

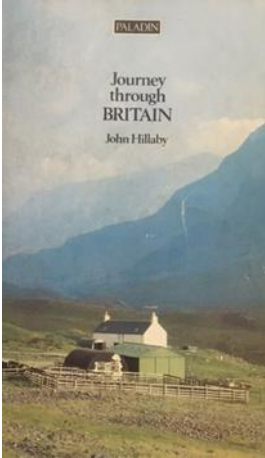
talking walking

Oxfordshire Ramblers Issue 64

April 2025



Start place



Early on in his book *Journey Through Britain*, the tale of his walk from Lands End to John O’Groats in the late 1960s, John Hillaby briefly describes his walking attire. Up top he wore a light windproof anorak, regulating his heat by zipping up or down as the conditions and his effort required – as we would today. His account reminds me of my early waterproof gear around the same time. Those cagoules were essentially made of plastic. They certainly kept the rain out but they also kept my sweat in; not good. Now we have Gore-Tex or similar, and much nicer fabrics.

Footwear caused Hillaby more concern. As was the way in those days, he bought two pairs of “stout” boots. After breaking them in he threw them aside in favour of a pair of Italian boots, which were light in weight and heavy in price. They caused him no trouble. His weighed about 15 ounces (425 grams) each. I’ve just weighed my current, composite boots, which come in at 24 ounces (700 grams) each. They do, though, have a very high cuff, to protect my ankles from rocks and to keep bog water out in the uplands, which adds to the weight. That said, I consider those to be lightweight; they certainly are compared to the heavier thick leather ones that preceded them and which exacerbated a soft tissue injury in my knees. Roll on May, when I’ll switch to hiking sandals for lowland walking; ultra-low in weight and air-cooled.



November walk.
Photo Dave Cavanagh

Although Hillaby was very appreciative of his Italian boots, in the last stages of his long, arduous walk some of his toe nails fell out. And with that thought, I’ll leave you to enjoy the rest of the magazine.

Dave Cavanagh

Editor Dave Cavanagh davecavanagh1000@gmail.com
Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers Richard Birch richard.birch15@virginmedia.com
Website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk Facebook @OxfordshireRamblers

Oxfordshire Area Picnic

Sunday 29 June 2025 @ 1230

Chilton Recreation Ground, SU489859, OX11 0SR

Come along and enjoy the annual Oxfordshire Area Picnic at Chilton Recreation Ground, (adjacent to Chilton Village Hall, just behind the church). This year it is hosted by Vale of White Horse Group who will be providing cakes and hot and cold drinks, but bring your own picnic. The Village Hall will be open for toilets, and shelter if the weather is wet. Vale of White Horse Group will be leading six walks, all

aiming to arrive at the picnic location at 1230. The walks range from 4.5 miles Leisurely to 10 miles Moderate so there should be a walk suitable for everyone. Details of the walks can be seen on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website under the 'Walking' tab 'Monthly Reports' ([click here](#)). They are also shown below, but do check online on the day.

Richard Birch, Walks Coordinator

Picnic Walks on Sunday 29 June 2025

10:00 SU489859 OX11 0SR Leisurely 4.5 miles Circular

Harwell campus history walk. Start place: Chilton, village hall car park. A circular walk around the Harwell campus to see the military and scientific history and a recently created marked route. Leader Bob Evans 01865 326631

10:30 SU525855 OX11 9HF Leisurely 6 miles Circular

A leisurely lowland walk from Blewbury. Start place: Blewbury, the recreation ground car park, Boham's Road off the A417. A 3.5 morning walk via Upton to the picnic at Chilton. After the picnic a 2.5 mile walk back to the start point on lanes and tracks with good views. Leader PM 01235 868216 / 07975 670553

10:00 SU484859 OX11 0PQ Moderate 7 miles Circular

A circular walk on the Ridgeway and Icknield Way. Start place: Chilton, in front of Chilton County Primary School, Downside. A 6 mile morning walk, up along hill to the Ridgeway, with great views across the Oxfordshire plain, then down to walk past AERE Harwell and its decommissioned nuclear reactors PLUTO and DIDO. Then to the picnic along the Icknield Way. After the picnic a short 1 mile walk back to the start point. Leader PR 07418 078044

09:45 SU489859 OX11 0SR Moderate 7 miles Circular

Ridgeway and Downs circular. Start place: Chilton, village hall car park. To the Ridgeway passing upper Farm, along the Ridgeway to Gore Hill, with excellent views then return to Chilton via Alden Farm. Leader AG 07766 880792

10:15 SU479840 - Moderate 8.5 miles Circular

Ridgeway and Downs circular. Start place: Bury Down car park. A 5.5 mile morning walk along a short stretch of the Ridgeway, then down to West Ilsley, then to Gore Hill via Hodcott Down and to the picnic at Chilton. After the picnic a 3 mile walk to the start point via the Ridgeway past Upper Farm then along the Ridgeway to Bury Down. Leader PL 07521 333430

09:30 SU525855 OX11 9HF Moderate 10 miles Circular

Ridgeway and Downs circular. Start place: Blewbury, the recreation ground car park, Boham's Road off the A417. A 7.5 mile morning walk up to the Ridgeway via Churn Hill, along the Ridgeway to Gore Hill and to the picnic via Alden Farm. After the picnic a 2.5 mile walk back to the start point. Leader SY 07855 496161

Oxfordshire ramblings

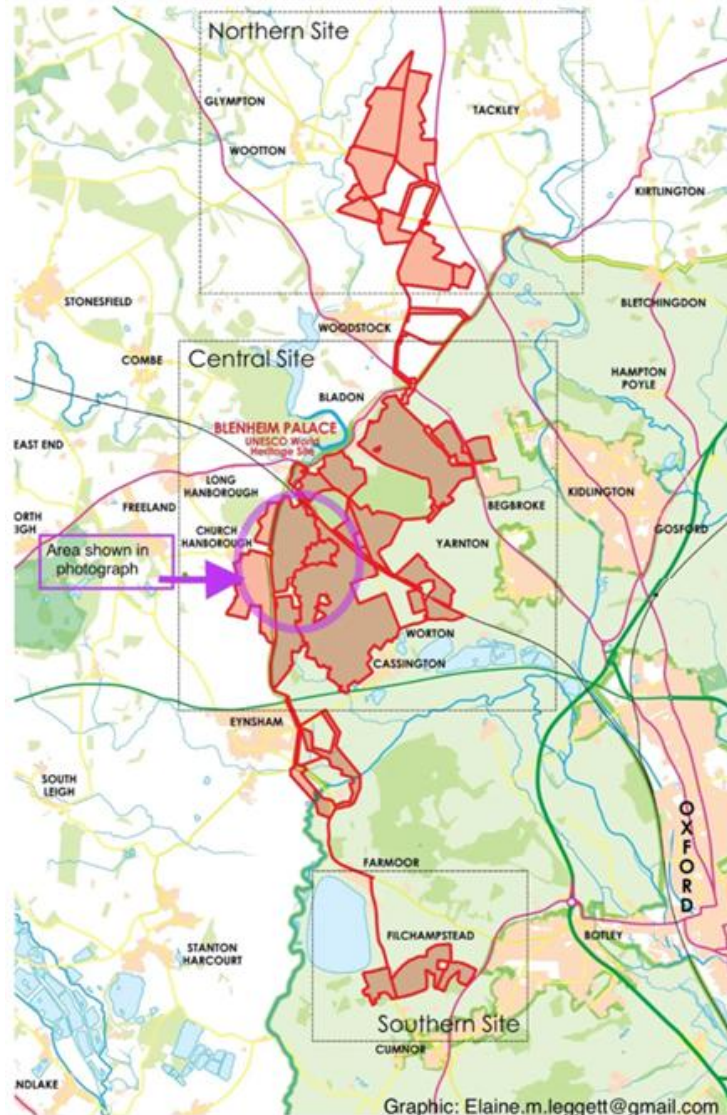
will give you a brief update each quarter on the current issues in Ramblers Oxfordshire Area.

Richard Birch, Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers

Botley West Solar Farm

Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) would form Europe's largest solar farm on land mainly in West Oxfordshire covering an area 11 miles long by 4 miles wide, with over 2 million solar panels. Oxfordshire Ramblers is very concerned that due to the size of the proposed solar farm there will be major adverse visual impact to users of some of the PRowS throughout the period of the project i.e. for decades to come. We estimate that around sixty PRowS cross the proposed solar farm with a total length of 17 miles. We therefore object to the application because we consider that the negative visual impact and associated adverse health effects outweigh the benefits of the project.

The application for BWSF was accepted by the Government Planning Inspectorate on 13 December 2024. Oxfordshire Ramblers has registered as an 'interested party' which will allow us to participate in the examination stage of the planning application. Judith Wardle, Chair of West Oxfordshire Group, is our expert on the solar farm and is actively involved with Stop Botley West Campaign group that is leading opposition to it. Stop Botley West is currently carrying out a survey to assess the impact of the proposed solar farm on the local community.



Graphic of Botley West Solar Farm location, reproduced with the kind permission of Elaine Leggett and Stop Botley West Campaign Ltd.

If you use the Public Rights of Way in or close to the proposed Botley West Solar Farm site then you are encouraged to complete the [Public Rights of Way \(PRow\) Survey](#).

Abingdon Reservoir

Thames Water is proposing to build a new reservoir on farmland approximately 5 km south-west of Abingdon, between the villages of Steventon, East Hanney, and Drayton. The reservoir would take water from the River Thames during winter months, store it until it was needed during the summer, then pump it back into the Thames for use mainly in the South East. You can read all about it on [Thames Water](#) website.

The construction would take ten years to complete with the current timescale aiming to start construction in 2030 with completion in 2040. The final two years of this 10-year period involves filling the reservoir.

Safety Tip

In areas where there is a poor mobile signal you may not be able to make an emergency phone call but you may be able to send a text as they need less bandwidth to be sent. You need to register your mobile phone before using the emergency SMS service. Following registration, by simply sending an SMS

Thames Water says that the reservoir would be open to the public. The facilities would include: car parking; water sports centre with sailing, kayaking, angling etc on the main reservoir; café; benches and toilets around the reservoir; wetlands; bird hides; public education facilities; a network of paths for walking /cycling/ wheeling/ horse-riding; floating islands for nesting birds.

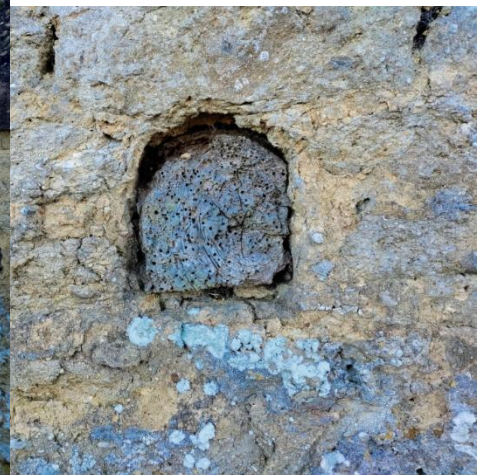
The Government has approved Thames Water's 10-year plan which includes the Abingdon Reservoir. Oxfordshire Ramblers will maintain a watching brief and participate in the formal consultation process once it starts.

message to 999 you can call for help and the emergency services will be able to reply to you. Register your mobile phone with the service before an emergency happens by texting 'Register' to 999. You will receive confirmation that your mobile has been registered.



Stanford Place, a short distance east of Faringdon. Along the lower part of the wall are regularly-spaced holes in which are worm-ridden pieces of wood. Does anyone know their purpose?

davecavanagh1000@gmail.com (who took the photos).



Bob Merry, of Thame & Wheatley Ramblers, contributes to a reception in the House of Lords



Bob Merry, second from right, with other members of Thame and Wheatley group's path maintenance team, having just installed a kissing gate in Holton parish. Photo by a passerby.

The Ramblers hosted a reception in the House of Lords on 16 December to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Royal Assent for the National Parks & Access to the Countryside (1949) Act, which led to thousands of rural footpaths being protected by law forming the public right of way network that we have today in England and Wales. You may have noticed BBC News items on that day.

It was also an opportunity for the Ramblers to promote their case for a new Access to Nature bill, to tackle the barriers preventing people from getting outdoors.

Bob Merry, footpath maintenance team leader of Thame and Wheatley Ramblers, counts himself fortunate to be one of three volunteers from across the nation to be invited by the Ramblers to share with the House of Lords audience their perspectives on why paths, walking and access to nature were important to them.



Baroness Young (speaking) and Baroness Hayman at the reception in the House of Lords hosted by the Ramblers for improved access to nature. Photo Bob Merry.

Bob describes the occasion.

“After a welcome introductory mulled wine to launch the general chit-chat, the reception got formally underway with speeches from sponsors Baroness Barbara Young of Old Scone (previous roles include chair of English Nature and Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and Baroness Sue Hayman of Ullock (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whose responsibilities include access, including rights of way and coastal paths), followed by the Chief Executive of Ramblers, Ross Maloney, who outlined the case for improved access, and then introduced the three volunteers.”

“I talked about achievements made by volunteers to make footpaths safer and more accessible as well as the experiences of my twin daughters accessing the countryside with their electric wheelchairs. I made suggestions on how standards for footpath surfacing could be improved,” he said.



Ross Maloney, CEO of Ramblers, speaking at the reception.

Scutchamer Knob

If you have walked along the Ridgeway as it passes through the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, specifically along the section due south of East Hendred, then you will have passed Scutchamer Knob. That said, you might not have been aware of it. The Vale of White Horse Ramblers path maintenance team, the Vale Path Volunteers (VPV), and other volunteers, have been working over the last several months to rectify its poor visibility.

This Scheduled Ancient Monument, which had become camouflaged by brush cover, has a great history.

Dan Bashford, archaeologist and Historic Ridgeway Project Officer, takes up the story

[Scutchamer Knob](#), a [Scheduled Monument](#), originated as an Iron Age round barrow, probably originally for a single burial (inhumation), at ground level in the centre of the mound. It is situated alongside the Ridgeway on the Downs, on Cuckhamsley Hill, above the village of East Hendred, a few miles east of Wantage, Oxfordshire. The earliest references we have for the name Cuckhamsley come from 10th century charters and from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1006AD when it is called *Cwichelmeshlaew* or Cwichelm's Barrow, named after the King Cwichelm, an early king of Wessex who is believed to have been buried here in around 696AD. Originally round, it is now crescent-shaped after being mutilated in 1840.



Scutchamer Knob, viewed from the Ridgeway. At work are members of the VPV, clearing the north side of the ancient monument in mid-December.

Although the entrance to Scutchamer Knob is only a few metres from the Ridgeway, it is very easy to walk past it without noticing that it is there. This is in part because the Knob is covered in scrub. It is one of the Historic Ridgeway Project's objectives, funded by Historic England, to remove the scrub by continually cutting it back to a short grass sward to what it would look like if sheep grazed it.

Hayley Gray, the Historic Ridgeway Volunteer Coordinator has already organised visits by King Alfred's scout troop from Wantage and the local scout group, 1st Cuckhamsley (who are named after the mound) in autumn last year to cut back some of the vegetation, which the landowner kindly arranged to have taken away.

On 18 December the next group of volunteers was the Vale Path Volunteers, the path maintenance team of Vale of White Horse Ramblers.

A couple of days before that, Hayley, Sophie Aziz, coordinator of the Ridgeway and Thames Trail National Trails Volunteers, represented by Martin and Roger on the day and Friends of the Ridgeway trustee Dave Cavanagh, had begun the task of filling depressions in the Ridgeway with crushed limestone. These were at the entrance to the Knob, in the parking area, and in between.

The aim is to improve access to the Monument for everyone, all year-round.

The VPV returned to continue the brush clearance – on the south side and flanks of the mound – on 6 and 15 January. The VPV will return to finish the job in late March or early April. ►



The north side of Scutchamer Knob seen from the Ridgeway, before (top) and after (bottom) the brush on this side was cleared by the Ramblers Vale Path Volunteers in December. Photos Dave Cavanagh

An evolving monument

Although Scutchamer Knob is about 4 metres high, it used to be some 4 metres higher. It shrank in 1844 when a local landowner took away cart-loads of soil which he believed contained the remains of Anglo-Saxon warriors who died at the battle of Ashdown nearby in 871, believing that the soil would be good for his rose beds. There had almost certainly been at least one inhumation within the Knob, that of King Cwichelm, dug into the side or top of the existing Iron Age mound. The nineteenth century despoilation of the Knob had uncovered a range of finds, augmented by others from a re-excitation in 1934. It was those, plus the complete absence of a particular type of pottery, that led to the conclusion that the mound was probably constructed between 300- and 200-years BCE (before the current era). The original inhumation at that time was probably followed by more in Anglo-Saxon times.

In the early medieval period, it became a meeting point for the shire moot (or county parliament), for solving disputes, discussing the news of the day and disseminating the will of the king. The eventual ceasing of these meetings was not the end of Scutchamer Knob's useful life. The site continued to be a meeting place, fair and major market until 1620.

The 1840 excavation revealed a large oak stake that is believed to be the remains of a beacon mentioned in 1738 but probably dating to the Elizabethan period as an armada beacon - the Knob's prominent location on the high chalk ridge would have been an ideal location for one of a series of beacon fires to be lit to spread news or warnings of important events.



The photo of this amazing bench was taken by Nicola Jones on a walk from Begbroke to Bladon.

Speaking of archaeology ...

I'm studying to be an archaeologist. I guess you could say that my life is in ruins.

Don't do it; there's no future in archaeology.

Archaeologists are great people to marry. The older you get, the more interested in you they become.

Filling-in the holes between the parking area and the entrance to Scutchamer Knob. Photos Dave Cavanagh

Top left downwards: assembling new wheelbarrows; blowing away leaves from the depressions; breaking up the surface; shovelling crushed limestone into the trailer.



Top right downwards: hauling the trailer to where the limestone is needed; barrowing and tipping the stone into the holes; compressing the stones.



Clearing brush from the Ridgeway side of Scutchamer Knob by the Ramblers Vale Path Volunteers in December. Plus (bottom left) a break for mince pies.



I'm an archaeologist. I'd be much more interested in you if you were dead.



January was cold (though we were in warm, sunny Melbourne. Nah nah nah nah nah! – Ed.)

Photos Gill Hawkins



Ice in mid-January. Photo Peter Flaxman



Sun on the last day in January. Photo Dave Cavanagh



Path maintenance – Banbury & North Oxfordshire Ramblers group

In February, BNO reinstated a footpath in Northamptonshire. John Gregory reports that “We had seven volunteers. The footpath was completely obliterated by heavy vegetation that we totally removed. There was also lots of litter thrown from the motorway, which we also cleared.” Here are some ‘before and after’ photos.



Rest stop



"Subs bench at Chadlington" was the caption chosen by Peter Flaxman, who took this photo in January.

Fox: Winter is here. We need a plan to survive.

Bear: I have a great idea! Let's just sleep 'til spring.

Goose: Want to hear migrate idea?

Two men were eating sandwiches in a pub. The barman said "You can't eat your own food in here." So, they swapped sandwiches.

Steve Jobs would have made a better president than Trump. But that's comparing apples with oranges.



How's that for service? Photo Gill Hawkins.



Photo Dave Cavanagh

Path maintenance – Henley & Goring group

Members of Henley & Goring Ramblers group go out with the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers to clear footpaths, replace stiles with gates, and build steps on steep slopes. They are superbly prolific and proficient. Below is a report on Facebook from Wim Klaucke of Henley & Goring.



 Wim Klaucke
Admin · 2 March at 10:21 · 🌐

February 2025

South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers – Henley and Goring Ramblers

The SC PMV is a group of volunteers working to keep the paths in the South Chilterns to a high standard. The group operates under the banner of the Chiltern Society. The H&G Ramblers participate with workforce. If you are interested in volunteering to keep the paths in your area suitable for use, feel free to send an email to the.scpmv@gmail.com. Once you are on the volunteering list, you get the invites for work parties, which are either on a Wednesday or a Saturday. The SCPMV aims to have 3 work parties per month.

8 February 2025 – Port Hill (Nettlebed)

Both L200 and trailer were used to get the material to site. The task was to replace two wooden stiles with metal Woodstock gates.

The first gate did not cause a lot of problems in installation, the morning was filled with the necessary work though. The second gate was installed next to a concrete post and the terrain was very slippery. There was a slight issue in that a new farm jack had a problem, but this was fixed. Digging conditions were slightly tougher than for team 1, but both teams managed to finish around 1pm.

12 February 2025 Hitsquad

This is a hit squad effort, meaning a team was dispatched to a number of spread locations, this time to install waymarks on four locations. The L200 proofed its use, as a very muddy track was negotiated with the vehicle, possible because of 4 wheel drive, differential locking and high ground clearance.

The waymark posts were installed on Blounts Court Road, Wyfold Estate, Stoke Row and Howberry wood farm (Nettlebed).

22 February 2025 – Waymark Mikado

Today's tasks were many, but repetitive. Six waymark posts were (re)placed. Three were positioned in Park Corner in a new extension to SW22. Three were on Ewelme Park Estate, replacing rotten waymarks and one new one, replacing discs on trees.

26 February 2025 – Cow Common Ewelme and Standhill Farm in Pyrton

Today was a split between 2 sites. The main task was to replace a gate on Cow common near Ewelme. The main challenge turned out to be the weather, rain bucketed down during the morning and despite having a gazebo to work under, water was the main problem. Digging was OK, but water running down the site filled up dug holes faster than it could be removed.

The weather did clear somewhat later in the morning and the gate got installed, but maybe not as sturdy as we like to see them. Water had turned soil into mud, which made tamping nearly impossible. An inspection after drying out should be done to check if the gate is still solid.

The second task was preparation work for gates on Standhill farm near Pyrton. A team of two took care of this and did some clearance around the paths at the work areas for stile replacement. In the coming months stiles at Standhill farm will be replaced with gates (and partly with gaps). Also this job was subject to deluge, but without digging activities the preparation was completed to satisfaction.



Bicester & Kidlington group held pancake races on Shrove Tuesday. Russell Thompson was the winner.



Plenty of mud in February. Photo Sandra Newton



More February splishing and splashing.

You don't have to be mad but Photo Sandra Newton



Good job I did a recce. This newly-formed lake scuppered my intended route, requiring a re-jig. Photo Dave Cavanagh

Work/walk around. Photo Jan Knight

There were some sunny, if cold, days in early February.



Photos, left Wendy Day; above Dave Cavanagh; below Pam Wheeler



Path maintenance – Vale Path Volunteers

In quarter one of this year, VOWH group’s Vale Path Volunteers (VPV) attended to paths in Ashbury, Letcombe Regis and Southmoor parishes. In addition, they returned to Scutchamer Knob no fewer than three times since their initial task day in December, this time on two chilly days in January and one gloriously warm day in mid-March.



The Ashbury task was on a restricted byway on Odstone Hill which is on the skyline in the photo. Richard took down this tree that had sagged over the way.

The March visit to Scutchamer Knob. Photos Dave Cavanagh



Before (L) and after (R) brush cutting on the Knob. There was also lots of clearance on the flatter area at the base of the Knob. Historic Ridgeway Project volunteer coordinator Hayley used a chain saw on thicker trees.



Housing estates can be good for public rights of way

David Godfrey sent me some photos and wrote “I suspect you will wonder what I am doing in sending you photos of monstrous housing estates, but actually they include eventual solutions to long-standing footpath problems. The two Canalside photos show new connections from Peartree to the White's Lane (Oxford bridleway BR15) which leads from Wolvercote village hall to the canal. The Gosford photo is of a new estate which will provide the exit from the dead-end Gosford & Water Eaton footpath FP8 to Banbury Road opposite Jordan Hill.”

Canalside



Gosford

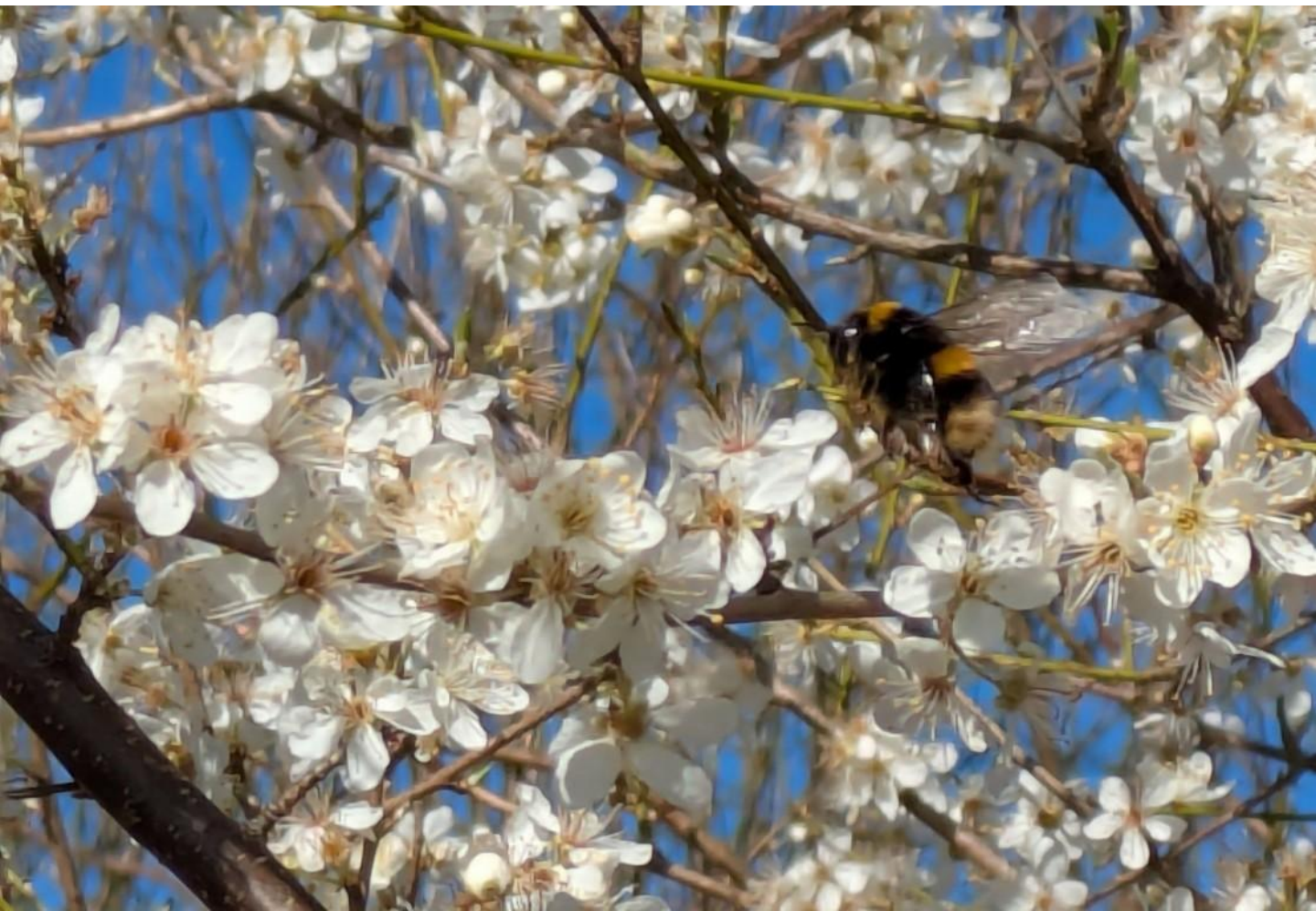




Photo Kerry Forkner

March started well, and largely continued that way

Photo Carolyn Blackmore



The last week of February and the first one of March will remain in the memory. There were several successive days of almost balmy weather – for the time of year. Although the temperature often didn't exceed 8C, there was barely a breath of breeze and the sun's rays were not hindered by clouds. Lots of jackets were unzipped and some took them off. It was dry enough for sitting down.



Photos: above, Joan Clark; right, Dave Cavanagh; below, Jan Knight; below right and bottom, Dave Cavanagh.





Red, dry soil on a walk from Wroxton in early March. Photo Pam Wheeler

Wim Klaucke, who took this photo, commented “One day when the sun did not stop shining”. It was another of those wonderful first-week in March days.







Tunnel on the Thames between Duke's Cut and Wolvercote. Photo Dave Cavanagh





The Tchure, Deddington. Photo Nicola Jones

What does 'tchure' mean? It leads from a main road in Deddington to the centre of the village. According to the [English Eye](#) website, 'tchure' is an old Oxfordshire word for alley, which makes sense. That said, there are arguments in favour of it meaning sewer, of the open kind so common over much of the past. There are other places that have a tchure, although spellings vary e.g. tewer or chewer, which sound rather like sewer. But then sewers were eventually paved over, sometimes forming an alley or other walk-way.

Use it or not, you will be aware of OMG being used in social media and text messages. However, it was not created by the online generation. It was first used by Admiral Lord Fisher in a letter to Winston Churchill in 1917. He wrote "'I hear that a new order of Knighthood is on the tapis [under consideration or discussion]—O.M.G. (Oh! My God!)—Shower it on the Admiralty!!'"

Think about it. If you buy a bigger bed, you have more bed room but less bedroom.

Six – S = IX



The folly on Folly Hill, Faringdon. It was designed for Lord Berners, and built in 1935. It once bore a sign saying "Members of the public committing suicide from this tower do so at their own risk."