader-programme.org.uk.
A great variety of entries were received for this year’s Chilterns Buildings Design Award. However, it was a highly imaginative restoration of a Georgian cottage in Beaconsfield that caught the judges’ eyes and won the top award.

**Overall winner 5 Windsor End, Beaconsfield**

A sympathetic and innovative transformation of a derelict terrace cottage in the heart of Beaconsfield won the top award this year. Described as ‘courageous’ by the judges, owners Sarah Boddington and Jonathan Sobczyk rescued the listed 250 year-old building, restoring its Georgian façade whilst transforming the rear and interior of the property with imagination and flair.

“The cottage had been derelict for almost 20 years, the back wall was falling down and important historical fittings, such as the original spit racks from the fireplace were left disregarded and rotting. We were very keen to make it into a comfortable home while staying true to its original character and re-using as many materials as we could. The whole project took a year and we’re absolutely delighted with the end result. We had a lot of help from family, not least my grandfather who was the architect and Michael and his team who are craftsmen of the highest ability. To win the Design Award on top is a really unexpected bonus!” said Jonny Sobczyk.

We were very keen to make it into a comfortable home while staying true to its original character ...

Jonathan Sobczyk, owner

The judges were particularly impressed with the imaginative way an outbuilding at the rear has been incorporated into the ground floor layout to contain the kitchen. The original roof timbers have been retained in the extended loft to create an unusual and attractive feature in the new third bedroom.

“Using traditional materials and workmanship of the highest quality means this project has greatly enhanced its surroundings in a historic part of Beaconsfield,” said Richard Wheeler, Chairman of the judging panel.

Owners: Sarah Boddington and Jonathan Sobczyk
Architect: Brian Jones, Harden, West Yorkshire
Builder: Michael Gardien, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

View from the kitchen to the central courtyard
Highly Commended
Marchants Farm, Pudds Cross, Bovingdon

Seven years ago the Proctor family took on a neglected farm near Bovingdon with the intention of turning it back into a successful enterprise. Using their 70 years-worth of farming experience they are now running an arable and beef business on its 150 acres, and they have also transformed the listed but uninhabitable farmhouse and outbuildings into a comfortable family home.

This project has been highly successful in retaining the original character of the buildings.

Richard Wheeler, Chairman of the Chilterns Buildings Design Awards judging panel

The 400 year-old house was restored using traditional materials such as lime plasterwork and lime wash paint, with a minimum of alterations to the inside and outside. At the same time, a lot of insulation was installed in floors and the roof to bring it up to modern standards. The attached courtyard buildings were converted to ancillary accommodation and a farm office.

“This project has been highly successful in retaining the character of the original buildings and the new additions are charming and modest,” said Richard Wheeler.

Owner: Mrs. P. Proctor
Architect: Edward Hunt, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire
Builder: C. J. Hammond Builders Ltd., Marsworth, Buckinghamshire

Special Award
Barn, Lower Farm, Britwell Salome

The new barn at Lower Farm is a great example of its owner’s belief in saving and re-using materials from old buildings – 80% of it is built from salvaged timber, bricks and roof sheets. Paul Sargeantson sourced a lot of the timber from local barns that were about to be pulled down, including one at Crays Pond and another in Pyrton. The posts at the front were cut from discarded lock timbers found at a nearby tip and the bricks were salvaged from a collapsed barn at Cookley Green. Paul, who works to restore old buildings, built most of the barn himself.

The resulting building is a simple, traditional open-fronted barn which is used to store machinery. The judges admired the way its design and materials help it to sit very comfortably within its farmyard setting.

Owners and architect: Paul and Fiona Sargeantson
Builder: Paul Sargeantson

2015 awards
Entries are welcome for the 2015 Chilterns Buildings Design Awards. The awards are offered annually by the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chiltern Society to encourage high standards of design and construction in the Chilterns AONB. The closing date is March 1st 2015 and schemes must be three years old or less.

Entry forms are available from the Chiltern Society on 01494 771250 or email office@chilternsaonb.org
A fruitful land

Some parts of the Chilterns were covered in orchards a hundred years ago, producing cherries and plums principally which were sent all over the country. This commercial industry is no more but there has been a resurgence in fruit-growing and juicing by local communities.

History

The Chilterns area was once famous for its cherry and prune orchards, which covered thousands of acres at their peak in the early twentieth century. Villages in southern Buckinghamshire including Prestwood, Flackwell Heath and Holmer Green were particularly known for their cherry industry and in the fruit-picking months of June and July most local people would have got involved, as well as many seasonal pickers from further afield.

Local varieties of cherries, plums and apples were developed, such as the Prestwood Black cherry and the Lane’s Prince Albert apple from Berkhamsted. One of the most famous local fruits is the Aylesbury Prune, a type of cooking plum which was grown almost exclusively along the foot of the Chilterns through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. They were delivered by railway to towns across Britain. The prune orchards provided perfect grazing for poultry including Aylesbury ducks.

In spring the countryside was transformed by the spectacle of the cherry blossom, which drew in tourists from London and elsewhere who came to stroll the rural lanes and admire the fluffy clouds of petals. The summer cherry harvest in the villages was a real community event, with men, women and children all turning out to take part. Traditional cherry trees were very tall, up to 20m in height, so the pickers used long wooden ladders which were flared at the base for stability. Everyone celebrated the end of the harvest and enjoyed the fruits of their labours on ‘Cherry Pie Sunday’, the first Sunday in August.

20th century decline

During the twentieth century the Chilterns could not compete with the dominance other fruit-growing areas such as Kent and Herefordshire and increasing imports of fruit from the continent. The orchards of the Chilterns began a slow decline. Cherry trees are not long-lived, their typical maximum age is 120 years, so without regular planting of new trees the orchards...
became quite aged after a few decades. Today many hundreds of orchards survive, some just fragments, but very few are commercially productive.

Orchards still have great value, as a traditional part of the Chilterns landscape and as homes for insects, especially bees, and other wildlife. As well as those that survive you can also see mature cherry trees blossoming in local hedgerows and woods, remnants of this once incredibly-important local industry.

What’s happening today?

Public interest in local food and healthy eating has been increasing for some years, and not surprisingly this has led to a resurgence of activity in growing orchard fruits. There is particular interest in growing and juicing traditional varieties of apples. There are plenty of apple-themed events in the autumn such as the Tring Apple Fayre and Apple Days at the National Trust’s Hughenden Manor near High Wycombe.

Quite a few towns and villages in the Chilterns now have their own community orchards which not only provide fresh fruit but also green spaces for people to enjoy the outdoors and get involved in planting and managing the trees. Many are growing local traditional varieties of fruit to help keep these rarities alive and to have lots of tasty, distinctive produce to enjoy:

- In 2013 a community orchard was created in Chesham next to Lowndes Park, with young apple, pear, cherry and plum trees planted including an Aylesbury Prune. These should be producing an abundance of fruit in years to come.
- Two years ago the National Trust worked with villagers and school children in Whipsnade to plant a community orchard next to the Whipsnade Tree Cathedral, as a celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.
- Chorleywood Community Orchard, started in 2009, now has 91 varieties of apple, cherry, plum and damson trees, many of them local to Hertfordshire.
- Other community orchards include ones in Chalfont St Peter, Downley near High Wycombe and Rotherfield Peppard near Henley.

In 2010 the Chiltern Open Air Museum at Chalfont St Giles planted a new cherry orchard using rare local varieties including the memorably-named Frogmore Early, Dangler and Doesn’t Split. The Museum houses an original cherry-picking ladder from the 1920s. At 18m it is so long it has to be stored horizontally across tie beams in one of the Museum’s old barns.

The Conservation Board is organising a training course on restorative pruning of orchard trees to improve their productivity and life span.

If you are interested, contact Neil Jackson at the Board on 01844 355523 or email njackson@chilternsaonb.org

The Chilterns were once full of orchards so we knew we were doing the right thing in planting our orchard. We manage it in a very traditional way and being organic is a big part of this. We planted traditional apples like Arthur Turner (an old Buckinghamshire variety) and Tom Putt. We also offer families with their own tree our apple pressing service to turn their lovely apples and pears into juice. We love seeing the different varieties of apples from the area.

Mark Knop, Drovers Hill Farm
None of us would want to live without electricity, but one of the consequences of having instant power is rows of imposing pylons marching across the countryside.

The good news is that a pot of money has been made available by the energy regulator Ofgem to reduce the impact of National Grid pylons and lines in the National Parks and AONBs of England and Wales.

The pot contains £500m, which sounds a lot but will only cover a portion of the 580km of power lines that cross protected countryside.

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project set up by National Grid is currently assessing all the lines and the Conservation Board is working with their consultants to look at the three transmission lines which cross the Chilterns AONB. These run from Sundon to Great Offley (north of Luton), Dunstable to Hemel Hempstead and Aylesbury to Seer Green.

Ideally, the Board would like to see the Chilterns’ lines put underground. However, this would be hugely expensive and there will be a lot of competition for the funds. Tree planting, landscaping and painting pylons are other, less costly, ways of reducing their impact although these are not always appropriate in a beautiful landscape.

To help decide where the funds should be spent an advisory group has been set up by the National Grid, chaired by broadcaster Chris Baines. Organisations with an interest in the nation’s protected countryside, including the National Association for AONBs, are represented on the group. It is likely that funds will start to be allocated in 2015 and the blight of pylons spoiling lovely views will be tackled.

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**Pigging out on pest plants**

Pig power is being used to clear the invasive non-native plant Himalayan Balsam from woods on Greenfield Farm near Watlington. The Berkshire cross Tamworth pigs are making short work of the pest plants, as well as brambles and bracken. After several years of clearance the Himalayan Balsam should be permanently removed and the cleared ground will be returned to woodland. In the past pigs were regularly found in woodlands in the Chilterns, clearing out weeds and feeding on acorns and beechmast in autumn.
School children can learn about the distinctive properties and rich history of box wood in the Chilterns thanks to a resource pack that has been put together by the Chilterns Box Woodland Project.

It includes a ‘box of box’ – a collection of samples of box timber and other native woods plus tools so that children can take cuttings of box and grow them on. There are also downloadable activity sheets and a DVD covering themes like box trees in the wild and how box wood has been used for musical instruments and art objects. The pack is aimed at Key Stage 2 and is available for hire. The Project is also offering 6 free sessions with a trained educator who will introduce the pack to teachers and children.

Much learning has been happening in Wendover Woods where the Project is trialling techniques to grow box, transplant it and harvest box timber. It is being helped by the Chiltern Society’s Wendover Woods volunteer group and the Forestry Commission. The volunteers have received training in box ecology and surveying skills. Project Officer Sarah Wright is keen to get more volunteers involved in all aspects of the Project – if you’re interested contact her at swright@chilternsaonb.org.

In an exciting recent development Chilterns box is being propagated by the National Trust’s Plant Conservation Centre in Devon and seeds are going to the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst. As a restricted plant species threatened by blight this will help to secure its future.

Find out more about the Project’s work and its education resources at www.chilternsaonb.org/box

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**Boxing clever for the future**

**Appreciating an old box tree in Wendover Woods**

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**Reviving the Wye**

From a concrete straitjacket to natural curves – the River Wye at Desborough Recreation Ground in High Wycombe has acquired a much more typical chalk stream character through a project organised by the Revive the Wye initiative.

As the pictures show, the concrete has gone and the river now has soft natural banks and a more meandering course. Obstacles which prevented fish movement have also been removed. Water flow has increased to a rate more typical of natural chalk streams, which keeps the gravel river bed free from silt, making it a better home for aquatic wildlife.

The work had support from the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, Wycombe District Council, the Wild Trout Trust, the Environment Agency and the Chiltern Society.

Find out more about the Project’s work and its education resources at www.chilternsaonb.org/box

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**What a difference – the River Wye millstream at Desborough Recreation Ground, before and after the project**
The Chilterns at war

World War 1 left its mark on both the landscape and the people of the Chilterns. With its proximity to the capital this area was inevitably a place of great activity during the War: troop training, munitions manufacturing and the establishment of the first RAF training base all happened here.

Like the rest of the country, communities saw their young men go off to war and then had to mourn the loss of many of them. Families at home played their part in the War too, especially women who left their traditional occupations to provide labour in the munitions and aircraft factories. It was a time of great upheaval and change. Here we reflect on the physical and social impact of WW1 on the Chilterns and what you can still see today.

The Devil’s Own in Berkhamsted

On 28 September 1914 troops from the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps, nick-named The Devil’s Own, arrived in Berkhamsted to train before heading for the battlefields of northern France. During the course of WWI, 12,000 troops passed through the training camp. They lived in a tented camp near the station, paraded on what is now called Kitchener’s Field and trained on Berkhamsted and Northchurch commons and in the surrounding countryside.

The impact on the small town was huge and there was strong respect and appreciation between local residents and the Corps. For many of the young men, Berkhamsted was their last ‘home’ before the horrors of the Western Front. By 1918, over half of all trainees had become casualties of the war with 2,200 killed and 5,000 injured.

The trainees dug nearly eight miles of training trenches on the commons. 500 metres of these remain today and have been cleared and mapped by a team of volunteers from the Chilterns Commons Project and Chiltern Society. You can see them for yourself by following the signs from the car park by the war memorial at the top of New Road out of Berkhamsted.

The distinctive remains of WW1 practice trenches can also be seen at Marlow Common in Buckinghamshire. These were probably dug in 1915 and would have been constructed to replicate the real ones at the front to give troops some idea of what to expect.
James McCudden – flying legend

One of the most illustrious men to pass through RAF Halton during WW1 was Major James McCudden. He came to Halton as an aircraft mechanic and later went on to train as a fighter pilot. By 1918 he had shot down 57 enemy aircraft and won the Victoria Cross, making him one of the War’s flying legends. With many other awards for gallantry he is Britain’s most decorated airman. Sadly he did not survive WWI; he died in an air accident in 1918 aged 23 on his way to take up a command post. It is very appropriate that a new Flight Heritage Centre at RAF Halton, which showcases the work of aero engineers over the decades, is named after him. Squadron Leader Simon Batt from 3 Squadron, which James McCudden belonged to, paid tribute to the flying ace at the Centre’s opening: “My contemporaries in 1913 relied on the skill of their engineers in exactly the same way as we do today; we depend on them to get our job done. It is highly appropriate that RAF Halton, where engineering training took place for more than 75 years, remembers one of the most famous examples of a man who started as an engineer and went on to become a flying legend.”

To visit the James McCudden Flight Heritage Centre call the curator, Francis Hanford, on 01296 656841.

Wartime women in Wycombe

Before WW1 less than a fifth of the adult female population in the country worked outside the home, but the onset of war changed all this. As men went off to fight women stepped in to fill many of the jobs created by the war effort. In High Wycombe these were frequently located in the furniture factories, which converted to the manufacture of munitions and aircraft parts.

The women were known as ‘Munitionettes’ and the work was hard and hazardous to their health. Some of them made gun shells and explosives, handling dangerous machinery and breathing in toxic fumes. Others made aircraft propellers and wings, as well as more domestic supplies for the front such as clothes and food. They were motivated by the desire to do their bit for the country and to support their husbands, brothers and fathers fighting overseas. The pay they received would also have been a big help to the family finances.

Birth of RAF Halton

On the outbreak of WW1 Alfred de Rothschild offered his estate at Halton, near Wendover, to Lord Kitchener for military training. By 1916 up to 20,000 infantry troops were encamped on the estate. In 1917 Halton became the main training unit for aircraft mechanics in the Royal Flying Corps, the precursor of the RAF. Many thousands of mechanics were trained here during the War to care for the simple early fighter and bomber aircraft.

On 1st April 1918 the RAF was formed. The government purchased the Halton Estate from the Rothschild family (for £112,000) to turn it in a permanent officer cadet college. After the War ended an apprentice scheme began, to train ground crew and skilled trades for the RAF, which ran for 73 years. The grand Halton House, former scene of sparkling Rothschild house parties, became an officers’ mess – civilians can look round it once a year when it has an open day each September.

You can read lots more about the history of WW1 in the Chilterns in the Summer 2014 edition of our local history newsletter Chilternsaetna which can be downloaded at www.chilternsaonb.org/newsletters.

There is also a free exhibition at Bucks County Museum in Aylesbury until March 2015, telling the stories of people from Buckinghamshire involved in WW1.
Where are you from?
I grew up on a farm in Yorkshire and moved to Cumbria when I was 18.

What were you doing before coming to the Chilterns?
Most of my working life has been based in the Lake District. I was a Ranger for the Lake District National Park Authority for 12 years, covering the central Lakes area, and did a lot of work to improve access for visitors and carry out conservation tasks. I then moved on to working for myself, and set up an outdoor activities and mountain guiding company. Over the years the business broadened into providing relationship-building activity-based challenges for staff from big companies and public authorities. We worked with staff from the Olympic Delivery Authority, helping them to gel into a close-knit team as they prepared for London 2012.

What attracted you to this new role at the Chiltern Society?
I'd always maintained a strong interest in the world of National Parks and AONBs and was keen to do more work in conservation. I was particularly attracted to this job because of the Society's broad approach. They are not just interested in the conservation of particular sites but in encouraging the general public to get out and understand and enjoy the countryside. I have always been very keen to help people learn more about the wildlife and landscape they're in while they take part in outdoor activities. I also had some knowledge of this area because of a family connection and knew it to be a lovely part of the world.

What are you hoping to achieve at the Chiltern Society?
It’s an exciting time to have joined as we should be taking on the management of our existing sites plus the new ones coming on board, to help the Society expand its membership and influence and to assist our large number of committed volunteers. I am greatly inspired by the enthusiasm and skills of the volunteers and I want to make sure they are well-supported. I’d also really like to extend the geographical range of our membership and activity, and get more people joining the Society from the southern and northern ends of the Chilterns.

What is your favourite part of the Chilterns?
I love the open viewpoints along the western edge of the Chilterns – places where you can walk across the chalk downland and see for miles across Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

What are some of the challenges ahead?
Increasing the size and diversity of the Society’s membership is very important, but not easy and it will take time. Some of our new projects, like the North Chiltern Trail which is being launched in the autumn, will help but it is a long-term goal to get more and younger members from across the whole area. It is a concern to me that while there is a lot of emphasis these days on encouraging people to use the countryside for healthy activities, there is less money for maintaining rights of way and countryside sites. Volunteers and voluntary bodies are doing more but can only do so much.

Tell us what you’ll be up to this winter
We’re organising a winter events programme – things like evening talks, courses, guided walks, bikes rides and so on. We're also launching a new publication to help celebrate our 50th anniversary – ‘50 Classic Walks in the Chilterns’. The Chiltern Society is a voluntary body with nearly 7,000 members that works to conserve the Chilterns and encourage people to care for and enjoy it. Find out more at www.chilternsociety.org.uk
Locals pitch in to care for special sites

Local voluntary body the Chiltern Society has expanded the number of countryside sites it cares for. Roger Newman, Vice Chairman of the Society, describes the work they are doing to encourage wildlife and involve local people in caring for these lovely places.

In the summer of 2013, the Society took over the management of three wildlife sites from Wycombe District Council: Brush Hill Local Nature Reserve near Princes Risborough, Marlow Common and Prestwood Local Nature Reserve. Not only are these wonderful places to visit for simple relaxation, but they have provided many opportunities for involving young and old in appreciating and managing nature on their doorstep.

Our new Site Coordinators have been busy building links with like-minded interest groups and others keen to help, including RAF Halton, local schools and the Guides. At the same time they have successfully recruited more than 50 new volunteers to join one or more of the regular work parties.

Benefiting people and wildlife

Much of our work has involved the clearance of scrub as well as keeping paths and glades open, both for access and the benefit of wildlife. New signage and well-located benches have also helped visitors enjoy their time on site. With support from the Conservation Board’s Commons Project we have created a new circular path and opened up an old clay pit at Marlow, and the National Trails Office and Bucks County Council helped fund the replacement of a crumbling flight of steps on the Ridgeway National Trail at Brush Hill.

We aim to maintain a variety of habitats on any one site, with plants and trees of different ages and heights. Chalk grassland is important at Brush Hill and Prestwood and home to many butterflies, while Marlow Common retains an important remnant of acid heathland, unusual for the Chilterns.

The ancient woodland at Brush Hill is an outstanding site for bluebells and other spring woodland plants while the Marlow Common woodland is full of birdsong in spring and colourful fungi in the autumn.

Help from Herdwicks

We have been very pleased to work with Ian Waller from Hampden Bottom Farm whose attractive Herdwick sheep grazed the Brush Hill and Prestwood reserves in the autumn. This provided another opportunity to involve the community as we agreed a rota of daily stock watchers, each of whom thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Our volunteers not only help with practical work but have also been involved in monitoring butterflies and bird nests, bird ringing, helping with guided walks, photography and involving local communities in site activities.

These new sites build on our experience from our other sites: Ewelme Watercress Beds, Lacey Green Windmill, Bottom Wood near Stokenchurch and many other places we have worked. In future we will be taking on more sites as part of our commitment to safeguard our local heritage and would welcome new volunteers and new members who would like to be part of our success and support our exciting future.

For more information about these and other sites managed by the Chiltern Society visit our website at www.chilternsociety.org.uk.
### Updates HS2 and Commons

#### High Speed 2 – what’s happening

The High Speed 2 Hybrid Bill is on its lengthy journey through Parliament and will not be passed before the next election. It is now at the Select Committee stage which is likely to take until next autumn to be completed.

The HS2 Select Committee is hearing representations from organisations and individuals affected by the rail line, starting in Birmingham and working south. When the Committee reaches the Chilterns, not likely before early summer 2015, the Conservation Board and others will be presenting a strong case for the line to be placed in a fully-bored tunnel under the whole of the Chilterns AONB.

In the meantime, the Board is working closely with local authorities to push the Government to set up a fund to be used for the benefit of the communities and environment affected by HS2. “The Prime Minister has given his backing to a Community and Environment Fund for those affected by fracking so why shouldn’t there be a similar fund for those affected by HS2?” says Ian Reay, Chairman of the Board. “This would recognise the fact that most of the costs borne by the areas hosting this national infrastructure will not be covered by compensation or mitigation schemes.”

A Government-created Fund would give out grants to enhance the quality of life and economy of communities along the HS2 line and to improve wildlife sites and historic features.

#### A common refuge for rebels

One of the main aims of the four-year Chilterns Commons Project, which comes to an end in June 2015, was to find out more about how local commons have helped to shape the history of this area and the communities in it. Volunteers have been researching some intriguing subjects, including the contribution Gypsies and Romanies made to life on the commons, why so many chapels are found near commons and the impact of cattle drovers as they herded their animals through the area on the way to London markets.

One of the studies has confirmed the unexpected fact that the Chilterns, and its commonland in particular, was a hotbed for religious dissenters and nonconformists in the past. Early rebels against the established church, known as Lollards, used the woods and commons as refuges from persecution. Not all escaped though: a memorial in Amersham records the death of seven Lollards who were burned at the stake for their beliefs in the 16th century. Despite this, nonconformist worship continued to flourish and by the 18th century there were clear concentrations of independent churches and worshippers: Quakers centred on Coleshill, Baptists active in the Tring/Berkhamsted/Chesham area, Independents and Congregationalists in the southern Chilterns, and Quakers and Baptists on the Hertfordshire/Bedfordshire border.

The results of this and the other research projects will be presented at a conference open to all on January 24th 2015 in Aston Clinton. At the same time fully-illustrated write-ups of all the historic research will be available to download from the AONB website.

Contact Rachel Sanderson for more information: rsanderson@chilternsaonb.org or call 01844 355525.
Chalk and Trees

For only £5 a year you can subscribe to this magazine and have it delivered as soon as it is published in April and October. Subscribe online at www.chilternsaonb.org/shop or send a cheque for £5 payable to the Chilterns Conservation Board to the address on p3.

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