

Friends of Naphill Common

History and Archaeology is the subject of this newsletter. The History and Archaeology Group was set up by the Friends of Naphill Common on 10th May 2011 specifically to explore the Common, the archives and the memories of villagers to further the understanding of the history of Naphill Common. The group (known affectionately as "HAG") reports back to the committee of FoNC. A wide range of possible projects has been identified and in time we hope to tackle all of them. We are starting with two lead projects as follows:

Archaeology – Walk the Common to establish a visual "big picture" survey of all the features worthy of investigation. This will help us to assign the correct priorities. We have already held two walks (see adjacent box) and will shortly be doing a third.

History – establish a time-line for the Common, charting its changing area and shape and its varying usages through the ages. This will be published on the FoNC web site and added to as more information is uncovered.

Possible future projects include:

Interviewing Villagers to record their recollections of life on the Common in days gone by, before mains water and electricity, when it was open grassland used for grazing. We can record your thoughts by pen and paper or using recording equipment, whichever you feel happiest with. We would like to build up an archive

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on our website. Can you help us? Please call Kevin on 01494 568689 or email Peter at fonc@hotmail.co.uk.

Churchill Tanks used to be manufactured at Broom Wade in High Wycombe and be driven up to Naphill to test them. Did you know that tank tracks still exist on Naphill Common? We can survey the tracks before they disappear for good, research archives to learn about what was built and interview villagers to rediscover the personalities involved.

History and Archaeology Group's first event

Our first event was an evening walk on 1st June to locate features of interest on the Common. We were led by Lyn Simmonds and joined by local historian John Morris of the Chilterns Woodland Project.

Starting at Forge Road, the 16 budding archaeologists strode out towards the boundary ditch/embankment between Naphill Common and Bradenham Wood close to The Piggery. John explained that the ditch may have been nearly a metre deep and the embankment a similar height originally. The objective was to stop animals escaping from the common. We then followed the boundary ditch towards Bradenham and a short way on we came across a circular feature about 4m in diameter, thought to be a Lye pit or possibly a charcoal pit.



Lye pit

Our next stop was Willow Pond. As the banks of this pond are quite steep it is thought it may have been dug to extract the Silcrete boulders rather than as a watering hole for animals. Silcrete is a pure fine grained stone, where it is mixed with flints the rock is known as Pudding stone (it resembles concrete). Several boulders of Pudding stone still line the rim of the pond. We also noticed a bench mark carved into one of the wooden posts that mark the Common's boundary into the pond.

Following paths H20 and H3 we found our way to the suspected Romano-British farmstead adjacent to Dew Pond. The bank and ditch that used to surround this feature is still evident on three sides, being a broad (c2m wide) ditch with embankments on both sides.

The trained eyes of Lyn and John quickly found lumps of iron slag, waste from an ancient iron smelting process. John explained that the iron ore was



Iron slag

smelted in a clay oven or Bloomary Oven. Some of the slag samples had evidence of clay embedded in them. It took up to 60 tonnes of wood to smelt 1 tonne of iron ore so it was more effective to move the iron to the source of fire wood.

Our third walk will be on Thursday 28th July starting at 7.30pm at the Common end of Downley Road. Please join us if you are interested.

The Victorian Fair used to be held on the Common close to Chapel Lane (not on the Crick as it is today). Who has knowledge of this passed down from parents or grand parents? We have located a few pictures copied from old glass plates.

The Romano-British (?) farmstead has been surveyed before but it is missing one side. We plan to conduct geophysical surveys to try to locate the position of the fourth side.

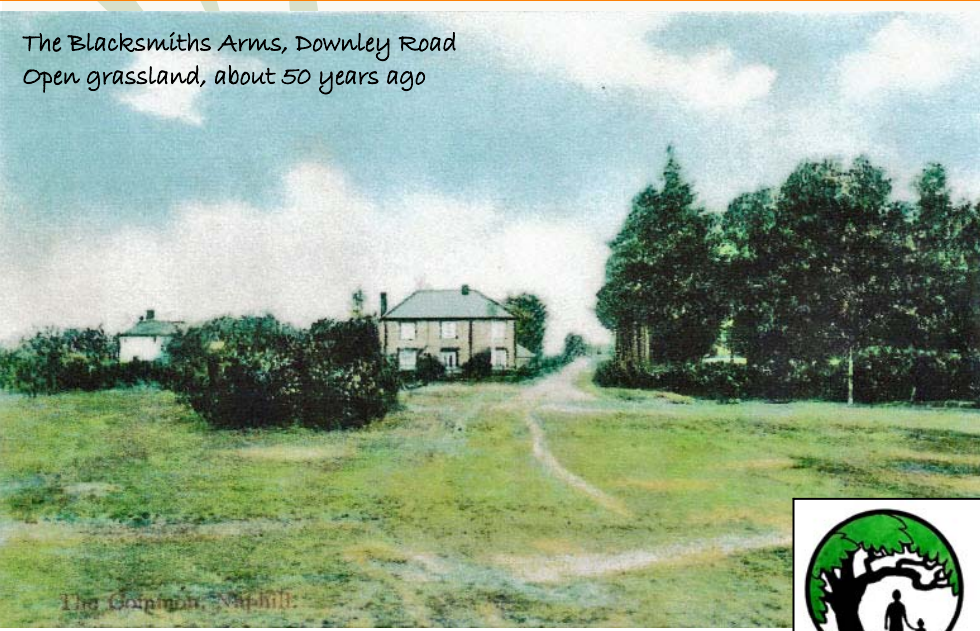
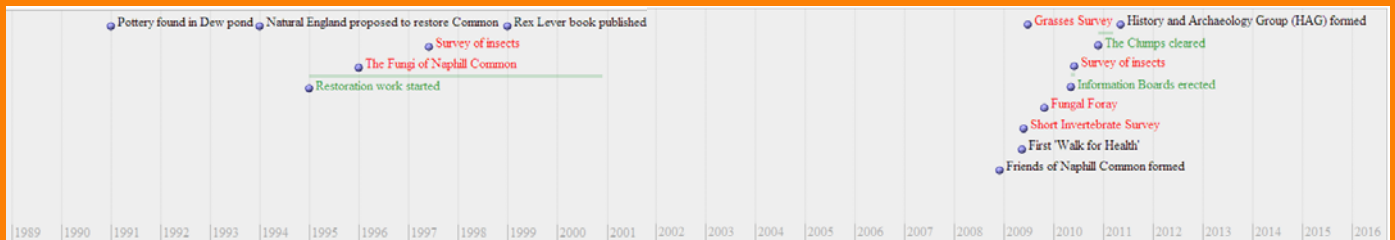
Your Garden. Another source of information is people's gardens. The Common used to be almost twice as large as it is now, extending to the eastern side of Main Road. This means that most of the houses in the village are built on what used to be the common.



The Victorian Fair
(courtesy Pam Smith)

Have you dug up something interesting in your garden? We would be very interested to learn about it. We promise not to commandeer your trophy!

Coming soon to our website www.naphillcommon.org.uk will be our Naphill Common time line. An extract is shown below. This interactive feature allows you to move forwards and backwards in time to a point of interest and when you click on an event, further details pop up, sometimes with links to other parts of the website. We will be adding additional events to it as we uncover more research, so if you know of an event we've missed please let us know all about it by calling Kevin on 01494 568689 or emailing Peter at fonc@hotmail.co.uk.



The Blacksmiths Arms, Downley Road
Open grassland, about 50 years ago



Our Programme

- 28 July, Archaeological walk of the Common (southern end), meet at 7.30pm at Common end of Downley Road.
- 4 and 18 Sept, 2, 18 and 13 Oct, Working parties to cut back scrub, meet at 10am at Forge Road.
- 27 October, Fungal foray, meet at 10am at Village Hall.
- 27 Jan 2012, AGM and Open Meeting with Jill Ayres presenting a talk on fossils and rocks of the area.

