



FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

[www.wolstonbury.com](http://www.wolstonbury.com)

## Newsletter – Spring 2016

Finally it seems to have stopped raining and the ground is beginning to dry out. Despite the wet winter the active members of the Friends group have been out and about on the Hill undertaking conservation tasks. We have helped the National Trust rangers clear some trees next to the bridleway on the Western end of the Hill where you will see a large stack of wood halfway up. We have cleared scrub along the fence line next to bridleway running along the bottom of the Hill. We have also cleared an area of scrub on the Eastern end of the Hill before it is incorporated into the bottom ex-arable grassland paddock. Although we spend most of our time cutting things down, in the winter we undertook some tree planting (see article below).

The cattle and sheep have done a good job of keeping the grass down and the myriad ant hills are clearly visible in the Hill fort and western paddocks.

Have a look at the upcoming dates on the website, as always all are welcome to join in or just come over for a chat and a cup of tea.

Mike Botterill – Chairman

### Tree Planting on Wolstonbury

It is noticeable that the east 'Campion Eyebrow' has fewer trees than its 'twin', the west 'Campion Eyebrow'. More trees were needed in the east to balance the view.

As the Trust for Conservation Volunteer were offering free whips we took advantage of this offer and ordered 50 in different varieties to suit the location. The varieties are beech, small leaved lime, goat willow, whitebeam and field maple all of which occur on the hill.

They arrived at Saddlescombe on 18<sup>th</sup> November ready for our task day on 21<sup>st</sup> November. The weather on this day was freezing and overcast with a very strong S.W wind. The wind was so strong that it was difficult to stand on

the top of the hill. It was also difficult planting the whips on the steep north facing slope and the ground was also very wet and slippery but at least we were out of the wind.



We divided into groups and each group took a bundle of trees to plant, spacing them out and avoiding the cattle paths which meander through the surviving, sheltering trees. As each tree was planted it was protected with a spiral plastic tree guard and a bamboo cane. This should stop rabbits and deer eating the new growth. We are now keeping a lookout for signs of growth.

Margaret Maillardet

### **Don't Panic**

It is a well documented fact that Wolstonbury Hill has been used as a target range at various times in its history. The Hill was taken over by the Canadian Army during the second world war for training purposes. The trench where the targets were raised still exists to the western end of Welcombe Bottom and in the summer time when the ground dries the rectangular outline of a building can be made out to the North of the dew pond.

With this background history, the Ministry of Defence swept the Hill for ordnances at the beginning of this century.



On a recent Saturday task day on the northern side of the Hill we were undertaking one of our usual cut and burn operations, removing some invasive scrub plants from the grassland. Towards the end of the day we were ranking up some of the twiggy bits to leave the site tidy. Taking an armful which was destined for the fire I stopped to examine something heavy.



It was a metal cylindrical object about 6 inches long with what looked like a nail sticking out of one end, similar to the above picture but a pin sticking out instead of the grey fins. Following some discussion about what it was we decided to hide it away and let the Police know. The following day I met the Police on site who took pictures and referred it on to the MOD who, later that day, turned up on site. They confirmed that the object was an unexploded mortar and removed it from site for disposal.

This is a rare occurrence and should not deter people from enjoying the Hill. If however you do uncover something you don't recognise think twice before giving it a kick.

Mike Botterill

### **A New Orchid Season**

The start of spring heralds the coming of our early native wild flowers such as cowslips and bluebells. In a more woodland location the primrose, violet and wood anemone are common. It's in the woodland margins that one of our spectacular native orchids comes into flower and is appropriately named the early purple, *Orchis mascula*. This orchid has been known by a wide variety of names since first being recorded in the late sixteenth century by William Turner and also referred to by William Shakespeare in Hamlet as 'long purples'. The name *mascula* and hence 'masculine' is reference to the shape of the plant's tubers.

It's the third most common orchid to be found in the British Isles after the common spotted and heath spotted orchids, but as is the case for many of our native species this plant is nationally in decline due to deforestation and intensive agricultural practices. We are however fortunate to retain a good population of these plants on the orchid banks at Wellcombe Bottom. As the plant's name implies this is one of the easier orchids to identify with a bright purple inflorescence and a stem height of 10-45 cm. The rosette is normally formed of four to eight highly glossy spotted leaves, although a plain leaf is not uncommon. On a very rare occasion a white-flowered variant may be discovered. Although this white form of plant has not been seen on Wolstonbury it can occasionally be found on the north slopes of Blackcap.

There are a number of pollinators for this orchid from bumblebees, solitary bees and possibly the cuckoo-bee. Unlike many flowers the early purple does not offer nectar as a reward to its pollinator. It's thought that as the bee freshly emerges from hibernation it's tricked into pollinating this orchid purely by the combined attractions of colour and scent.

