

Friends of Naphill Common

It has been a busy year, but one of mixed fortunes. Several of our events, including the mini-beast safari and the bat walk, were adversely affected by rain but were reasonably well attended despite that. Then, ironically, just when we could have done with wet weather to encourage the fungi, the exceptionally dry autumn meant that we struggled to find specimens on the fungus foray. Of course, once the foray was past the rains came. However, this has encouraged one of our genuine rarities to appear for the first time in about four years: the beautiful, even spectacular, *Hericium erinaceum*. If you would like to see it, go to Dew Pond near the junction of paths H2 and H21. At the far side of



Hericium erinaceum

the pond is the Great Beech and the fungus is on the rear of the tree at a height of about 12 feet (or if you have been metricized, about 3.66m). It is like a head of tousled blond hair – think of Boris.

Newsletter No. 8 December 2011

Our working parties have been busy. We have continued clearing holly scrub from near the Clumps and we hope you have noticed the greatly improved paths entering the Common from the end of Chapel Road. More recently, as you will read overleaf, the working parties have been surveying the WWII tank tracks as part of the activities of the History and Archaeology Group. It was particularly good to see that the work parties attracted members other than those on the committee. These practical tasks are friendly, enjoyable and satisfying, and they make a contribution to the village, so if anyone would like to join in please do. You will be very welcome, no expertise is needed and tools are provided. See the Naphill and Walter's Ash gazette and the website for details and dates.

Ron Collins' 'Walks for Health' have been consistently popular. This year the walks have been more widely spread – made possible by car-

sharing – and they often end at a hostelry for a drink and/or a meal, depending on the inclination of the walkers. This is another friendly activity you might like to join.

Possible Management of the Common.

Some months ago the West Wycombe Estate expressed an interest in undertaking some management



*Mk III Churchill Tank
The Tank Museum, Bovington*

activities on Naphill Common which could include some limited tree felling and scrub clearance. The Estate owns all of the Common except for a small portion at the Bradenham end owned by the National Trust. However, because the Common is an SSSI Grade 1 and a Special Conservation Area, the Estate has to have

Photographic Competition 'My Naphill Common'

All amateur photographers are welcome to enter up to two photographs representing any aspect of Naphill Common that interests them. Even old photographs are welcome, and these can be submitted as slides or prints, while recent photos should be sent by email to fonc@hotmail.co.uk

There are two classes, one open to adults the other to those under 16.

The closing date is Saturday 7th January 2012. There will be prizes for the winners and at least one photo will appear on the front of the Naphill and Walter's Ash Gazette. See our website for the rules.

www.naphillcommon.org.uk

the agreement of such bodies as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Chiltern Conservation Board before any work can begin. At a meeting in July representatives of FONC were asked to prepare a list of "significant features" which must be respected during forestry activities.

We have now submitted a list of ancient and significant trees; the juniper and surviving heathland plants; rare plant species; rare fungi; important fauna; ponds; glades and paths; and archaeological features, together with a map showing their locations. What management will eventually be undertaken and when it will begin, is yet uncertain, but we are watching closely and will keep everyone informed as we learn more.



Future activities.

The committee will soon be planning a new programme of activities and events for 2012. At present we have the Walks for Health on Monday 19th Dec.; 16th Jan.; 20th Feb.; 19th March; 16th April; 21st May; 18th June; 16th July; 20th Aug.; 24th Sept.; 15th Oct.;

19th Nov.; and 17th Dec. Meet at the Village Hall at 10am. There will be our last working party of the year on Sunday 11th December, starting from Forge Road at 10 am.

Please come to our open meeting on Friday 27th January 2012. The well-known and popular speaker, Dr Jill Evers, will give a talk about the geology and some archaeology of our area, and answer questions and identify any specimens you would like to bring along. The meeting is in Naphill Village Hall, beginning at 7.30pm. The winners of the photographic competition will be announced during the evening.

News from the History and Archaeology Group

Our History and Archaeology Group (HAG) has been very busy. Our most active project is Churchill Tanks which neatly links archaeology, oral history and archival research. Did you know that **Churchill Tanks** were tested on Naphill Common after assembly at Broom and Wade's factory in Bellfield Road, High Wycombe? Sometimes they drove up through Downley Common, other times they came up Coombe Lane, but when they came onto Naphill Common they seem to have been driven as far as Five-Ways where they turned around. We have clear indentations in the ground showing the alignment of a pair of parallel tracks and a broad bowl where they turned. We are surveying these tracks currently. We have a copy of a contract card from the Tank Museum in Bovington showing that on 5th Oct 1940 Broom and Wade were instructed to assemble 219 Churchills. Several have been traced to the Canadian Army and one, Tank Number T31748, is pictured below. It



Assembling Churchills, from A Recorded History of CompAir BroomWade

seems quite likely that this would have been tested on Naphill Common.

According to some "Most Secret" drawings the museum have sent

us, Churchill Tanks were 24 ft long by 10'8" wide and weighed 38.5 tons fully laden. Their max speed on tarmac was 17.3mph and their average fuel consumption was 0.8mpg! The 5-man crew consisted of the Commander, Driver, Gunner (hull) Gunner (turret) and Loader. The distance between the centres of the tracks was 7'2 1/2", which agrees well with the survey measurements we have taken.

Our other active project is **Oral History**—recording the recollections of villagers with particular regard to the Common. We've been trained in interviewing techniques and in how to use the digital recorder so look out—we'll soon be after your memories!

You can follow our HAG projects on our website by going to the History and Archaeology Group button. If you are **interested in helping** please call Kevin on 01494 568689.

Made in High Wycombe: Churchill Tank T31748, www.ramtank.ca

