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The Friends of Troopers Hill



May 2006

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Music on The Hill

Come and celebrate the summer sunshine with a picnic and the sound of Bristol East Band on Saturday 1st July. Imagine sitting and relaxing enjoying fantastic views out to the Mendips or across Bristol while listening to music that will stir your imagination. The brass band will start playing at 6pm and you can arrive with your picnics at any time. The event will take place at the top of Troopers Hill, a very easy, short walk across the flat area of the field accessed from Malvern Rd or Summerhill Terrace.

This is a free event but we will ask for donations to cover the costs that are being borne by Arts at St Aidan's and Friends of Troopers Hill as joint organisers. We would love to make a profit to support further events.



Tickets for Arts at St Aidan's concerts are usually £6. Wrist bands (that will work as well as the Harry Potter cloak of invisibility against donation collectors) can be obtained in advance and will automatically be entered for a free prize draw. Send a cheque made payable to "Friends of Troopers Hill" to the address in "CONTACT US" together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.



Please protect Troopers Hill, your local nature reserve, by not bringing disposable BBQs as these will damage the heathland.

If it rains we will move to St Aidan's Church Hall in Fir Tree Lane, so your advance purchase will not be wasted!

 **We're** very pleased to have welcomed so many new faces at work parties recently. Particularly since the winter months are when we can do most work.

Do try and come to the concert on the 1st July. It's going to be great but we need your support as we really want to stage more for you in the future.

Congratulations to Jacks Hurley who won the prize given for returning our recent survey.

Alan Watt asked and his employers Cromadex, part of Akzo Nobel, very generously gave us almost £800 under their Global Community Programme. A very generous grant that will help us continue the work on your behalf.

Thanks to all the contributors this edition—we're always happy to receive more!

Delivered with this edition, a form for the Sparrow Survey which we are helping with this year. Find out more on the website.

Heath and Heathers

Large parts of Troopers Hill are covered in what is known as heath. But what actually is a heath? Generally speaking heaths are areas dominated by small shrubs of the heather family. In England, heathland is an uncommon habitat, now only covering something like one third of one percent of the total land area! So, we are very lucky to have this area of rare habitat which is in such good condition.

Heathers belong to the same plant family as Rhododendrons and Azaleas, and the members of this family tend to do well on acidic soils such as those that are found on Troopers Hill.

There are two species of heather growing on Troopers hill, one is Heather or Ling, and the other is Bell Heather. Botanists use what are known as scientific names to differentiate species. This is partly because there can be so much variation in common names that two people in differing parts of the country can use the same common name for two different plants. So, using a scientific name means that you are, literally, being specific!



Heather

The scientific name for Heather is *Calluna vulgaris*, the *Calluna* part comes from Greek word *kallunein*, to cleanse (it appears it was used to make brushes) and *vulgaris* is from the Latin for "common". Bell Heather is known as *Erica cinerea*, the *Erica* is from the Greek *ereiko*, to break; an infusion of the leaves was thought to break up bladder stones, and the *cinerea* is from the Latin *cinis*, meaning ashy or grey.

Although they initially look rather similar it is quite easy to tell the two species apart. Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) has smaller flowers than Bell Heather and the tiny leaves are in four neat rows.



Bell Heather

Bell Heather, the more common of the two on the hill, has larger flowers, and larger leaves which are arranged in threes; to begin with this can be quite hard to see, so its best to learn to recognise the neat, symmetrical leaf arrangement of Heather first and then the two become easier to tell apart.

Friends of Troopers Hill will have a stand at the "Festival of Nature", in Millenium Square, on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th June. Do come along and visit us.

Friends of Magpie Bottom

The Magpie Bottom Nature Reserve is a valley lying between Hanham and St George. The Strad brook, which flows through it, is the ancient boundary between Bristol & Gloucestershire.

A fresh water spring rises and flows into a pond. There are several woodland trails plus the main paths going North to South and East to West. A substantial green has goal posts at the centre and smaller grassed areas dotted around.

We have a number of fruit trees in the woods, including an ancient orchard and a future project is to prune and plant new trees.

A visitor can see many species of birds from wrens to buzzards, butterflies, dragonflies, badgers, foxes, voles, rabbits and rare sightings of a deer. Wild flowers are also in abundance.

In 2005, under the guidance of the BTCV, Friends of Magpie Bottom obtained a grant from Peoples Places which enabled us to create a surround for the spring and build a weir designed by Geoff (one of our members). We next purchased and assembled two very nice benches with eight seats around circular tables. Unfortunately, they have been vandalised to some extent but with running repairs they are still in service.

We've cut and built 26 steps to create a safer access from Furber Road - a very rocky and stony job (hard graft!) and then turned our attention to our the pond. Funded by some of our grant, we enlarged the pond and created a weir. The pond is now a nice focal point.

Whilst these big projects have been going on, our small team of volunteers were also planting trees, shrubs and bulbs plus of course clearing rubbish and scrub; tasks that will always be with us. The 29th Kingswood 2nd Hanham Scout Group made and put up bird boxes.

We would all welcome anybody who would like to help us. We meet on the last Tuesday of the month 10 am to 1pm approx, Contact Alan on 011796 76192 or Paul on 01179605447

Alan and Paul

Dates for your Diary

Thursday 18th May: Meeting. 7.15 to 9.00pm. *Wesley Memorial Church Hall.*

Friday 26th May: Moth Event. 9.30 pm till late. Catch and identify some of the moths on Troopers Hill.

Saturday 3rd June: Work Party on the Hill. 10am to midday. *Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown.*

Tuesday 27th June: Meeting. 7.15 to 9.00pm. *Wesley Memorial Church Hall.*

Saturday 1st July: Music on the Hill concert. Music from 6pm onwards. *Bring a picnic, the family and friends from any time.*

CONTACT US

If you want to talk to us about issues raised in this newsletter, or about any other concerns, please contact:

Susan Acton-Campbell (Chair) on **0117 947 5037** or write to
3, Corkers Hill, St. George, Bristol, BS5 8DT.

email:chair@troopers-hill.org.uk

Sally Oldfield (Bristol Council Local Nature Reserves Officer)
on **0117 922 4429**

email:sally_oldfield@bristol-city.gov.uk

Or

Post a message on the new Forum at:

www.troopers-hill.org.uk

Memories of Troopers Hill Road

In 1964 three blocks of four houses numbered 111 to 133 were built by R. Howard and Son of Kingswood in Troopers Hill Road. My wife Phyll and I moved in to number 119 in September 1968, and since then we have seen many changes in Troopers Hill Road.

When we moved in, the Gas Lamps, supplied with gas by Butler's Chemical Works, had only recently been replaced by electric street lamps. One gas lamp survived for many years on the corner of the junction with Crews Hole Road. The pavement was very narrow at that time and the town houses numbered 87 to 109 were under construction. Once they were complete a new wider pavement was laid only for it to be dug up again shortly afterwards in order to lay more services; nothing changes! There was no domestic gas supply in the lower half of the road until the late 1970s/early 1980s, so the houses only had electric cookers and coal, electric or oil fired Central heating. We didn't have central heating when we moved in and it was several years before we did.

Between Crews Hole Methodist Church and Troopers Hill Road were some old cottages, the one right on the junction being Jack's shop. This was a general grocery store which was very convenient as it saved walking to the top of Troopers Hill Road to the next nearest shops. The lighting in these cottages was gas lamps, also using gas supplied by Butler's and they still had outside toilets only twenty or so years ago. These cottages, including the shop, were demolished in the 1980s and where they once stood is now the car park for the converted Methodist Church.

On the brow of the hill stands Myrtle House, once the residence of Mr and Mrs Lawson. This property originally had a huge garden, which may have been a remnant of the market gardens that once graced that side of the road. Mr Lawson, and for a few years his son, tended the garden with care until it was eventually sold and four houses now stand where vegetables used to grow.

In 1970 British Steel Corporation bought the William Butler site when the latter moved their Tar Production to Avonmouth. BSC used the Plant as an offshoot to their Port Talbot works shipping waste materials, from the steel production, to Crews Hole in large road tankers. These used to arrive throughout the day and night at about two hourly intervals, leaving on their return journey to Port Talbot twenty or so minutes later. The residents of Troopers Hill Road felt these tankers were a danger to children and animals alike. So, one evening after the tankers had passed down the hill, residents' cars and a lorry were parked in such a way to prevent the tankers coming back up again. The police and local press attended and everything was resolved amicably. As usual, however, the Press blew things out of all proportion by describing non-existent angry scuffles between residents and drivers. As a result a three ton weight limit was introduced on Troopers Hill Road.

Also in the 1970s, two town houses were built on the triangle of land between Troopers Hill Road and Parfitts Hill. This was followed a few years later by the building of the three houses on Parfitts Hill on land that was derelict when we moved in. This land (and that adjacent to Corkers Hill) had been the site of many old houses and had lain derelict from the time they were demolished until the time these new houses were built. The land behind them, to the top of Corkers Hill, was also redeveloped in 1993/1994 and this is where our present Chairperson and her husband now reside.



17 August 1985 - A Hot Air Balloon pilot decided to use Troopers Hill as a landing site.

Vernon McVeigh 2006