



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

No. 106
Summer
2015

THIS EDITION of the *Newsletter* has a lot of reports about our natural environment, which is looking good as spring turns to summer. None of it is ‘natural’ in the absolute sense, of course – all of it is managed, to a greater or lesser extent, mostly by Bristol Parks in the case of our public green spaces, or by individual companies, or – and this is much more important than many people realise – by each of us in our own homes and gardens.

One area not otherwise mentioned in this edition is Dundry Slopes. M.V.C.G. has been working for a better appreciation and better management for Dundry Slopes pretty well since we started. We were very active in the late, lamented Dundry Hill Group, working with CSV Environment (now renamed ‘Volunteering Matters’). We got some good things done on the ground – the wonderful Malago Spring Artwork, of course – but in terms of getting Bristol Parks to give the area the attention and resources it deserves, we can’t claim much success. The closest we might have got was to give Parks a guilty conscience about the Slopes! More recently, other people and groups have risen to the challenge, and we’ve been happy to take more of a back seat (we’re not short of other things to do!). ‘Volunteering Matters’, the Avon Wildlife Trust and local people have been achieving a lot, most recently with a successful ‘Dundry Discovery Day’ at the end of May. If any M.V.C.G. member would like to get involved with work on Dundry Slopes, please get in touch.

The built environment remains important, of course. There will soon be a major planning application for 74 houses at one of the four sites at Imperial Park which got outline planning permission a couple of years ago. You can find out more about what is proposed at sites.google.com/site/imperialparkphsv. If you have a view about it you can let the developers know – and please tell us, as well.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

IN THIS ISSUE

Manor Woods Valley News....	Page 2
White Elephant Update.....	Page 3
Crox Bottom Clean-up.....	Page 4
Anton Bantock.....	Page 7
Dates for your Diary.....	Page 8

NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

IN OUR SPRING *Newsletter* we expressed concern about the future of Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve in the midst of cuts affecting parks and the re-organisation of Council structures. Three months later we are gradually being faced with the reality of cuts and the re-organisation is still going on leaving us more and more frustrated. Progress is slow and requires more effort and more time from volunteers if anything is to be achieved.

However, our walk with Tom Penn round Manor Woods Valley in February produced some results. Some fallen trees in the woodland have been removed and the path is going to be repaired by ParkWorks, which is a new initiative to undertake ‘one-off’ work in Bristol’s parks, using volunteer labour and providing training opportunities. Since February, Tom’s responsibilities have been extended over more areas of the city and he is now very overstretched.

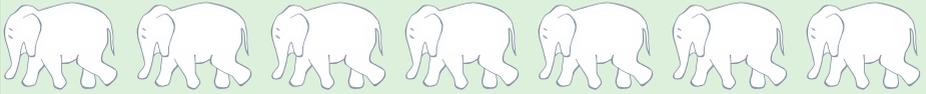
We have tried to report the fly-tipping at the top of the woodland. We were told to use the Council website. I did, and spent twenty very frustrating minutes fighting with an inadequate website. I also sent an e-mail. All this without any result.

Members of our small group have done some litter-picking and trimmed the paths in the ‘Malago Orchard’ (the old quarry at the north end near Vale Lane). We have also replaced a few of our ‘dog notices’.

The M.V.C.G. committee provisionally agreed that we would finance the repair of the Meadow interpretation board which had been vandalised. Many e-mails have gone backward and forward to try to understand and minimise the costs, but the repair is not finalised yet. Meanwhile, the meadow itself is starting to put on its summer show, orchids and all – go and have a look!

Every summer we have the ‘Himalayan Balsam Big Pull’. This year it is taking place on Tuesday 23 June. Meet at 10.30am at the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library. Tools and bags will be provided. If you are staying until the finish at about 2.30pm, bring a picnic lunch. These events are usually friendly and fun, with a visible improvement for not too much work.

MARIE JO COUTANCHE
Manor Woods Valley Working Group



WHITE ELEPHANT UPDATE

We reported last time that Alun Griffiths, the contractors who are building the South Bristol Link Road, were keen to work with local people to minimise problems. It doesn't seem to be working out that way, and it's not clear whether Griffiths are at fault, or Bristol City Council officers, or their 'political' masters. There certainly seem to be communications problems getting all concerned to understand the issues and deal with them.

Our colleagues in Highridge Forum are liaising with Griffiths on behalf of local people who live along the route of the road across Highridge Common and down King Georges Road. Two houses on the Common are affected – one in particular – by the closeness of the road to their frontage. Access into the drive with a van (the resident works from home) would be highly dangerous, if not impossible, thereby interfering with his ability to work. And that's without mentioning the noise and pollution so close to the house, and the near-absence of foundations which these old properties have.

Griffiths had originally said that they could 'tweak' details to deal with local concerns. In this case, it seems they can't. The City Council officers don't seem to understand the seriousness of the problem. 'Escalating' the issue up the officer line and the 'political' line is in progress as I write.

It's important to understand that this isn't a negative, blocking tactic to obstruct progress on the road. Both Highridge Forum and M.V.C.G. opposed the road in principle, but we both accept that it has duly received the necessary permissions. However, we do insist that it be built in a way which doesn't ruin people's lives and livelihoods.

Extraordinarily, it seems that detailed plans for the road are still not available. What sort of system gives full planning permission for a major scheme which is still being finalised? Enquiries are being made.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE



CROX BOTTOM CLEAN-UP

Back in January we had an e-mail from Alison Hatcher, who regularly walks her dog in Crox Bottom. Like many people, she was dismayed at the amount of rubbish there, but unlike most people, she wanted to do something about it herself. We jointly arranged a clean-up, with Alison publicising the event and us liaising with the City Council to get bin bags and have the rubbish collected. BERYL HEATON takes up the story ...

ALISON WAS THERE on Saturday 21 March to greet us at the entrance to Crox Bottom, where she had arranged for a supply of the ‘tools of the trade’. There were pickers and gloves, plus good quality large black plastic bags from the Council. We reckon there were over 20 people engaged in the activity in all, but it was difficult to do a head count as everyone had arrived at intervals so were strung out.

We soon began our task, Marie Jo and I working together. Although there were lots of small pieces of litter for which the pickers were invaluable, larger items were hidden in the foliage which we soon rooted out. Sometimes quite a tug was needed to dislodge partially buried items. We found several old plastic bags already full of rubbish. One wonders why people would dump it in such a lovely area.



Beryl (right) and Marie Jo (left) picking and bagging



Every now and then Adrian and Fliss, Council Park Keepers, would appear in their wagon and throw full bags into the back. It was good to know that this was happening straight away and not left to the next day. Sometimes litter can find its way back if it is not dealt with promptly. A couple of hardy souls crossed the stream and with the help of ropes and brute force hauled

shopping trolleys from the water. It must have been difficult as they were in oozing mud.

Finally we reached the interceptor near Hartcliffe Way. This was a particularly bad area, not just the interceptor itself, but all around it. There were dozens of cans which were collected separately for recycling. A couple of people were engaged in this task throughout the morning. They soon got into a rhythm: find the cans which we left on the side of the path, stamp to flatten, then into the bag. We soon got used to the regular crunch as they performed this action.



Risen from the depths

André stayed at the top entrance, working along the hedge by the slip road to Imperial Park and extricating the litter which had collected in the vegetation. While he was there, a young couple came past, polite greetings were exchanged and they continued on. Then they stopped, came back and offered a £5 note as a ‘thank you’ for our efforts. That was very much appreciated, not just as a donation to our funds, but as a symbol that people *do* care about their public spaces, even if they don’t quite know what to do about it themselves.

A few of the volunteers who came along lived at Lakeshore. This was very pleasing, because we have been hoping that, as Lakeshore filled up, enough of the residents would appreciate what a super environment they lived in that a ‘Friends of Crox Bottom’ could be formed, based at Lakeshore and with help from us and other local groups. Time will tell!



I don’t know how many bags of rubbish we collected, but the wagon was already pretty full before Adrian and Fliss did the final run. We were fortunate that it was dry all morning. It was certainly a case of ‘many hands make light work’. To sum up: good fun and a lot of job satisfaction.

A wagon of waste – and more was added after the photo was taken

WILD BS13

THEY'RE BACK AGAIN – our swifts – coming back to nest on our roof. All the way from southern and equatorial Africa to Perrycroft Road. Every year, man and boy, for the past twenty years or so. Marvellous. May 4th this year, a day later than last year. They make my summer! They fly back to Africa with their young in August. What a journey. What a bird! Amazing aren't they?



Hold the front page! The swifts, or their offspring, have gone elsewhere this summer after all. They buzzed in and out the roof for days but have not been around for a week or more so it's now a bit doubtful that they're staying. Wait and see. Very sad. However we were cheered by a local blackbird, singing his heart out in our pear tree this morning and refusing to be outdone by the petrol driven mower next door! Also it appears our area is inundated with foxes this year. Adults and at least six cubs are in and out all our gardens day and night – same for you?

ANGELA JAMES



LAST AUTUMN we reported that we had collected wild flower seeds from the meadow in Manor Woods Valley so as to 'share' our meadow with Crox Bottom. Volunteers from the Avon Wildlife Trust

have been planting our seeds in Crox Bottom, together with flowers from elsewhere, and experimenting with different ways of preparing the soil. The results are looking great!

ANTON BANTOCK: 1933 - 2015

YOU PROBABLY KNOW that Anton died in March. He was visiting Jordan and he was happy to be there and enjoying himself when he had a cardiac arrest. The funeral was on 29 April at St Mary Redcliffe.

To tell the story of Anton's life and his contributions in so many fields would take all the pages in this *Newsletter* and more. The University of Withywood was central to his life, and the Malago Society, the local history society for south-west Bristol, couldn't have functioned, as it has for forty years, without Anton as a founder, speaker, committee member and general *agent provocateur*.

Anton was passionate about buildings as well as local history, and that made him an essential part of the campaign for a Conservation Area based on old Bishopsworth village. After Anton and others had written the report which in due course resulted in the Conservation Area, I rashly said, 'Why don't we start a permanent group to look after the area, and wider south-west Bristol, monitoring planning applications and helping to care for our parks and green spaces?'. And so was born Malago Valley Conservation Group, now twenty years old, with Anton as a founder-member and a committee member all that time.

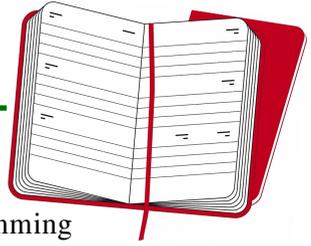
When people are paying tribute to a late friend, they sometimes say: 'They broke the mould after they made him'. I don't think there was a mould for Anton in the first place. He was a self-made man – though a million miles away from the narrow, financial sense in which that's usually meant. He did what he did out of a deep moral sense. He would have described it in religious terms, but I'll just use the phrase which in my book is about the highest praise you can give someone when they're no longer with us: Anton made a difference.



*Anton being entertaining
at the M.V.C.G.
Christmas Party in 2010*

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



OUR SUMMER OUTING will be very interesting – we’ll be having a privileged look inside the former Bishopsworth Swimming Pool building before it reopens as an indoor Skate Park.

Tuesday 23 June: HIMALAYAN BALSAM BIG PULL in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve (see also page 2). Meet at 10.30am at the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library. Tools and bags will be provided. If you’re staying until the finish at about 2.00pm, bring a picnic lunch. Dress for ‘gardening’ – long-sleeved clothing advised.

Tuesday 21 July: The M.V.C.G. SUMMER OUTING will be a VISIT TO TRANSITIONS SKATE at the former Bishopsworth Swimming Pool. Meet at the building at 6.00pm.

Saturday 22 August: FUN DAY in Witherwood Park. Look out for more information nearer the time.

HEATHER LEESON has resigned from the M.V.C.G. Committee. That’s because she’s moving away from Bristol. She’s been a great help, even during the period when she was virtually ‘full time’ as Chair of Bristol Civic Society. Thank you, Heather, and best wishes for the future.

Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	Peter Crispin	907 0623
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	André Coutanche	964 3106
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Paul Mizen, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, CSV Environment, Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Helen Holland, Tim Kent, Kevin Quartley, Naomi Rylatt
(All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members).

Newsletter edited by André Coutanche, 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, Bristol, BS13 8LB; tel. 964 3106; e-mail andrec@mvcg.org.uk; website www.mvcg.org.uk.

Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

The opinions in this *Newsletter* do not necessarily represent those of M.V.C.G.