



# MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

# **NEWSLETTER**

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**WE** MAY BE APPROACHING THE SUMMER 'SILLY SEASON' but there's lots of eminently sensible things to report and to look forward to. Well, sensible by M.V.C.G. standards anyway: we've got our 'Amphibious Garbage Raid' on Sunday 15 August (see p.7) and some of us are now honorary graduates of the University of Withywood (see p.8).

Our policy of seeking co-operation with other organisations in the area is well illustrated in this edition of the *Newsletter*. You can read of the revival of our ideas for Elm Tree Corner on page 5 - this will be a joint effort with the Highridge Forum and Cllr Richard Eddy. And links with the Bedminster Down and Uplands Society are being strengthened with a joint visit to Manor Woods on Thursday 12 August (see p.7), followed by the clean-up on the 15th.

There will also be a clean-up in late August/early September of the area under the flyover by the former Wills factory. The local police are taking the initiative here, and we have said we will help when the date is known - keep an eye open for further details.

Speaking of the Wills site, we now understand that the refusal of planning permission for a Tesco supermarket will not go to appeal; at least, not in its present form. It seems likely that Tesco will buy the part of the site they are interested in and then submit a new application which they would pursue.

And at the other major shopping site in our area, Symes Avenue, Panther Securities, the lease-holder, have said that they will not proceed with their current planning permission. They are now talking to the Council about a major redevelopment to include a large supermarket.

And a final bit of (cyber) summer silliness: our web site address has changed again (for the last time?) to [www.mvcg.tsx.org](http://www.mvcg.tsx.org).

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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## MANOR WOODS UPDATE

**W**E REPORTED IN MARCH (*Newsletter 26*) various bits of news from and about Manor Woods. This is where we're up to now ...

■ We have paid for two **owl boxes** and, with the help of Chris Sperring of the Hawk and Owl Trust, we have put them up in the woodland. The sites selected by Chris are off the main paths through the wood and the boxes, while not very high (the owls prefer them that way), are positioned on the sides of the trees away from any casual passers-by.



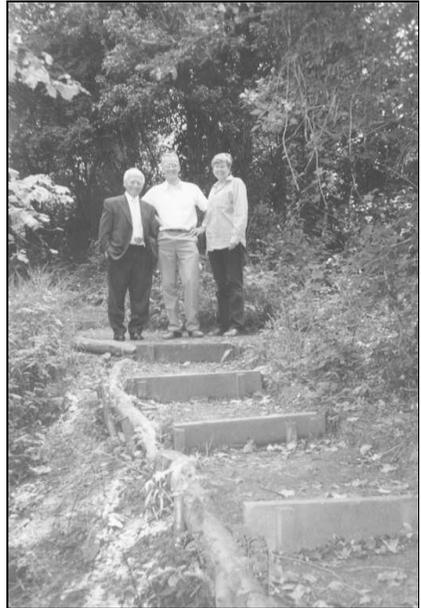
*A standard British workforce in action - one worker, one holding the ladder and three others watching/chatting*

*But the result looks good - will the owls agree?*

■ A small group of members have re-established the **path** which runs from the dam to the interceptor. This is a lovely walk, mostly by the side of the Malago, through trees and shrubs which harbour a great deal of bird and insect life (it's a good area for butterflies). The ends of the path had got blocked by brambles last summer and the path was close to disappearing completely, so a few evening's work with shears, secateurs and scythe was called for. We hope that the City Council/Wildlife Trust will now help to maintain the path under the auspices of the S.B.R.I. - but the best way to keep it open is for people to use it!

■ Just before a small group of members were due to go for a walk to see what had appeared in the area of unmown grass at the Vale Lane end, we had a phone call from Helen Hall, the City Council Conservation Officer, to say that she had spotted some bee orchids there. When our gang went the next afternoon, they counted no less than **26 bee orchids** among the carpet of wild flowers which made such a colourful display until the summer cut which happened recently. We think this a new species for the list in Manor Woods, and goes to show that there are still things to be discovered here.

■ The **South Bristol Rivers Initiative** is carrying on after the departure of Caroline Smart, the former Project Officer. Allied Domecq are continuing with their financial support this year but, rather than employ a new worker, the current thinking is that resources should be redirected within the City Council and the Wildlife Trust to make things happen. I recently met Harry Pendleton and Joy Stacey of Allied Domecq and Jon Gething, Director of the Wildlife Trust, and showed them around what had been done and what we hoped to see done in Manor Woods.



*Harry Pendleton, Jon Gething and Joy Stacey on the steps of the woodland path*

There was praise for some of the work done on the first phase of the path through the woodland - and justifiable concern that other parts of Manor Woods were litter-strewn and that the pond was an unsightly mixture of silt, flotsam and garbage. We will be running our annual AMPHIBIOUS GARBAGE RAID on Sunday 15 August, on a more ambitious scale than ever, and other problem areas will be tackled as part of an overall agreed strategy with the City Council and the Wildlife Trust. Work on repairing damage and upgrading the first phase of the woodland path should be done this autumn. Studies are being carried out for some development of the former line of the Malago near Vale Lane to provide a wetland/boggy habitat, but if this proves feasible, work wouldn't start until a 'Phase II' next year or later.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

## FINGERS CROSSED

**W**ITHOUT WISHING TO TEMPT FATE, we can report some positive signs of progress on a few matters which, until recently, had seemed to be dragging on indefinitely.

### **Chestnut Court**

You may have seen in the *Evening Post* that there is a planning application in for Chestnut Court. A company in Hengrove who deal in office fittings and furniture have applied for permission for change of use of Chestnut Court for office premises. We have written to say that we are pleased to see at last the possibility of some progress being made on Chestnut Court. This listed building has been derelict for far too long, and the designation of the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area has heightened the need for a solution.

We have no objection in principle to the re-use of Chestnut Court as offices. The potential conflict which can arise when the interior of a fine building is re-used other than for its original purpose does not apply here since, unfortunately, there is no interior to be concerned about. This will make it easier for the new owner to devote the right level of effort and resources to a full restoration of the exterior, including, we hope, the removal of the ugly extension built in the 1960s.

The use of the side of the site along Vicarage Road for car-parking (with no more parking spaces than when the building was a club) should cause no major problem if the area is properly laid out and landscaped. The main garden facing on to the lower part of Vicarage Road and Church Road should be restored and maintained as an asset both to the new business and the neighbourhood.

We are looking forward to commenting before long on the detailed planning application which should bring about a full restoration of the exterior of the house to its original condition.

### **The 'Elm Tree' wall**

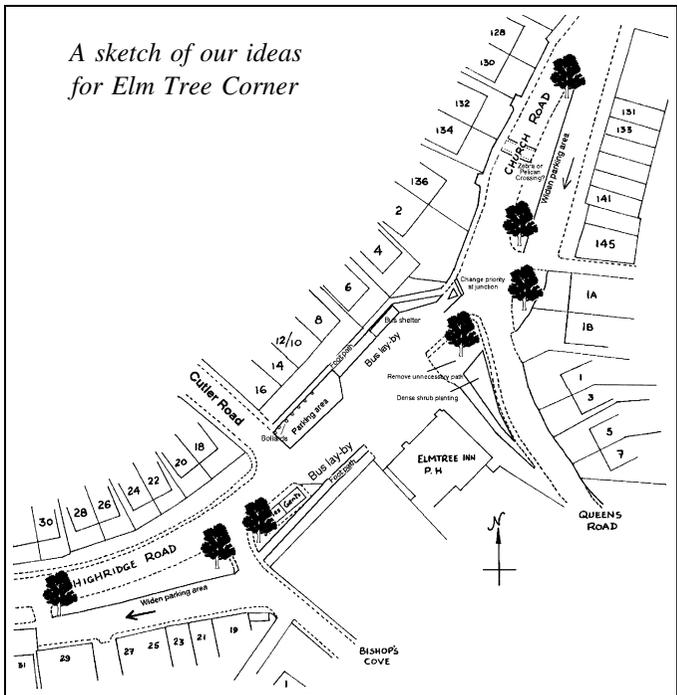
As many members will know, the torrential rainstorm we had at the end of May resulted in the collapse of part of the wall in front of the 'Elm Tree' pub. This was because surface water drains overflowed and a mini-tidal wave pushed over the wall. The wall is an important historical feature, being of freestone and of the same material and quality as many of the boundary walls which enhance and give coherence to the Conservation Area. It still contains some hitching rings which remain from the days of horse travel. We had been

concerned about its condition for some time, since several stones had fallen out and letters to Scottish Courage, who own the pub, had led nowhere.

Wessex Water, who are responsible for drainage, have accepted that their drains should not have overflowed and they are going to repair the wall. I met the Wessex Water officer who is dealing with this on site recently, together with the mason whom they will employ to do the job. The mason is experienced in this type of work and understands the importance of using the right type of mortar for a traditional stone wall. We are looking forward to seeing a successful restoration of this important feature, and we are grateful to Wessex Water for responding so well.

### ‘Elm Tree Corner’

Two years ago, an M.V.C.G. working group devoted a lot of time to developing a comprehensive improvement plan for what we called ‘Elm Tree Corner’ - the junction of Church Road, Highridge Road and Queens Road. We proposed changes to traffic flows, parking and bus stops, principally to make things easier for pedestrians and shoppers, and we suggested substantial landscaping and planting to improve the look of the area.



Having lain rather dormant since then, our ideas are now being revived in discussion with the relevant City Council departments in conjunction with Cllr Richard Eddy and also with the Highridge Forum, who recently achieved one of their primary goals, the children’s play area at Lakemead Grove. Nothing will happen quickly, but ... *fingers crossed!*

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

## THE BAT WALK

**O**N 15 June several M.V.C.G. members assembled at Bishopsworth Library for a meeting with a difference - a 'bat walk' in Manor Woods. This was led by The Avon Bat Group and several of their members came as well. Although we didn't start the walk until 9.00pm it was still quite light and too early for bats to be flying. However, this gave us a very good opportunity to go into the wood for a short talk by Mark and Richard. They told us that there were sixteen species of bats in the British Isles, including two different types of pipistrelles, and they were hopeful that we would see some that evening. They said the habitat was ideal for pipistrelles and noctules. We asked if it would be helpful to erect some bat boxes at a later date but they were doubtful that the boxes would be occupied. Experiments in the past had shown a very low 'take up' rate of boxes.

Richard produced some home-made ultra-sound receivers which he offered around so that we would be able to 'hear' the bats and hopefully identify them. Then we had a lovely surprise. Diana, one of the Bat Group members, showed us a baby pipistrelle which had been abandoned by its mother. Diana was trying to hand rear it by feeding it cows milk supplemented by added vitamins. She produced a small drawstring bag from under her jumper and there inside was a tiny bat, little larger than a thumbnail. It was fascinating to see the fully formed toes and we were all amazed at the size of the wings as Diana gently eased them open. After a few sips of milk from a tube, the baby bat was safely returned to the bag and the warmth of the jumper.



Soon after, the ultra-sound detectors started giving us messages: there were the irregular 'tocks' of pipistrelles, and 'chinks' of noctules. We set off for the pond where there was a great deal of bat activity. We could see them flying overhead and we could hear them moving among the trees. Some of our members were keen to locate Daubenton's bats, and Mark and Richard led us to the dam where they thought we had a chance of seeing them. Unfortunately we didn't get a positive sighting; perhaps they were just hiding from us.

We all enjoyed the evening and are most grateful to the Bat Group for passing on their knowledge and helping us to hear and see for ourselves these wonderful creatures.

BERYL HEATON

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

**T**HE **M** symbol means an event organised by M.V.C.G. Members are also very welcome at events organised by the Dundry Hill Group (DHG - phone 935 9710).

**M Monday 26 July:** *Garbage Raid*. Meet at **3.45pm** at Withywood Post Office.

**Tuesday 27 July:** Dundry Hill Group *Litter Raid* along the Pigeon House Stream. Meet at the end of Bowring Close at 3.00pm (DHG).

**Saturday 31 July:** *Organic Open Day* at *Hill House Farm*, Dundry. There will be wildlife walks, craft demonstrations and activities, pond dipping, bees and honey, organic refreshments and much more. *Free entrance*, parking and toilets available. Bring a picnic! Hill House Farm is on Castle Farm Lane, which runs off the little road from the back of Dundry Village to Winford (DHG).

**Wednesday 4 August:** *Wildflower and Butterfly Survey* around Hartwood Acres. Meet at the end of Aldwick Avenue at 2.00pm (DHG).

**M Thursday 12 August:** *Guided Walk in Manor Woods* to see the latest developments and hear of future plans. A joint event with BEDMINSTER DOWN AND UPLANDS SOCIETY whose members will be joining us. Meet at Bishopsworth Library at **7.00pm**

**Friday 13 August:** *Short Walk* on Dundry (steep in parts, some stiles). Meet at 10.00am in Dundry Village carpark (return at 12.00) (DHG).

**M Sunday 15 August:** Our major annual *Amphibious Garbage Raid* in Manor Woods. Not just the inflatable dinghy on the pond this time, but also a walk in wellies along the Malago removing garbage and a concentrated effort on other known blackspots. The City Council is providing a skip, and other organisations will, we hope, be able to join us. **MEET AT 10.30AM AT BISHOPSWORTH LIBRARY** - a determined 'blitz' should see a big improvement and still get us home for Sunday lunch!

**M Tuesday 17 August:** *A Guided Visit to Hartcliffe Community Park Farm*. We will be shown round by PETER HALL, Co-ordinator at the Farm. Meet at the Farm at the end of Lampton Avenue, Hartcliffe, at 7.30pm.

**Wednesday 18 August:** *Wildflower and Butterfly Survey* at Littledown and the Hurfords' field. Meet at Dundry Village carpark at 10.00pm (DHG).

**Monday 23 August:** *Slide Talk* by HAROLD HURFORDS with his fantastic slides of the countryside. Dundry Village Hall at 8.00pm (DHG).

## DEGREES IN DETRITUS

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF WITHYWOOD (A. Bantock, prop.) recently held its annual degree-giving ceremony and tea party. Honorary degrees were awarded for *Outstanding Service to the Community* and recipients of this distinguished honour included the regular members of M.V.C.G.'s Garbage Raid team.

Joking apart, this is a well deserved recognition of a thankless task faithfully carried out every month - including by Anton himself.



*The Principal in his academic gown (and full flow). The photo is of an earlier event - the matinée française*

### **Malago Valley Conservation Group Committee Members**

<b>Chairman</b>	André Coutanche	964 3106
<b>Vice-Chairman</b>	Lola Hardingham	964 1116
<b>Treasurer</b>	John Taylor	964 2913

#### **Other Members**

Anton Bantock, Brenda Docherty, Royston Griffey, Beryl Heaton

#### **Co-opted Members**

Geoff Clarke, Tania Ford, Peter Hall, Chris McFarling, Lis Pibworth, Sue Walker, Barbra Wharton, Cllr Bernard Chalmers, Cllr Tessa Coombes, Cllr Peter Crispin, Cllr Richard Eddy, Cllr Ron Hodges, Cllr Dave Johnson, Cllr Mary Sykes (*All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members.*)

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