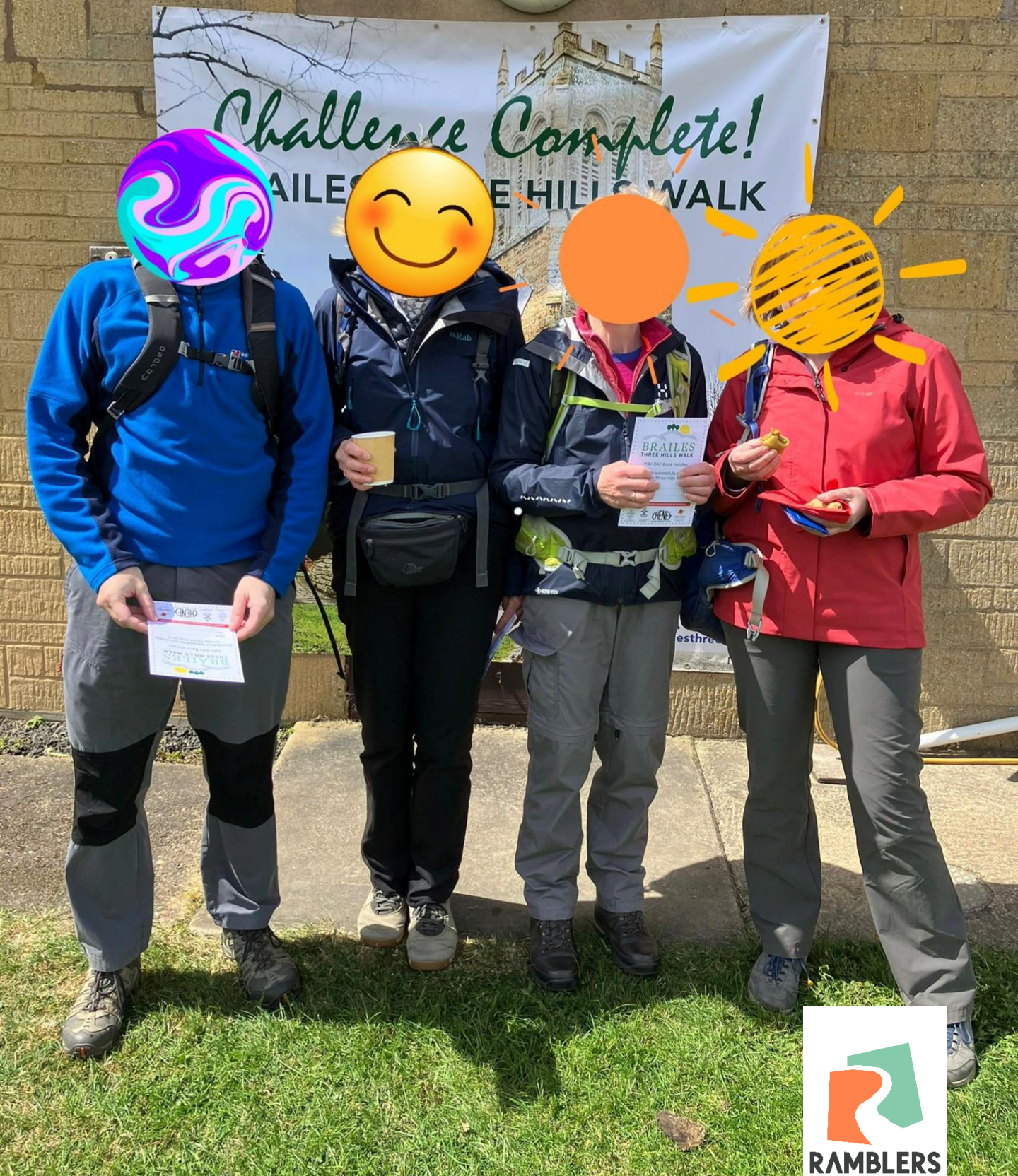


talking walking



Start place

The 4th of March was a rare day. I'll give you a clue: windsocks on airfields would have felt dejected. That's right, the windspeed was low. Not just low but almost non-existent; the meteorological forecast was for a wind speed of just 1 mph. To put that in context, if we were walking at a leisurely pace then, by Ramblers definition of leisurely, we would have been walking twice the speed of the wind. 'Wind' is too strong a word here. Even 'breeze' seems over the top.

The maximum forecast temperature during the walk was 10C. That was low enough for me and others to go out well covered, with some wearing hats and gloves. Soon the latter had been discarded, jackets unzipped and even taken off, and sleeves pushed up. Why? Because 10C can seem very warm when there is virtually no wind.

On other walks in spring, when the temperature was several degrees higher than on that day, I regretted not putting on more



insulating clothing. The difference was that a chilly wind was blowing, and the sky was overcast i.e. no direct sunshine on us. This experience brought home to me just how important wind speed is to feeling comfortable. So now, when I'm looking at the weather forecast to decide what to wear on a walk, I look at the windspeed as well as the temperature and rainfall.

Top, fully clad at the start of the walk from Bampton. Bottom, at the end, some with sleeves rolled up and jackets around the waist. Photos Dave Cavanagh



Cover photo. Four of the five Oxon Weekend Walkers who took part in the Brailes Three Hills Walk. Photo Pamela Cartlidge

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Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



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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

The Planning Inspectorate's Examination of the Botley West Solar Farm application commenced on 13 May 2025. The first sessions resulted in 92 pages of questions raised by the Planning Inspectorate, mainly for the Applicants and Local Councils. Responses to the questions were required by 1 July 2025.

Botley West Solar Farm would cover about 1,000 hectares of countryside if approved. Since the start of the Examination:

- the applicant has agreed to remove panels on 10 hectares of land that is required for potential emergency landings at Oxford Airport;
- the applicant has announced that it would double its community benefit fund to £440,000 a year following discussions with local groups.
- West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), in its final written submission to the Government, concluded that the development would cause "major harm lasting generations" and should be "dramatically reduced" in size.

Abingdon Reservoir

Thames Water has published its Consultation Feedback Report and Statement of Response into its proposals for the Abingdon Reservoir. The update, summary brochure, Consultation Feedback Report and Statement of Response can be found on their website at <https://thames-sro.co.uk/SESRO>

Community information events

During July Thames Water are holding a series of community information events in various locations around the proposed reservoir site. The events will be held at:

- 2pm-8pm Wednesday **2nd July** – Milton Hill House, Milton Hill, Steventon, Oxfordshire, OX13 6AF
- 10am - 3pm Saturday **5th July** – Sutton Courtenay Village Hall, Hobbyhorse Lane, Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire, OX14 4BB
- 2pm-8pm Thursday **10th July** – Marcham Centre, Barrow Close, Marcham, Oxfordshire, OX13 6TY
- 2pm-8pm Tuesday **15th July** – East Hanney Royal British Legion, Mill Orchard, East Hanney, Oxfordshire, OX12 0JH

Oxfordshire ramblings, continued

Richard Birch

Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers

Safety Tip

Despite our best efforts to keep our members safe on walks there are sometimes incidents. In this case the Walk Leader must complete an Incident Report Form. The form should be completed as soon as possible after an incident involving injury or property damage, or after a near miss.

The completed form should be sent to incidents@ramblers.org.uk within 10 days of the incident, attaching any relevant supplementary information.

A copy of the incident Report Form can be found on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website within the Safety article in 'Walking Guidance' under the 'walking' tab or by clicking on the following link: [Incident Report Form](#)

Discover more tips and links to safety-related topics on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website: [Walks Guidance - Safety](#)

In summer this scene – people sitting down on the ground for a break – would be unremarkable. But this photo was taken on 1 April, after a very dry March. No faffing around with 'sit-upons', just sitting directly on the ground. Photo Dave Cavanagh



Thame & Wheatley tackle the bête noire of walkers

Thame & Wheatley group's path maintenance team have been very busy in quarter 2 with respect to stiles and gates.

David Tole, the coordinator of our Oxfordshire Ramblers Parish Path Warden (PPW) Network, informed me of a very successful outcome to a face-to-face discussion at the PPW workshop held in Tiddington. This involved: OCC's Countryside Access Team negotiating the removal of six stiles on a promoted route (the Oxfordshire Way), to be replaced by gates; provision of funding for half of the gates by Oxfordshire Ramblers, organised by our Chair, Richard Birch (the other half coming from OCC); and Bob Merry and his team doing the removals and installations. The team also improved two other stiles, and cleared vegetation in the vicinity.

Here are extracts from Bob's reports that he copied to me.



Top, the team (minus Bob, who took the photo) with their new stile in Denton parish; the approach path and footbridge before and after their attention. 22 hours of work.



Another improved stile in Denton, taking 14 person-hours of effort. Much of the time on each stile was spent digging post holes to take the new step supports. This involved "prising out stone after stone".

On a more relaxed note, Bob added "We're starting to get recognised in the Bat and Ball now having been there two Fridays in a row and both times a nice sunny warm terrace to sit out with our refreshments!"

And now, Thame & Wheatley's the stiles-to-gates project



Bob describes this 29 person-hour task in Stadhampton parish. "The gate was firstly delivered to site a couple of days beforehand with the help of Tim and his trusty Dacia 4WD and trailer." said Bob. "We made our way to site in an idyllic corner of the farm just two meadows away from the River Thame and at the end of an overgrown Copson Lane (an old Drover's lane I reckon). So idyllic in fact that with such a cacophony of birdsong we had to turn on the newly discovered Merlin bird audio app which within a few minutes picked up 12 different birds: Firecrest (rare), Garden warbler (uncommon), Chiffchaff, Wren, Goldfinch, Skylark, Blackcap, Robin, Long-tailed Tit, Blackbird, Greater Whitethroat and Greenfinch – quite a haul!"

"The old stile removal was generally simple except for one rogue post that had been buried a staggering 100 cm and probably pushed in by JCB – it took much heaving, hoing and cursing to remove!" All together it took 29 hours of work, including improvements nearby.

"All in all, a good day's work, which needed celebrating afterwards in The Lamb at Little Milton!" [You can see a pattern emerging here – Ed.]



It was the turn of Tiddington parish for a gate. "This gate installation (our 4th) was a classic example of "Just In Time" planning," wrote Bob. "We had ordered three Charnwood self-closing gates from Secure-a-Field with funding provided by Oxfordshire Area Ramblers and delivery was set for 9 am on the day of installation. But as best laid plans have to get changed so a transport delay meant that I had to divert the delivery address from my house to the work site in Tiddington. We had already set to work on stile-dismantling when delivery driver Richard arrived with the three gates plus a welcome packet of biscuits, three branded pens and a useful colour product guide. All Just In Time for installation and coffee/biscuit break! Suitably refreshed, the three-man team completed installation plus concrete capping of post bases with postcrete all within a few hours [14 person-hours]. The hardest part was excavating the 60cm deep post holes through broken concrete and very hard dry soil.

The least hardest part was drinking a pint of one of Timothy Taylor's finest ales in the Fox and Goat afterwards! [No surprise there – Ed]



Before (above) and after (below).



Thame and Wheatley's gate number 3, the comparatively easy one.

This was again in Tiddington parish. "The field was very dry so we could transport all our tools across in our own vehicles." wrote Bob. "Gate 3 was heavily encroached with vegetation so we firstly cleared that right back and then set about the stile dismantling along with the dog gate which took less than an hour to complete. With the work site being located adjacent to Sandy Lane it was no surprise to find a uniform sandy soil throughout the post hole excavation – a dream material which came out easily with just the double shovel but could still be compacted firm. Postcrete was used as post collars to add stability against the nose-pushing of livestock. All was completed within 3 hours [14 person-hours] and Ken did the final inspection and taking of the team photo." [No mention of imbibing afterwards. Worrying – Ed.]



The stile. Photo Oxfordshire County Council



The gate.



I wrote a play about the weather, and we had five actors dressed as clouds for the rehearsal. On opening night six clouds turned up. It was overcast!

It was hot and sunny. When I went into town I saw a line of men outside a hairdressers. I thought 'What a lovely day to have a barber queue.'



Seen on a walk from Warwick to Lemington.
Photo Linda Rooker



An inquisitive bull. Yes, there was a fence between us.
Photo Dave Cavanagh

In the April issue of *talking walking*, I asked why this wall at Stanford Place, near Faringdon, had evenly-spaced holes blocked by pieces of timber. Member Richard Miller replied "They look like putlog holes. An old method of scaffolding, they put logs into a wall and laid planks across so they could build the next bit of the wall. Sometimes they're left empty after use, or they may be filled with cut off bits of log."



Photographed in Hook Norton by Peter Flaxman

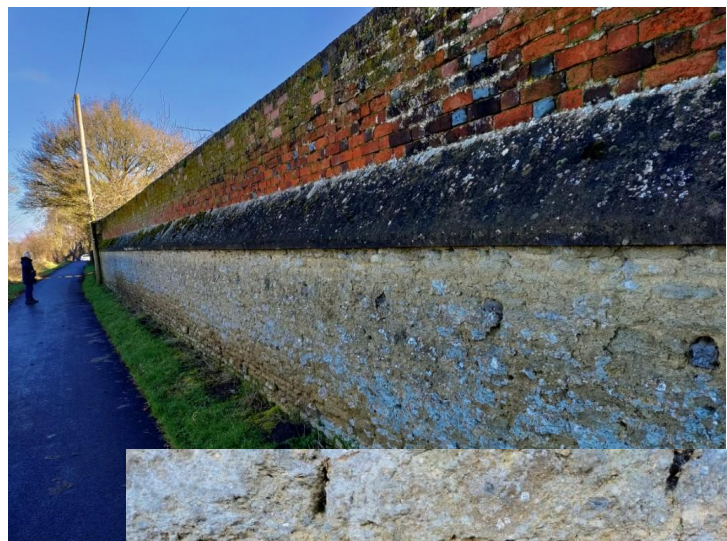




Photo Jan Knight

Photo Becky Day



rest stop

Did you hear about the explosion at the Nissan factory? It was raining Datsun cogs.

A young deer, with ambitions to be bigger, ran away with its mother's sister. Then it became an auntylope.



Who else but Bicester & Kidlington members on their annual Easter Bonnets walk. Photo Fiona Hitchcock.



Mind your step! Seen in Settle, N. Yorkshire. Photo Verity Cavanagh

My wife says that I'm not romantic enough. She could be right. On holiday on the North Cornwall coast, we were watching a beautiful sunset together. My first thought was '1/250s at f8 at ISO 400.'

A writer died and was given the option of going to heaven or hell. She decided to check out each place first. As the writer descended into the fiery pits, she saw row upon row of writers chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they were repeatedly whipped with thorny lashes.

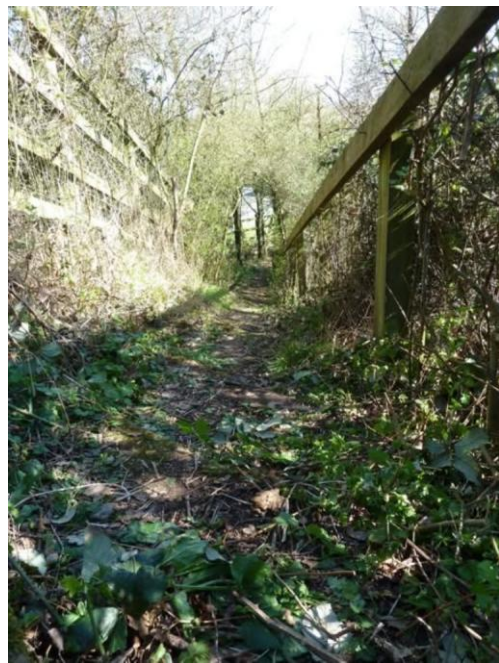
"Oh no!" said the writer. "Let me see heaven now."

A few moments later, as she ascended into heaven, she saw rows of writers, chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they, too, were whipped with thorny lashes.

"Wait a minute," said the writer. "This is just as bad as hell!"

"Oh no, it's not," replied an unseen voice. "Here, your work gets published."

Blitz & Klean, path maintenance team of Bicester & Kidlington group



Blitz & Klean cleared a footpath close
to the M40 near Little Chesterton.





Watcombe Manor, near Watlington. Photos Salim Sajid.



In early April the Vale Path Volunteers went to Scutchamer Knob for the fifth time to clear vegetation from and around this Scheduled Ancient Monument by the side of the Ridgeway. As you can see, nettles and other vegetation, including trees, were growing up all over the mound. So, it was back there again in early June to cut it down.



... after



Before ...



Photos Dave Cavanagh



In the second quarter of the year, in addition to three sessions at Scutchamer Knob, the Vale Path Volunteers cleared paths in Ashbury, Lockinge, Faringdon, Wootton and Ardington.



Richard, left, sawing off a fallen and hung-up tree across the D'Arcy Dalton Way (running along the skyline above) near its terminus at the Ridgeway. Other members of the team went to the top of the path, where they put in a waymark post, as well as trimming back vegetation. Photos Dave Cavanagh and Pat Rosum



Phil putting the final touch to the clearance in West Lockinge. Photo Dave Cavanagh



The team in Faringdon. Photo Pat Rosum.

What is Earth without "art" in it?
"Eh..."



Photo Sandra Newton



Photo Ian Macpherson

Step by step with the South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers (SCPMV)

Some Ramblers members go out with the SCPMV. They are particularly adept at putting in steps and gates, as well as cutting back vegetation. Here are some of their works in May and June. Photos from the Chilterns Society Facebook page.



Before



AFTER



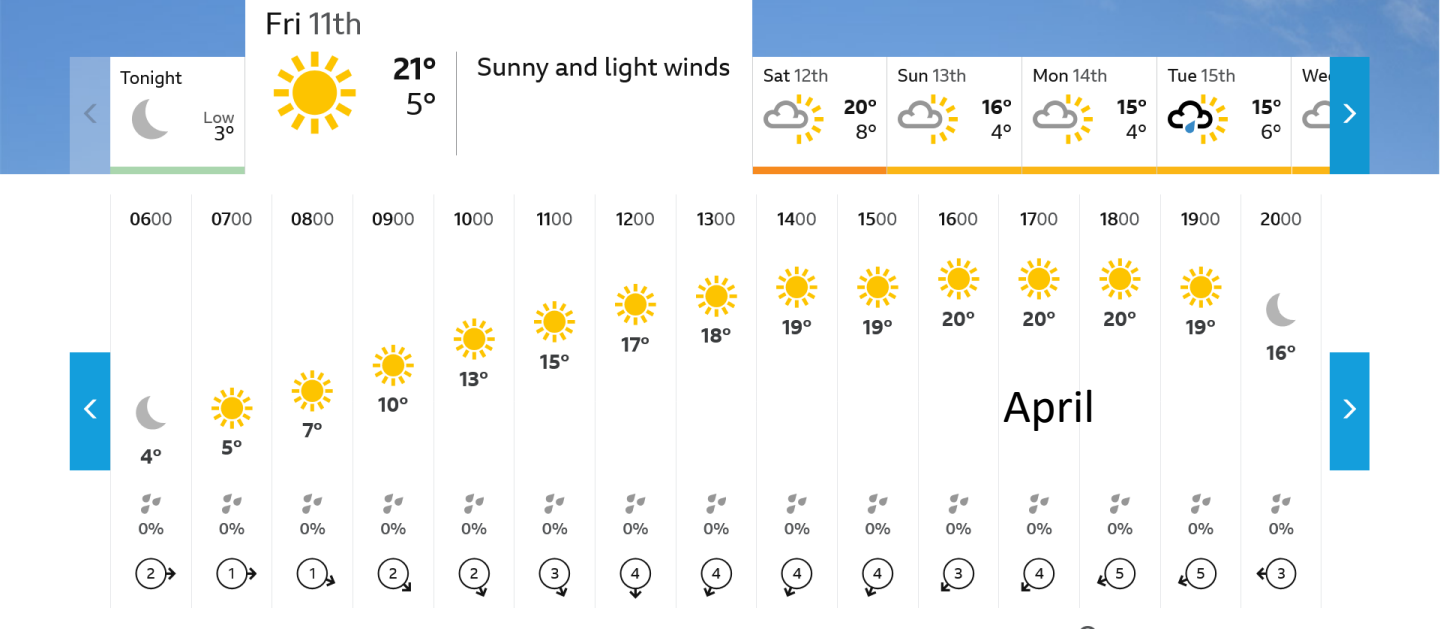


On the Lambourne Downs south of White Horse Hill. Photo Wendy Spicer



Janet Middleton was a former member of Vale Group. Photo John Gordon



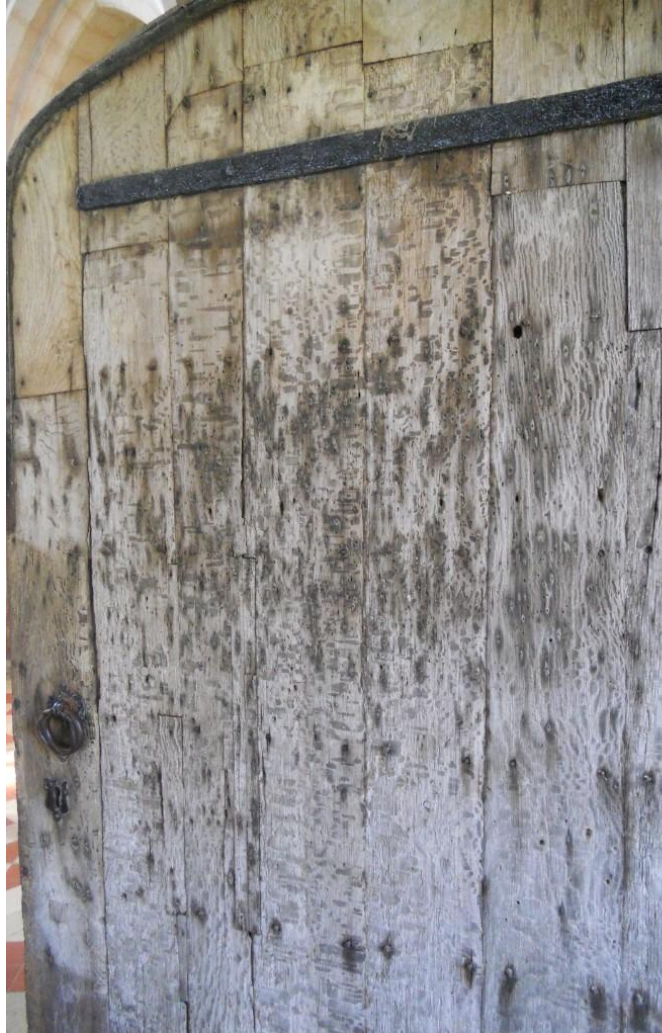
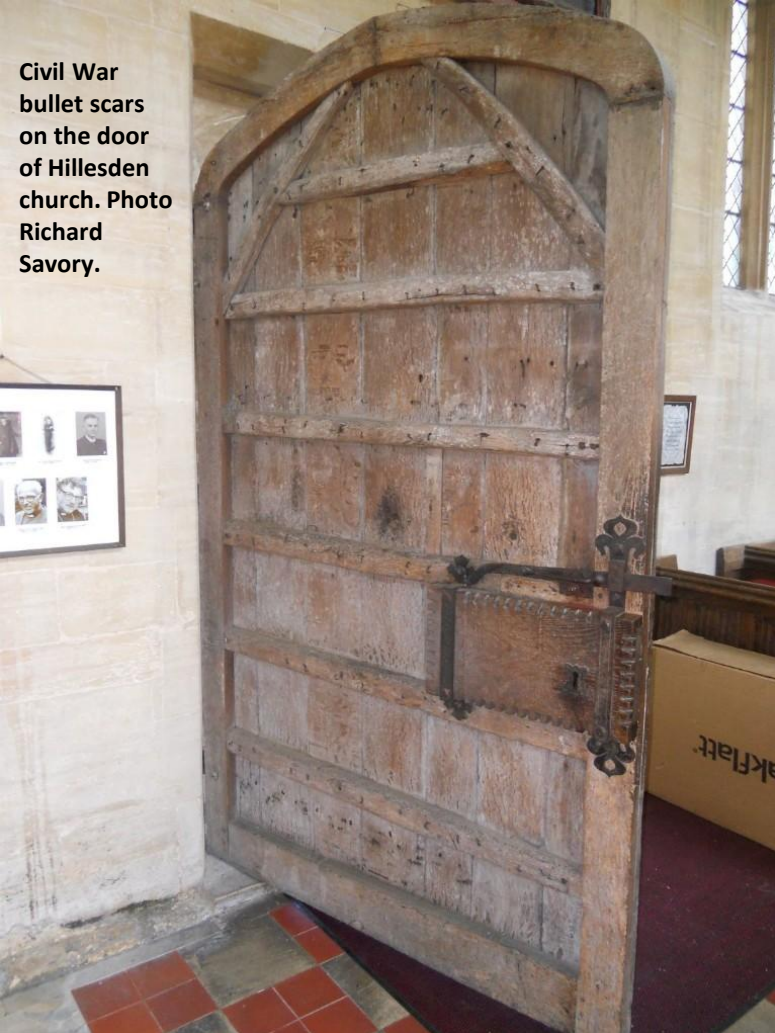


England had its sunniest March since records began in 1910. It was also the driest March since 1961. The good weather continued through April and well into May. Rain came in the last week of May, the week that Verity and I went to the Yorkshire Dales. Early June had two particularly wet days, on both of which I was leading group walks. Mmm ...



Photo Becky Day

Civil War
bullet scars
on the door
of Hillesden
church. Photo
Richard
Savory.



Some backrest. At a firing range near Beckley.
Photo Ruth Cornish

feet up



It's how you sell it. Derek Whitley, 2025's leader of the Yorkshire Naturalist's Union, gave a talk to the Craven Conservation Group (Yorkshire Dales) on the Diptera i.e. flies. Not a subject to get most people buzzing, perhaps, so he chose a great title: 'Flies unzipped.'

When young men walk down a pavement in a group it can be a bit intimidating for some. Does the reverse apply when a group of women of a certain age take up the complete width of a rural path? Photo Pam Wheeler.



I went to the library and said that I wanted to find out about tooth care through the ages. "Ah," replied the librarian, "you need a book on denthistory."

On the baptismal font in the church at Hook Norton. Photo Peter Flaxman

What do you eat when you're stuck in cold weather and angry about it? A brr-grr.

What does Salvador Dali take shopping so that he doesn't forget things? A surrealist.



We decided not to comply with this finger post literally. Photo Dave Cavanagh