



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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2016

THE Spring edition of the *Newsletter* always includes the report of our A.G.M. which means we have 12 pages this time. Some of the updates which would have appeared anyway are in the A.G.M. reports. As usual, it's a mixture of good news and bad news, but we've started the New Year with hopes moderately high – and fingers crossed!

At last year's A.G.M., I said that I was looking to reduce the amount of time I spend on M.V.C.G. The Committee have discussed this and it's been raised in the *Newsletter* and Pete Crispin kindly volunteered to take on the Hon. Secretary's role. Since I'll still go the Neighbourhood Partnership meetings for the Pride of Place and Transport Groups, we thought it would be as well if I still had a formal 'officer' role, so Pete and I have done a swap. That's more significant than it sounds, since Pete will now deal with the e-mail and phone contacts, which have increased steadily over the years.

We're delighted to report that Marie Jo Coutanche has volunteered to attend meetings to take minutes. She's been doing this for every other meeting for a while. The Committee have now formally co-opted her in that role.

After losing Anton Bantock and Heather Leeson (who moved to Cardiff) during 2015, we now only have two elected committee members other than the officers. We need new people. It's bad for the individuals and for the organisation if the same people go on too long.

We'll see how it goes. But with not enough people to do the work we would like to do to improve our part of Bristol, and with M.V.C.G. depending on a handful of people to keep things going who have no back-up and no apparent successors, we may be coming close to being unsustainable.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

ONE DRY BUT COLD Saturday morning in February I set off for a walk with my dog to Manor Woods Valley. We started at the Library entrance and Bruno chose the woodland path walk first. I was admiring the handy work of the newly repaired path sides when I heard a van engine! My heart leapt as I looked across to the path on the other side of the Malago. I could see a white van with a trailer – a food van was my initial thought!



I raced towards the end of the woods walk – the area was busy with cyclists and dog walkers and the van was moving along the path. When I got to the interceptor it all became clear – it was the Community Payback team who were there to tidy up the litter. It was such a relief to see it was an organised clear-up and not mobile food!

We walked up around the top of the valley past the M.V.C.G. bench and then headed back along the path towards the Library end. Once we reached the Library entrance we headed off again to follow the same route and see what progress had been made. When we got to the interceptor the group of workers had split into two or three groups and were targeting different parts of Manor Woods Valley.



That afternoon we returned to Manor Woods and when we got to the interceptor I could see around ten black bags which were clearly labelled 'For Collection' and explained who had carried out the work.

The area was much clearer from rubbish and the brambled area to the right of the riverside path had been trimmed back to make the path more welcoming. I went along the Riverside Path with a spring in my step and a smile on my face knowing that the M.V.C.G. working group were keeping a keen eye on the conservation area for us all.

LIS PIBWORTH

OWL PROWL ON DUNDRY SLOPES

I DECIDED TO GO to the Owl Prowl with Chris Sperring as advertised in the December *Newsletter*. I love owls. It took place on the Dundry Slopes, and Nick Ward of 'Volunteering Matters' met eight of us at the Scout hut on Bishport Avenue, kindly lent for the evening. We were provided with stout sticks, if we hadn't brought our own, and of course we all had wellies or boots on and torches. We certainly needed all of them.



*Tawny Owl from
'My Manor
Woods Book',
drawn by Lola
Hardingham*

At our first stop Chris told us all about the owls likely to be in this area – Tawny, Little and Barn. Two local ladies on the walk said they see a Barn owl most days at the nearby allotments. Chris also discussed the need for diversity of habitat for all kinds of wildlife to enjoy – which is what Nick and his team are trying to achieve on the Slopes. He then did his 'hooting' and within minutes had a response from a male owl not too far away. We climbed up the slippery pathway that Nick and Keith Way had spent hours clearing. Remember – December was very, very wet! At the second stop and 'hooting' we received more answers and much closer, but no sightings. This time a female as well as a male we were told – a tawit and a tawoo are from two different birds apparently. It was so quiet, black, eery really, but also quite exciting!

We reached the top where Nick and Keith had made a stile into the top field. However Chris said the grass was too short to interest owls, so we turned round and made our way back on an alternative route down, noting some wild garlic poking up already in some places. The view right across Bristol to both Severn bridges was amazing, and halfway down was a convenient bench to sit and take it in. It was an interesting descent, with what Keith described as a few 'puddly ruts', but which I had quite different words to describe!

We all made it safely to the Scout hut, leaving our boots outside of course – there's something very companionable when you are all padding around in brightly coloured socks! We all had hot chocolate and biscuits and an interesting chat about Bristol Green capital funding, volunteers, wildlife locally etc. Chris reckoned about three owls were around this area though none actually flew close enough for us to see.

We are so lucky to be on the edge of a busy city but with a lively countryside on our doorstep. We really must look after it.

ANGELA JAMES

REPORT FROM THE A.G.M.

PETE CRISPIN welcomed everyone to the meeting. As usual, there were reports on our activities during 2015, followed by elections to the Committee. Our topical talk was from Simon Dunn and Carys Gwilym of Alun Griffiths, the contractors who are building the South Bristol Ring Road. Drinks and nibbles rounded off M.V.C.G.'s twenty-first A.G.M. and birthday party.

Programme Report: PAUL MIZEN reported that as it was Green Capital year, he thought we should save on pollution and congestion by restricting our summer outing to a local venue, and you can't get more local than our visit to the old Bishopsworth Swimming Baths. This is now the new home of the Campus skateboarding centre and we were just about the first visitors after the completion of its renovation. A very good crowd were entertained by two very athletic and skilled 'skaters', or is it 'boarders', but sadly none of our party took up the offer to have a go.

The Christmas party was its usual mixture of fun, chatting, some brain-searching, and an abundance of good eating, all helped along with plenty of Mulled Wine. Again a very good attendance and, as always, a good time was had by all, which makes for a good end of year celebration.

Planning Issues: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that, as usual, he had been monitoring the weekly lists of planning applications which we receive by e-mail from the City Council. The vast majority are 'householder' applications – for extensions, granny flats and so on – and don't usually need looking at. For the few applications in our three wards which seem to need checking, he looks up the details on the Council's website, and brings a few of those to our Committee. In many cases, the Committee doesn't want to make a comment, and in a handful of cases each year we submit our opposition to an application, often on the grounds of over-intensive development, traffic, parking, or its effect on the character of the Bishopsworth and Malago Conservation Area.

One application which ticked all those boxes – in a bad way! – was for the rear of 32-34 Grange Road. As is often the case with infill developments, the address is potentially misleading – this would be a new frontage onto the top end of Queens Road, opposite and down from the Elm Tree. There have been several applications on this site, all of which have been refused by the planners. As with those earlier ones, we opposed this application. It's important to say that as a general rule, infill applications are a good idea – they relieve marginally the pressure to build on green-field sites such as open spaces and Green Belt. The devil is always in the detail, and here the problem was partly the over-intensive nature of the scheme, but mostly the absurd access and parking proposals – a lay-by excavated into the 'mini-cliff' where the back gardens of the Grange Road houses back onto Queens Road. There isn't room here to park safely, and even less room to open the door of a parked car into traffic coming down from the junction



which the driver would have difficulty seeing. There would also be damage to the character of the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area from the removal of the hedge along this part of Queens Road. The Council planners agreed with us and refused the application. The applicant appealed, and we resubmitted our comments to the Planning Inspector. We heard just a few weeks ago that the Inspector had allowed the appeal. Having a planning permission granted, either by the Council or on appeal, doesn't oblige the applicant to go ahead with the development, but the hedge has already been partly removed, so things don't look good.

A couple of more welcome applications to develop on brown-field sites came in during the year which we had a look at and decided not to comment on, since what was proposed looked perfectly sensible. One was the site of the former 'Woods' pub on Fouracres in Withywood, where nine houses were planned. The site has been an eyesore and a rubbish magnet since the pub was pulled down, but that's no reason to accept a second-best scheme on the grounds that 'at least it's better than what's there at the moment' – that would be a bad developer's charter. We saw no problem with the plans, but the Council planners had some reservations and things are still pending. The other site was the former Boys' Club on Winford Grove, Bedminster Down, where two pairs of semi-detached houses were applied for and granted.

At our last A.G.M. we reported that the excellent plan to convert the former Bishopsworth Swimming Pool into a skate-boarding park was mired in a legal tangle at the Council. Eventually it got sorted out, and the actual conversion work proceeded quickly. As Paul reported, we had a super summer outing there and were very impressed. Further work is planned, subject to availability of funding, to make the project financially sustainable.

The biggest planning application in our area in 2015 was for what's known as Plot 4 at Imperial Park. This had already received outline planning permission for housing, and we thought that the detailed scheme was OK. We didn't comment, and planning permission was granted a couple of weeks ago.





At last year's A.G.M., we reported that plans for the former United Reformed Church on Church Road in Bishopsworth had reached an apparent impasse. During the year, we heard that there was a new owner, but the story only restarted this January – so although it's not part of the year we're reporting on, many people will be interested in this important building in the Conservation Area. The new owners have done the right thing – as the previous owners did – by contacting us for pre-application discussions. We have seen preliminary plans. There are only preliminary,

but the approach is the same as before – the conversion of the former church building into flats, with virtually no external alterations, and new housing at the back, replacing the church hall. The difference is that the current owners are suggesting a terrace of houses rather than the block of flats proposed last time. We've commented on the preliminary plans, and we await further news.

The South Bristol Link is a subject we keep tabs on at Committee meetings since it received planning permission in November 2013, though it's not a planning issue as such any more. Highridge Forum are the lead organisation liaising with the contractors in our area, and we work very closely with them.

Progress with Manor Woods Valley: MARIE JO COUTANCHE, the Convenor of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group, reported that after a rather frustrating 2014 our group was ready to face 2015 with some energy. Our main concern was the woodland and its future. In January we invited Tom Penn, the Client and Operations Coordinator for our area in Parks, to come for a walk with us and we discussed our concerns with him, the main one being the lack of maintenance. We explained to him how M.V.C.G. had been involved with Manor Woods Valley for many years. We went to see the Old Quarry area, pointed out the flower meadow and discussed the silted pond. In the same month we also invited Joe McSorley, the Reserves Officer from the Avon Wildlife Trust. With his team he has worked in the Old Quarry area for several years. His professional opinion confirmed what we had already discussed, the need for coppicing, creating glades in order to have more sunny areas and encouraging the regeneration of trees and flowers on the woodland floor.

In February, some fallen trees were removed from the woodland and we heard that the Woodland Path was going to be repaired by ParkWorks, a new initiative by Bristol Parks using some volunteer labour and providing training opportunities.

On 23 June some of us took part in the 'Himalayan Balsam Big Pull'. It is rewarding to notice that these yearly sessions to control this invasive weed have been effective. We hope it will carry on.

This summer was the first season after the start of the re-organisation in the Council. We soon realised that only grass cutting and bin emptying had happened. The River Path had not been trimmed, rubbish in the stream or on the grass not often removed. The grid at the interceptor

had not been cleared for several months and the debris was accumulating. We reported it several times. Willow trees which had grown out of the silt had now fallen in the middle of the stream near the interceptor. We were also sad to discover that the Meadow Interpretation Board designed and paid for by M.V.C.G. had been totally broken by vandals. We hope to have it replaced at some point.

Trees where they shouldn't be. Since the A.G.M. the interceptor has been thoroughly cleared of debris and the water level in this channel has fallen dramatically – allowing access to remove the trees, we hope . . .



In the summer we trimmed the paths in the Old Quarry so that people could use them. We removed a branch from across the River Path as it had not been cleared. Tom Penn told us the interceptor grid would now be cleared twice a year. The edging of the Woodland Path had been nicely repaired by ParkWorks (*photo, left*). M.V.C.G. has offered to help financing more work on this path as it is well used by people. We also have made contacts with staff in the Parks Department. This should help progress. Knowing who to talk to is essential! We can also tell our members that on 13 January four members of the Wildlife Trust and four M.V.C.G. members did some coppicing in the woodland on a rainy day. We used the cut wood to construct a 'dead hedge' which will provide a habitat for mini-beasts. It may only be a small beginning but it has created enthusiasm. We hope it has brought some light in

this part of the woodland if not at the end of the tunnel yet. We have definitely made some progress. But patience is essential.

At the time of writing for the A.G.M. we do not know whether the Old Quarry will be included in the Local Nature Reserve. Also we do not know whether the Avon Wildlife Trust will carry on doing some work there as they have in the past couple of years. M.V.C.G. have been putting constant pressure for this to happen as it is a precious habitat different from the other parts of Manor Woods Valley.

Progress with Other Projects: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that, as in recent years, many of the projects we are involved with are progressed through the ‘Pride of Place’ working group, the Environmental sub-group in our Dundry View Neighbourhood Partnership. It has monthly meetings which he attends, and it remains a good forum both for learning about new developments and for getting things done. Because of Council cut-backs, meetings will move to every other month later this year.

As happened last year, progress has continued to be made on Dundry Slopes, with ‘Volunteering Matters’ – who used to be called CSV Environment – and the Avon Wildlife Trust doing a lot of work. With other things occupying us elsewhere, we have taken a back seat on Dundry Slopes again in 2015.

We reported at the last A.G.M. that we had had an e-mail from a lady called Alison to propose a clean-up operation in Crox Bottom. That took place on 21 March and was a big success. We had great help from Bristol Parks in the shape of ‘roving’ park-keepers, Fliss and Adrian. Some people came who live in Lake Shore, but hopes of a new ‘Friends of Crox Bottom’ group based there haven’t materialised.

Combined effort: park-keepers + volunteers=lorry-load of garbage on its way out



For a couple of A.G.M.s, we’ve been sounding up-beat about Elm Tree Corner – the project which we started over 19 years ago! This time last year, we were about to have a meeting with the transport officers to define the brief for the scheme which would then be consulted on. That happened, jointly with our allies, the Highridge Forum, and the consultation duly happened. What was consulted on was almost exactly our original scheme, and responses were minor, so that is what will now be built. We’re expecting construction to start before too long, and the work should be finished before next year’s A.G.M.

We continue to go to the Parks Forum, which has quarterly meetings, and their very good e-mail circulation keeps us informed.

Our website is regularly maintained with details of our events, and we continue to put our *Newsletters* on the website as they are published. They’re sent to the majority of our members and to all our colleagues by e-mail. As we said last year, we’re happy to go on producing paper *Newsletters* for anyone who needs one, but if you do get an e-mail address, or if you change your existing address, do please let André know.

ACCOUNTS FOR 2015

Here are the accounts for 2015 which Beryl Heaton presented to the A.G.M.:

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Membership.....	160.00	Refreshments at A.G.M.	25.66
Donations	24.00	Printing	16.00
Christmas party raffle	32.00	Hall Rent.....	66.00
Sale of scrap metal	18.40	Christmas meeting	17.35
Book sales	4.00	CPRE subscription	36.00
Bank Interest	<u>2.37</u>	Web domain fee	<u>5.99</u>
Total	240.77	Total	157.00
			£
		Excess of income over expenditure	73.77
		Brought forward from 2014	4247.50
		Balance carried forward to 2015	4321.27
		Made up of:	
		Cash in hand	4.52
		HSBC Money Manager account	3384.25
		HSBC Current account	932.50

During the year we have not financed any major projects and we have made a modest excess of income over expenditure of £73.77. The committee has backed Marie Jo's decision not to sell scrap metal for our funds any more. Historically it had been a group policy, mainly because there were no Council recycling schemes in operation and cans were just sent to landfill. The resulting income was used to purchase daffodil bulbs to plant around the area, resulting in beautiful swathes of flowers in spring. Nowadays, new rules mean that scrap merchants have to pay us by cheque and for this they charge £1. It makes a lot of trouble for very little return and we know that most cans will now be recycled.

In spite of this small reduction in income I feel that we can continue with our day to day ventures and two public meetings a year if the sum generated from subscriptions and donations remains at the present level. Regarding major projects, for which we would use our reserves, there are a couple of ideas in the pipeline but they will need further discussion before we proceed. Whatever is decided, please be assured that our funds, including what we have inherited, will be used wisely.

BERYL HEATON
Hon. Treasurer

A TRIBUTE TO ANTON

2015 was the year we lost Anton Bantock, a founder-member of M.V.C.G. and a committee-member ever since we started. We recorded his death in the Summer *Newsletter*.

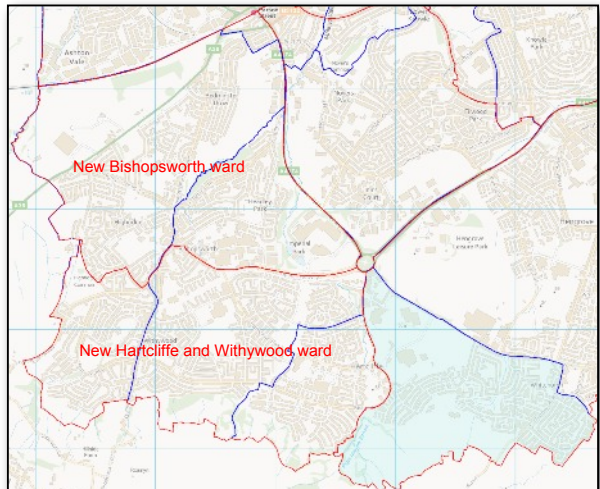
Late last year, the Malago Society, the local history society for south-west Bristol, published what may well be the last ever edition of MALAGO Magazine. Anton had been a pillar of the Malago Society as well as M.V.C.G. Fittingly, the Magazine consists in large part of tributes to and memories of Anton. If you'd like a copy – just £1 – contact Marie Jo on 964 3106 or mariejo.coutanche@googlemail.com.



NEW YEAR – NEW WARDS

IN THE LAST *Newsletter*, we mentioned the new ward boundaries which will apply in the elections on 5 May. It's impossible to show the detailed boundaries in a publication this size – visit <http://bit.ly/1ZS4c3D> to check your street.

The old wards (blue lines) ran north-south, and the new wards (red lines) run east-west. The new northern ward – called 'Bishopsworth' – will have two councillors, and the southern one – 'Hartcliffe & Withywood' – three councillors. Half the former Whitchurch Park ward (shaded) goes to another ward and half joins the new Hartcliffe & Withywood ward. Dundry View Neighbourhood Partnership will consist of the two new wards (5 councillors).



TREES IN KINGS HEAD PARK

KEVIN QUARTLEY dropped a leaflet through my door about a forthcoming tree planting event at Kings Head Park. He quite rightly guessed I would be interested and I made a note in my diary as I wanted to attend.

The Council-run event had consulted with the local park group to arrange to plant 17 trees as part of the 'One Tree per Child' project. It took place on 5 January and there was a handful of people from the park group to watch the proceedings. I discovered that a coach would soon be arriving with pupils from Whitchurch School who would be planting the trees. Much preparation had been done beforehand as the trees were large and difficult to handle.

When the children came, Helen Humphries, coordinator of the project, gathered them around her as she explained the importance of trees in our environment. She did this by asking questions, and lots of hands shot up in the air as they eagerly gave answers. Then it was time to split into two groups and the children were kitted out with gloves and spades as they started to enlarge the planting hole.

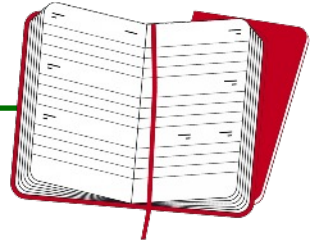
Finally it was deep enough and Helen held the tree upright as the children enthusiastically backfilled the hole then had great fun stamping on the soil to compact it.



Although rain had been forecast it stayed dry and sunny for the whole of the time I was there. I was unable to stay to see any more trees planted but I was impressed by Helen's empathy with the children. Hopefully it will make them more aware of the importance of trees, and who knows, they may bring their own children to the park in the future to show them the trees they helped to plant all those years ago.

BERYL HEATON

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



WE DO HAVE DATES for the Bishopsworth Quiz and the M.V.C.G. Christmas Party, but it seems a little odd to be telling you about them in March. Never mind, for efficient people with their diaries to hand:

- **Monday 21 November:** BISHOPSWORTH QUIZ.
- **Wednesday 14 December:** M.V.C.G. CHRISTMAS PARTY.

In both cases, we'll advertise them again in future *Newsletters*, with more details nearer the time.

THANK YOU to everyone who has renewed their subscription. Some people haven't got round to it yet, so you'll find a renewal slip attached to this *Newsletter* if we haven't heard from you. There's no need to fill in the form unless your details have changed – just let us have a note of your name with your cheque or cash – but **do please let us know if you have a new or changed e-mail address**. Please send your sub. to either Beryl Heaton (3 Kings Walk) or André Coutanche (14 Queens Road). *THANK YOU!*

Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	Peter Crispin	939 0256
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Paul Mizen, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan, Marie Jo Coutanche, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, Volunteering Matters, 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).

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Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

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