

NAPHILL COMMON: SOME REFERENCES

Trevor Hussey
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The following list is composed from whatever I happen to have to hand. I will try to do more thorough research over the coming months. I have copies of all documents mentioned except the first.

General reference.

Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments. (1912) *Monuments of Bucks.*

This lists an Unclassified Earthwork. Naphill Common. 30 yds. E of Bradenham Hill, just below 600 ft contour. 160 yards long x 90yards wide. Roughly stirrup shaped. Ditch 21 ft wide x 2 ft deep. N side obliterated. (This may be a Romano-British farmstead.)

Rex Lever (1999) *Naphill and Walters Ash: Looking Back at Village Life in Celebration of the Second Millennium.* Published by the Millennium Committee of Naphill Village Hall and Playing Fields Council.

This contains several pages about the Common, including maps, photographs, accounts of encroachments, the 1853 enclosure etc. It is not all reliable – especially concerning the drovers – but it is the only extensive attempt at local history of which I know.

Other sources in date order.

Smith, W. G. (c1895) Article and map in *Naphill Gazette* of 1968.

Wilfred Smith is writing in 1948 about his childhood just before the end of the 19th Century and, as a warden of a reserve, his natural history is likely to be reliable. The map mentions various orchids, juniper, nightjars etc. He mentions juniper forests quote: ‘...so closely growing that it was difficult to force a way through them; many, beautifully symmetrical columns of verdure 15 or 20 feet high.’ This was reprinted in the *Naphill Gazette* in 1968. Note the mention of a study area: there might be records of the research done there but I have not found them.

Roscoe, E. S. (1903) *Buckinghamshire.* (7th edition edited by E. C. Rouse and R. L. P. Jowitt 1950) Methuen/Batsford; London.

Quote: ‘The Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is common on the escarpment as at Princes Risborough, Halton, etc., and it is also found on Naphill Common and in Burnham Beeches,...’ p 18. As the juniper was disappearing from Naphill Common by the 1950s, this is likely to have been unchanged from the 1st ed. 1903.

Eland, G. (1911) *The Chilterns and the Vale.* Longmans, Green and Co.; London.

Quote: ‘Naphill Common is one of those entrancing places on entering which the complexities which civilisation spells are forgotten, and imagination can easily conjure the pageant of ages before our eyes, just as the same stage did

duty for the varied scenes of the Elizabethan masterpieces. Among scattered and misshapen oaks and scrubby beech rise great bushes of juniper and gorse, eight or ten feet high; now all dark with the stalks of dead bracken forming a tangled mass of orange and ochreous (sic) lines across them. Wide tracks of short and springy turf wind across the Common, and in the highest part are several ponds, now brimful.' p. 17.

Robinson, R. M. and Bathhurst, C. J. (1929) *The Penn Country and the Chilterns*. John Lane the Bodley Head: London.

Quote: (Describing a journey reputedly made by Elizabeth I) 'As we follow her trail backwards we pass an invisible point where Downley Common becomes Naphill Common and soon the open down gives way to thick clumps of bracken and furze and hawthorns; gradually beech trees rise on either side to hide the outer world, and glades between show a singular diversity of vegetation that places Naphill in the front rank of Chiltern commons. Oaks mix with the beeches. Birches show their silver trunks against a patch of hollies, and junipers spring up, not one by one as elsewhere, but in solid grey-blue companies.....' p. 79.

Massingham, H. (1940) *Chiltern Country*. Batsford; London. (The Face of Britain series.)

Quote: 'The books do say something about Naphill Common – I never could make out why. They tell us that hollies and juniper, bracken and gorse, oak and scrubby beech grow there and that there are ponds and turfy paths. Granted, but so they do on many other commons, while the juniper, the most uncommon plant on the list, is of much finer growth elsewhere. My own impression is that Naphill Common looks like a particularly clever venture in landscape gardening; it is not so much wild as an attempt to look wild and so sophisticated.' p. 85.

Here Massingham is following Eland (1911) without acknowledging him and without recognising that the common will have changed in the intervening decades. (He plagiarises Eland elsewhere in the book.)

Nature Conservancy Council. (1988) Details of Naphill Common Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Naphill Common was made an SSSI in 1951 under the 1949 Act and registered in 1988 under the 1981 Act. The document gives some information about the geology and flora.

Quote: 'The woodland has a very unusual structure and composition because there has been little or no silvicultural management since the cessation of grazing. The site is therefore of value to woodland ecologists as a control in which the fate of native tree species, and the associated flora and fauna, can be monitored and compared with more managed stands.' p. 1. This paragraph was omitted from the copies of the document distributed at the time (the then) English Nature proposed their programme of felling.

Hepple, L. W. and Doggett, A. M. (1992) *The Chilterns*. (2nd ed. 1994) Phillimore. Pollards on Naphill Common (p. 132), enclosure (p. 197). Quote: 'These open spaces were on acidic soils of the clay-with-flints or patches of Reading Beds,

with a different flora to the chalk. Here reduction of grazing soon lead to ling, heather or bracken colonising and growing. These are succeeded by scrub, oak and beech woods. These woods, like Naphill, are widely regarded as some of the most valuable ecologically, with their diverse structure and ground flora. Yet the heaths are disappearing under this growth, and they have attracted less attention than their downland compatriots.' p. 238.

Showler, A. (1994) *An account of the re-appearance of Starfruit (Damasonium alisma) at Downley Common and Naphill Common and a report for 1989-1993.* Plantlife 'Back from the brink' project.

Smith, C. J. (1995) *A Preliminary Field Survey and Proposals for the Continuing Management of Naphill Common and Part of Downley Common for the Period 1997-2007.* The West Wycombe Estate in association with Naphill Common Committee, Downley Common Preservation Society and English Nature.

This was produced for English Nature when setting out on their project to fell and clear..

Hodge, P. J. (1997) *A survey of the insects of Naphill Common – 1996 and a Second survey of the insects of Naphill Common – 1997.* For English Nature Thames and Chilterns Team.

Jackson, N. (1999) *Naphill Common: Grazing vs Grass Cutting.* Report prepared on behalf of the Naphill Common Committee. The Naphill Common Committee was a forerunner of the Friends of Naphill Common.

West Chilterns Project.

(2000) *Conservation and Restoration Plan for Naphill Common.*

Alexander, K. N. A., and Lister, A. J. (2003) *Thames & Chilterns: Parkland and wood pastures with veteran trees. Phase I.* On behalf of English Nature.

Forbes, V., Rose, B., and Fay, N. (2005) *Thames & Chilterns: Parkland & Wood-Pasture Veteran Tree Survey Phase II.* On behalf of English Nature mentions 181 live veteran trees on Naphill Common.

Bloxham, M. G. (2009) *Naphill Common: Short Invertebrate Survey.* For Friends of Naphill Common.

Idle, A. (2009) *Looking at grasses on Naphill Common.* For Friends of Naphill Common.