



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

UPSTREAM

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Dead Hedging, East Garston © Andy Hollox

A Helping Hand in East Garston

Nature needs our help now more than ever. To that end any group needing conservation advice is very welcome to contact the Society. We are happy to visit to discuss problems and proposals and will always try to offer a helping hand.

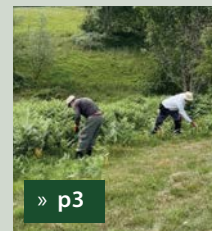
Recently, the society was approached by Pat Glover, on behalf of East Garston Eco Group (EGEG, set up in 2022), asking for advice on how to manage a strip of woodland which runs along the edge of a recreation field in the village, called the Millenium Field. The woodland was planted over 25 years ago on land owned by the parish council. Pat explained that the council had agreed to let the new group assume responsibility for managing the area,

especially as it borders the gardens of concerned parishioners.

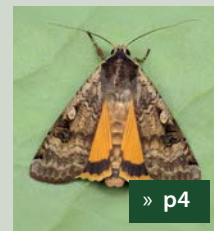
As a result, a visit was arranged to assess the woodland and to offer advice on how best to manage it going forward. In summary, the site was found to be heavily shaded, due to the way trees and shrubs had been managed in the past, with an almost impenetrable hedge along its boundary with the field. Not ideal conditions for wildlife or biodiversity!

Following the visit, Pat produced a report for the Parish Council highlighting the site's poor ecological condition as well as its potential with appropriate management. The report included suggestions on how this might be achieved. At this point it was expected that any work needed would be carried out by

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EGEG. However, the Society is very aware of how daunting conservation work can be, especially when getting started on a new site, and so it offered a one-off conservation management task visit as well as offering practical conservation advice on the day. The £100 donation to the Society to get EGEG's work up and running has been gratefully received.

And so, very early in April, 20 Society Volunteers set to work – as always with enthusiasm and determination. As a result, many overgrown hazels were coppiced and two D-shaped scallops with associated dead hedges were created. Scallops enhance the area for wildlife especially butterflies and other small animals; dead hedges provide hiding and nesting habitats.

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West Berkshire Countryside Society

Caring for our Countryside – Join Us and Help Make a Difference.

West Berkshire Countryside Society

The aim of the West Berkshire Countryside Society is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the West Berkshire countryside... furthering these objectives through practical conservation work, and guided walks and talks from local experts. It was formed in 2012 by amalgamating the Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys; the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group; the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers & the Barn Owl Group.

Upstream is our quarterly publication designed to highlight conservation matters in West Berkshire and beyond and to publicise the activities of the Society.

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Conservation Volunteers' Task Diary

For outdoor events please wear suitable footwear and clothing. Most practical tasks start at 10am and usually finish around 3pm, unless otherwise stated, so bring a packed lunch. However, we are more than happy to accept any time you can spare! All tools are provided. A map of each task location can be found on the website diary page by clicking on the grid reference shown for that task. The three-word code after each grid reference is the "What Three Words" listing for the task meeting point.

Date/Time	Venue	Details
October 2025		
Tue 7th Oct 10:00	Malt House, West Woodhay	Hedge laying and coppicing. Parking is on the entrance to the field off the West Woodhay Rd or as directed on the day. SU407 9763945 /// belts.glorified.connects
Tue 14th Oct 10:00	Bucklebury Common	Heathland and woodland management. Meet at the Crossroads or as directed on the website. SU556 691 /// taskbar.flagpole.sensual
Tue 21st Oct 10:00	Furze Hill, Hermitage	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent. SU512 740 /// simmer.equipping.casual
Tue 28th Oct 10:00	Little Hidden Farm Hungerford	Hedge laying. Access by following the track through the farm until you can go no further. Park opposite the indoor riding school. SU351 713 /// crisps.joke.encrusted
November 2025		
Tue 4th Nov 10:00	Sheepdrove, Lambourn	Continue hedge laying and tidying previous length of hedge. Park near the red barn. Do not use sat nav guidance to locate this site. SU349 816 /// connected.ranges.over
Tue 11th Nov 10:00	Streatley Allotments	Hedge laying in conjunction with local volunteers. Park at recreation ground and walk to allotments near to Streatley Church. SU592 812 /// gazed.intruding.weeds
Tue 18th Nov 10:00	Boxford	Brash clearing and willow maintenance. Park along Westbrook Lane and in the site entrance in Boxford village. SU426 717 /// rectangular.maybe.scatter
Tue 25th Nov 10:00	Grove Pit Common Leckhampstead	Woodland maintenance on this parish wildlife site. Access the common via the track which leaves the B4494 west at Cotswold Farm. Please leave your vehicles at the bottom of the track and walk up to the common. SU440 777 /// bossy.connected.tubes
December 2025		
Tue 2nd Dec 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm Bradfield	Continuing woodland conservation management tasks. Meet at the Black Barn off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. SU584 723 /// telephone.brink.crate
Tue 9th Dec 10:00	Bucklebury Meadows	Working on hedges around the meadows behind the pub/restaurant in upper Bucklebury. Park in Morton's Lane or as directed on the website. SU543 686 /// chuckling.notion.regaining
Fri 12th Dec 10:00	Ashampstead Common	Haloing ancient trees and maintaining wheelchair access path. Park at the Common entrance just past The Cottage along Sucks Lane, Ashampstead. SU576 751 /// nuzzling.pegg.afford
Tue 16th Dec 10:00	NEWT, Newbury	Site management tasks across the varied habitats of this exciting new conservation area. Park on site. Access from Hill Road via Speen Lane. SU462 674 /// insert.wage.anyway

Volunteers: Task Roundup

Cutting Bracken, Holt Lodge
© Andy Hollox

The excessively hot, dry weather this summer has led to some difficult working conditions. We have had some early starts to avoid the worst of the heat and a couple of cancellations because of it. On the other hand, vegetation has grown less so it has been a little easier to cut and rake along paths and in meadows and glades where most of our summer tasks take place.

However, invasive species seem to be flourishing as much as ever. Whilst we have nothing against the appearance of purple flowered *Rhododendron ponticum*, a Victorian introduction, it is highly invasive, spreading very easily and quickly by layering and creating an ever-growing mass of vegetation. It snuffs out any chance for a diverse flora and fauna. On the **Eling Estate**, we cleared a large patch near Grimsbury Castle and even more in the woods at Geoff's Corner.



A single visit was made this year to bash bracken along the steep slopes at **Holt Lodge Farm**. The task seemed

slightly easier this year (hopefully we are winning the battle to eradicate it) but at the very least we are preventing its further spread. Large numbers of 11 different butterfly species were recorded here on the day, showing the value of removing the invasive bracken from this meadow.

On two of the hottest days of the summer, the volunteers were at **Sulham Water Meadows** engaged in the task of ragwort removal. This rather attractive yellow flower is poisonous to all livestock. The meadows are a Site of Special Scientific Interest and so no herbicides can be used for control. We removed large numbers of plants, digging up the roots to prevent regrowth, and bagging them for removal from the site.



Path maintenance activities in this quarter began with work on the **Eling Way**. The task covers the 2.5k stretch from Hampstead Norreys Village Hall to the M4. We have two objectives: to preserve the definition of the path provided by the wooden shuttering on either side; and to clear any higher-level vegetation ingress. We try to clear debris from the surrounding trees and the weed ingress without disturbing the structure of the path. Our two days' work this year have covered the stretch from Hampstead Norreys to the high bridge.

The visit to **Grovepit Common, Leckhampstead** resulted in the annual clearance of vegetation which was encroaching onto the ROW and side

tracks. It was pleasing to see that the saplings planted after felling dead elm trees had survived the recent hot weather and were still in leaf.



Following an early start during the second summer's heatwave, we undertook our annual task of raking three glades on **Ashampstead Common** that had previously been cut by Yattendon Estates. The grass was not as thick this year due to the exceptionally dry summer, and the task was completed by lunchtime. Continued cutting, raking and removal of the grass helps to promote beautiful wildflowers in the spring.

At **Furze Hill** there is a large meadow which provides sustenance for a variety of butterflies and other insects. As part of the management plan the meadow is cut and raked on a biennial basis. By creating a checkerboard of 'cuts' in rotation, we are able to manage the area effectively.

Two visits were made to **Rushall Manor Farm**: the first to continue coppicing the edge of a ride to widen it and let in more light to encourage a more diverse ground flora and associated fauna; the second to clear up and revitalize a wooded area by the Oaklands Classroom, so that it is safe and suitable for developing further outdoor educational facilities adjacent to the building.

Compiled by **Margery Slatter**, with thanks to the Task Leaders

Late-September Moths

With butterflies now all but over, let's take a look at the 'Top 5' nocturnal moths most likely to be flying at this time of the year: those that typically have the highest number of sightings recorded during the third week of September in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. This is the area covered by the Upper Thames Branch (UTB) of Butterfly Conservation.



Top of the list is the Large Yellow Underwing (*Noctua pronuba*) which has been recorded in 92% of the 10k Ordinance Survey grid squares in the UTB region. This moth is common across a wide range of habitats (with herbaceous plants and grasses the caterpillars' foodplants). The Large Yellow Underwing can be seen when disturbed from ground vegetation during the day.

Large Yellow Underwing © Butterfly Conservation/Ryszard Szczygie



The Number 2 spot goes to the Lunar Underwing (*Omphaloscelis lunosa*), which is a widespread and common single-generation species which frequents a range of grassland habitats across our region (recorded in 85% of our 10k squares). Its larvae overwinter and feed on various grasses.

Lunar Underwing © Butterfly Conservation/Julian Francis



Third in line is the Square-spot Rustic (*Xestia xanthographa*), another grassy-habitat species, recorded in 92% of our 10k squares. It may also be found along woodland edges and in suburban habitats. Its nocturnal caterpillars feed mainly on grasses during the winter.

Square-spot Rustic © Dave Wilton



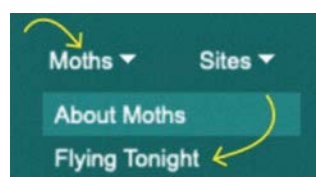
The fourth most-recorded species is the Lesser Yellow Underwing (*Noctua comes*), whose larvae feed on herbaceous and woody plants. Again, this is a common species throughout our region, occurring in 91% of 10k squares. Like its larger cousin, the Large Yellow Underwing, it shows a wide range of variation in both colour and pattern on the forewings.

Lesser Yellow Underwing © John Thacker



In fifth place we have the wonderfully named Setaceous Hebrew Character (*Xestia c-nigrum*), equally common in a wide range of habitats (but especially in cultivated areas). It is quite easily identified by the bright straw-coloured triangular marking on the leading edge of the forewing, adjacent to a black mark considered to look like a letter from the Hebrew alphabet – hence the name! Note the variation in colour and markings in the 2 photos. Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is one of its larval foodplants, so check out your local nettle patch!

Setaceous Hebrew Character © Butterfly Conservation/Ryszard Szczygiel



Check out our website for the full list of the moths you might see at this time of the year: if you select a species on the list, you'll also find details on how you can submit your own sightings and/or upload your own photos.

www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk www.UpperThamesMoths.co.uk

We know that nocturnal moths are less conspicuous than their day-flying counterparts (or, indeed, butterflies), nevertheless, discovering them can bring great joy. If you would like to have a go at identifying more moths, the UTB has a moth trap loan scheme. Details from priority-moths@upperthames-butterflies.org.uk

Derek Haynes

Continued from page 1.

Finally, we reduced the canopy of several pollard trees. All this work will have the effect of reducing shade which, in turn, should encourage greater diversity of the ground flora and associated wildlife.

The aim of this visit was to create a template for EGEG to follow, including further coppicing and the creation of more scallops on a rotation basis. The possibility of plug planting to enhance the scallops created so far was also discussed. Pat has since heard back from several villagers who now feel

inspired to manage their own land in a more sustainable and ecological way – for example, creating their own dead hedges – and to stop using pesticides. EGEG also received a small donation for the pile of beanpoles we produced from coppicing during the day, which they will use to buy some native bulbs.

A very productive day was enjoyed by all, especially the very nice cake that Pat provided which members of the Society always appreciate!

Terry Davis



Dead Hedge Scallop, E Garston
© Andy Hollox



Working on the Millennium Field, E Garston
© Andy Hollox

The Tree Tube Dilemma: Reduce? Reuse? Recycle?

A member of the society is hoping to start a local collection service, in order to facilitate recycling of tubes that have deteriorated beyond reuse.



Plastic 1.2m tubes are essential for the establishment of young saplings, especially in areas subject to grazing pressure, such as from deer. However, when they have served their purpose, they become an eyesore.

Fortunately, Tubex now offer a recycling service, including an option to return tubes to a local hub, free of charge. The challenge is managing tube collection and storage, especially as they are often

retrieved in small numbers and from difficult to reach areas.

Tubes need to have their black ties removed before being "nested" in groups of five and then stacked, 350-400 at a time, in a builders bulk bag. In order to consolidate tubes prior to their return to the nearest hub, a site with hard standing is needed, sufficient to store at least three bulk bags.

If anybody can help with a storage space, please contact the society for more details.

All Bright and Beautiful

Walking in late autumn along a hedgerow or woodland edge can reveal some spectacular displays of fruits and berries. On lime rich soils, one of the most vibrant is the spindle tree. Growing to about 3 or 4 metres tall, but often remaining as a hedgerow bush, the spindle tree's leaves turn a deep pinkish red in the autumn. It also produces bright pink berries, hanging in clusters from its branches, that slowly split open to reveal vividly clashing bright orange seeds. Not unexpectedly,

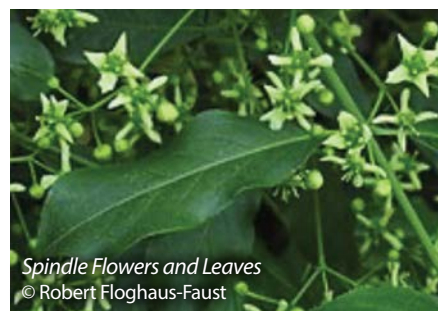


Autumnal Spindle
© Wikimedia commons

the seeds are poisonous and will purge the body quite violently if consumed. Powdered seeds were once applied externally to treat mange and louse infestations.

Spindle gets its name from the use of its wood – creamy white, very dense and hard, it was ideal for making spindles for hand spinning raw wool. The very straight and strong, heavy twigs were also widely used for making knitting needles, skewers and toothpicks. As well as hand spindles, some specialist artists' charcoal is still made from it.

The spindle is the host plant of certain moths that include the magpie, scorched carpet, and the spindle ermine moth which creates a web that can completely envelop the whole tree. The beautiful holly blue butterfly



Spindle Flowers and Leaves
© Robert Floghaus-Faust

occasionally chooses to lay its eggs on spindle. Unfortunately, spindle also plays host to black bean aphid and so is not so popular with keen gardeners!

In late spring, spindle's characteristic four-sided green twigs bear clusters of insignificant greenish white, four-petalled flowers and its fresh green leaves. Though a pleasant plant at any time of the year, it is in autumn that spindle appears like a flame in the hedgerow – most bright and beautiful!

Margery Slatter

Habitat Restoration Protects Rare Species on Bucklebury Common

Fantastic progress has been made this year with habitat restoration on Bucklebury Common to protect rare heathland and wood pasture species. The work has been carried out with some help from West Berkshire Countryside Society volunteers and is part of the Partnerships for Nature (P4N) programme. The Common is one of seven sites in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape P4N programme – which is funded through DEFRA's Species Survival Fund and administered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Bucklebury Common project covers 266 hectares of wood pasture, restored heathland and newly created heathland, and is expected to lead to a significant increase in a wide range of species, including heathland birds, reptiles, bats, and butterflies.

Heathland Restoration

Heathland is an important habitat for the survival of some rare species, including woodlarks, adders and the Dartford warbler, but there is very little remaining in England. Bucklebury Common is the largest remaining area of lowland heath in the North Wessex Downs – and this project will more than double its size to 66 hectares. The heath would originally have been grazed by wild herbivores, and then by cattle. But since cattle grazing stopped after the Second World War the heath has become overgrown with invasive birch. An area of birch and holly has been cut back, allowing heather seeds that have lain dormant for over 80 years to germinate.



Protection of 200 Veteran Trees

The project includes wood pasture restoration which will protect around 200 veteran trees. Old trees are a valuable resource for wildlife and an important part of Bucklebury Common's history. Many of the older trees on Bucklebury Common are overcrowded by lots of younger, taller trees. This reduces their lifespan and their ability to support an abundance of wildlife. Veteran trees are being 'haloed' by removing younger trees around them. This will increase the longevity of the veteran trees, allowing them to form lots of features which are great for wildlife like cracks and hollows, dead branches and 'epiphytes' – other plants growing on the tree. Wood pasture is also being restored by pollarding of younger trees – trees cut above the reach of livestock and deer which resprout with lots of fresh growth.



New Homes for Adders

Bucklebury Common is home to a small but very important population of adders, an increasingly rare reptile. Adders hibernate during the winter in structures called hibernacula. These are often natural, formed of narrow cracks in the roots of old trees, or rodent burrows. To increase the population of adders, artificial hibernacula have been built using logs and soil. These will provide additional spaces for them to hibernate safely through the winter.

Reintroduction of Cattle Grazing

Cattle grazing will be returned to the common to help maintain the heathland and wood pasture and prevent invasive birch trees regrowing. Another benefit of cattle grazing comes from cattle dung – which provides a fabulous resource for insects and fungi. A small herd of Belted Galloway cows are being introduced – with the help of invisible fencing. GPS collars are used to alert cows when they reach a boundary, and grazing boundaries can be defined via a simple phone app – making it much easier to manage than using physical fences.



Nightjars are one of many rare species to benefit from this project. These migratory birds, arrive from sub-Saharan Africa in spring and require open, heathy areas to nest on the ground. To find out if the nocturnal and well-camouflaged nightjar is about, listen out for its distinctive 'churring' call at dusk.



Ruth Larkin

Find out more about this and other Partnerships for Nature projects at www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

News from our AGM...

Minutes of the AGM are available to read on our website.



At the AGM in May this year I was pleased and honoured to take over as Chair of the Society.

Recently, I have been an active member of the volunteer task group, but my association with the Society goes back many years. Before my retirement I was the Farm Manager at Sulham Estate and, having fields

adjacent to the river Pang, knew of its work when it was the Pang Valley Countryside Project. I have always had an interest in wildlife and the environment, and the farm was involved in Higher Level Countryside Stewardship.

I would like to give particular thanks to Nick Freeman, as the outgoing Chair, for the hard work he has done in the last four years and for handing things over in a good position.

I would also like to thank the

volunteers who are out in all weathers and accomplish a large amount of work each Tuesday; the Barn Owl group which does an exceptional job to erect boxes and monitor numbers to protect this valuable species; and the wider membership who give support and take an interest in Upstream – a valuable point of information for tasks, news, meetings and walks.

I hope we continue to flourish in 'Caring for our Countryside'.

John Haggarty

Can We Help You?

The keynote presentation focused on the support the society is able to provide to parish councils and other local groups to establish their own working parties.

The presentation used Cold Ash as a case study, where WBCS helped the local group (Cold Ash Countryside Volunteers) to get established. When WBCS first worked with the group there were only 3 members. It is now thriving and has 17 members, with 10+ regularly attending the weekly events. The success has enabled the CACV to expand their work beyond land managed by the parish council, and they're now working on Public Rights of Way and other community areas, including the local graveyard

and a school. This has enabled the group to build a strong relationship with the parish council and West Berks Council. The work with WBC is particularly beneficial on Public Rights of Way, as WBC provides the materials and CACV do the work. Cold Ash Parish Council are the link between them. The volunteer group no longer requires the support of WBCS, as it is now self-sufficient.

With WBC's 'Devolution' proposals likely to be expanded, and its Public Rights of Way strategy focussing on engagement with parish councils and voluntary organisations, it is expected that the demand for local volunteer groups is likely to increase.



WBCS can help those who are struggling to maximise biodiversity in their parish or to manage their green spaces. If your parish council or voluntary group are interested in exploring what West Berks Countryside Society can do to support your local group to become established, please contact us at enquiries@westberkscountryside.org.uk



Find Us at the Newbury Show!

Saturday 20th & Sunday 21st September

Look out for our logo in the Countryside Area



Don't forget our website!
www.westberkscountryside.org.uk



Beenham and Woolhampton: Villages, Woods and Fields

5k (3 miles) on well-drained paths and tracks. Park in Beenham Village, or, if intending to use it, park at The Six Bells pub. SU583689 delivers.showcase.spouse. OS Explorer Map 159.

Passing the Six Bells pub on your right (turn right out of its car park), after about 200yds, take the track on the left.

1. Greyfield Wood is a 38 acre mix of ancient woodland and commercial trees offering a varied habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including 37 species of bird and at least 14 species of butterfly. The woodland is managed by volunteers. Permitted paths offer interesting detours.



Pasture, Beenham
© Geograph – Andrew Smith

Follow the main track keeping the wood to your right. After some 300yds bear left across fields to a junction of five paths. Bear half right towards the prominent buildings of Douai Abbey.

2. A Benedictine foundation (Paris, 1615), **Douai Abbey** provided a centre for English monks at the Sorbonne and Catholic exiles. It moved to Douai in Northern France after the French Revolution but was expelled in 1903. Now occupying the former site of St Mary's College, the Gothic Revival abbey church dates from 1928.

Follow the footpath past the new housing behind the abbey. On reaching the public road, take the lane opposite for about 300yds to reach the Anglican church. Go left through the churchyard to a gate on the other side.

3. St Peter's Upper

Woolhampton was originally built in the 13th century. It was probably associated with the Knights Hospitaller who owned the Woolhampton and Brimpton estate. The church was extended in 1861 and has fine stained glass windows.

Cross the sports field keeping to the right-hand side, over a metal drive, before shortly coming out on a lane. Walk right, down the road to the farm entrance, where a permissive path to the right skirts the paddocks at the edge of Gravelpit Copse; or take the footpath on the left and pass a succession of five narrow pinch-stiles through the paddocks of Malthouse Farm.

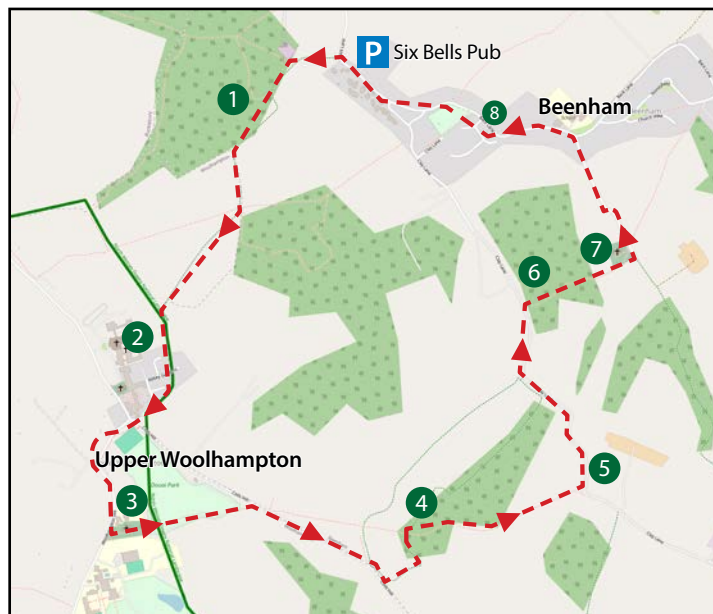
4. The aptly named Gravelpit Copse (a Local Nature Reserve) contains a tangle of shallow quarries. These probably provided suitable materials in the days when parishes had to maintain their own roads.

Take the bridlepath to the right through the wood, downhill for some 400yds, until you cross a bridge, turning left onto a wider track.

5. This is Clay Lane, part of an ancient route from the grazing



Equisetum Arvense
© Geograph – Bob-Harvey



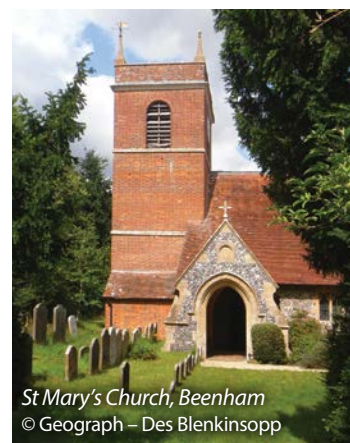
areas on Bucklebury Common down to the Kennet Valley marshes. Look for interesting plants on its banks such as horsetail, once used to polish pewter.

In 200yds turn right through the gate into Old Copse and follow the footpath steeply uphill to St Mary's Church, keeping to the south side of the wood.

6. Old Copse SSSI has numerous coppice stools which used to supply poles, sticks and firewood. It has bluebells, wood anemone, golden saxifrage, wild daffodils and many other plants.

7. St Mary's Church was twice damaged by fire. The tower was rebuilt in 1794 and the rest of the church in 1860-71. There is a ring of six bells dating back to 1859 containing the salvaged metal of an earlier peal that melted in the first destructive fire, thus more than halving the cost of the new bells.

8. The village of Beenham is first mentioned in 956AD as Benna's Hamme – meaning



St Mary's Church, Beenham
© Geograph – Des Blenkinsopp

'Benna's enclosure' but is not mentioned in Domesday Book. The church and manor were granted to Reading Abbey on its foundation by Henry I in 1121. The earliest settlements grew up on the ridge at Beenham Stocks and at the west end near the Six Bells. During the Civil War 1642-46 the area was 'no man's land' and many skirmishes took place.

Leaving the churchyard, turn left. Turn left again at the road junction to return to the pub.

Margery Slatter

Many more interesting local walks are available on our website: www.westberkscountryside.org.uk