

Swannington Commons Part 2: Their Use as a Recreational Amenity for Parishioners

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In the late 1970s, extensive consultation with parishioners and recorded interviews with senior residents, identified keeping some open areas of the common from becoming overgrown with trees as being very important. A management plan was therefore drawn up with the primary aim being “**to maintain and enhance the recreational amenity value of Swannington commons for parishioners**”.

Then, as now, everyone had a slightly different views of what they most valued on the commons. For some it was exercising their traditional rights to keep chickens, ducks, goats and horses and to collect fire wood.

Some enjoy *walking* through the cathedral-like mature oak woodlands but for many their enjoyment of the commons depends on there being open spaces, for example to provide important places to train dogs. Many parishioners value the *peace of mind* which they find from walking alone, (or with a canine companion) through a mosaic of different landscapes. Since the pandemic the benefits of such open air activities have become more widely appreciated.



Keeping chickens on the common has been a traditional use of the commons for many years (a-z animals com)



Looking north east from Deadman's Hill close to where Terry enjoyed his picnic last year

Some intrepid explorers have even scaled the dizzy heights of Deadman's Hill (Swannington's answer to the Himalayas) to gaze at the view down its heather clad slopes to the fen below. Despite the best efforts of 3 Dartmoor ponies and annual work by a skilled contractor, young trees continuously invade the fen.

Young fit parishioners used to enjoy *bike racing* with the “Uggate Aces” on their oval track and more recently face similar challenges on the BMX track at Alderford Common.

In **autumn** some parishioners enjoy *harvesting blackberries* or going on *fungus forays* on the commons, while one parishioner also used to delight in *burning furze* (gorse) on bonfire nights.

In **winter** *sledging* down the slopes of the marl pit on Alderford Common was popular as initial training for the Olympic bob sleigh event, while more intrepid individuals risked *ice skating* on the ponds

In **spring** some parishioners have helped toads and newts migrate across the road but the majority of the ponds on the commons in which they used to breed are now too overgrown for them to spawn there. Pond dipping for a wide range of invertebrates is a favorite occupation. A traditional Easter activity has been *egg rolling* in the marl pit. Many parishioners enjoy the birds' dawn chorus on the commons while many especially valued hearing nightingales singing.

In **summer** some people appreciate sitting on “Arthur's Seat” on Alderford Common watching the ever changing kaleidoscope of red tinged clouds as *the sun sets over the upper Wensum valley* while many parishioners enjoy the sight of swarms of orchids in the grasslands, watching butterflies pollinating the wildflowers in the marl pit or dragonflies hawking round the ponds. A modern use is for displaying agricultural machinery during “Swannington in Bloom”. Coming right up to date, *playing Pokémon Go* on Alderford Common appeals to some of the younger generation.

So many parishioners enjoy such a wide range of recreational activities on the commons throughout all the seasons but their activities have **never been to the detriment of the natural wildlife**.