

# FOD + AG

**Friends of the Downs** + Avon Gorge

Issue 49 Spring 2023



Photo: Derek Catterall

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

APRIL 2023

At last winter loosens its frosty grip on the landscape of the Downs and we can once again get out and about as spring takes her first tentative steps.

Thank you to the members who turned up at the end of March for the Downs stakeholders meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to consider an innovative proposal from the Downs Committee to offer FOD+AG a partnering arrangement that will permit a much greater say in the future management of the Downs. This is the first time since the Downs Act was signed in 1862 that the Downs Committee has considered the possibility of a partnership arrangement. Also attending were a range of organisations, stakeholders and individuals with a shared passion for the Downs. It was enlightening to hear so many views and opinions about the proposed partnering arrangement with the Down Committee.

The FOD+AG committee working group are close to finalising the details of the proposal and at the last meeting of the Downs Committee, I was able to inform members that FOD+AG had agreed a Memo of Understanding (MoU) with our opposite numbers on the Downs Committee. Members voted unanimously to accept the MoU. There have been subsequent meetings between both sides to consider the details of how such a provision might work and I expect a recommendation to accept the proposal in full will go to the Downs Committee at their next meeting.

The arrangement will see the establishment of a FOD+AG led Advisory Panel that can sit alongside the Downs Committee, offer suggestions, contribute to future policies and provide easier access to the Committee.

FOD+AG volunteers have been busy during the winter months. Members have tackled the dead hedge renewal, removed deep seated litter, repainted the White tree, assisted with the goat monitoring, tidied the flower beds at the Thomas Memorial, attended a variety of meetings and continued with numerous walks and talks. For some years now the Downs have been somewhat blighted by the presence of dozens of campervans and caravans. You will read later in

the magazine an article highlighting the problem. FOD+AG has until now taken a relatively generous stance to the van dwellers and of course we have sympathy for people who are genuinely homeless or struggling to meet exorbitant rent demands. However, we believe we have reached a point where the situation has become untenable. FOD+AG are working with the City Council and the Downs Committee to try and bring about a satisfactory resolution. I am able to report that notices have been served on unoccupied caravans and some have been removed.

In the Winter edition of the Magazine, you would have read about a FOD+AG initiative to enlist members to monitor specific areas of the Downs and report anything of particular interest or of concern. I am pleased to report that Downs Ambassadors have been appointed and the scheme, led by FOD+AG committee member Dave Jones, supported by Joan Gubbin is currently up and running. A report about the Ambassador Scheme can be found later in the magazine.

Members may have read in the local press that plans to replace the old Seawalls toilet block with a new facility and a café are currently at an impasse. This may please many but without the income that the café would have provided the long-term future of the toilets is in doubt. Despite receiving planning consent last summer, it would seem somewhat ironic that the Downs Act itself has become a barrier to the development of the site. Downs Committee representatives met with Government officials and were 'strongly advised' that such an application would be unlikely to succeed without changes to the Act itself. This would come at a likely estimated cost of around half a million pounds.

Finally, let's all look forward to a fine summer and a chance to enjoy all that the Downs has to offer.

Robert Westlake                      Chair  
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## VAN AND CARAVAN DWELLERS

Over the last few months, we have seen an increase of up to sixty camper vans and static caravans parked illegally on the roads around the Downs and these numbers are increasing all the time. Proper enforcement of the parking regulations, which do currently exist, would have prevented this issue from proliferating. This is something that residents have been continuously requesting and they have been ignored.

FOD+AG and other resident groups have been calling for a review of the current Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and the inclusion of a '*no overnight camping*' regulation that will cover the Downs and the roads around the Downs. The Downs is an important site with recognised national classifications.

Parking Services would like to find a solution – however officially their line is that there is no problem, unofficially they say that the current rules are too difficult to enforce, they cannot deal with static caravans, and they often do not ticket Van Dwellers as there is no point and there is too much aggravation.

Caravans are not covered by Parking Enforcement, as they are not deemed to be a motor vehicle.

Bristol Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement Team would also love to find a solution, however even issuing a Section 77 dispersal order is difficult as it is hard fought by Vehicles4Change and Bristol City Council's Legal Services have no appetite for a legal battle. This means that the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team can bare their teeth – but the Van Dwellers know that there is no bite. There are Council discussions taking place at the moment concerning the vans and we certainly hope that they find a solution to this worsening problem.

**What can you do to help** – There is tendency for the authorities to consider issues like this as low level, often because if they are not receiving significant numbers of complaints then there is no real problem. Given that all our public services are stretched in terms of resources its easy to see why something like van dwelling falls off the radar.

Derek Catterall



### There are things that can be done:

If you object to the camper vans and static caravans being parked on the roads around the Downs or you are witness to anti-social behaviour then FOD+AG would like to encourage you to let the authorities know.

**Reporting anti-social behaviour:** Every reported incident of anti-social behaviour increases the likelihood of Bristol City Council and Avon & Somerset Police taking action. Call 101, or you can report online and also share photographic or video evidence with the police by emailing it to the local Beat Officer Team using this link <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/your-area/clifton-down/> You can email the Police and Crime Commissioner to highlight your frustration at the lack of Police action to control ASB on the Downs, and their reluctance to use the powers currently available to them to remove illegal encampments: email: [pcc@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:pcc@avonandsomerset.police.uk) Reporting illegally parked or abandoned vehicles/caravans or those which have overstayed their time limit on a public highway. Use this link <https://digital.bristol.gov.uk/streets-travel/report-an-abandoned-vehicle> to file a report. Or you can send an email to:

[VDE@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:VDE@bristol.gov.uk)—[neighbourhood.enforcement@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:neighbourhood.enforcement@bristol.gov.uk) or by expressing it on the Council's website. Go to 'Report a street issue', followed by 'Tell us about people living in vehicles on the road'

### Reporting your frustration with a Vehicle Dweller Encampment

You can either email [neighbourhood.enforcement@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:neighbourhood.enforcement@bristol.gov.uk) or file a report on <https://digital.bristol.gov.uk/people-communities/report-an-unauthorised-encampment-form> Derek Catterall



### FROM THE FOD+AG COMMITTEE.

Over many years FOD+AG has tended to take a benevolent stance towards van and caravan dwellers around the Downs. This position was mostly based on live and let live for some of our citizens who may have found themselves homeless or those who had chosen an alternative life-style. The Downs are huge and half a dozen camper vans could be reasonably accommodated.

The Downs Committee have taken the view that this is really a Highways problem and does not impact directly on the Downs. This is no longer the case, Downs users are being impacted and neighbours lives blighted. FOD+AG has in recent weeks consulted with and taken soundings from regular users of the Downs, neighbours of the Downs, and even City Council officials. We have recorded incidents of regular users feeling intimidated in certain areas, that areas have become no-go areas, litter bins near campsites needing emptying twice a day, evidence of human excrement, exposed gas bottles, damage to grass verges, physical threats, all quite apart from contravening current parking regulations.

FOD+AG's view now is that this an escalating problem that potentially will get worse if not resolved. FOD+AG will continue to press for action by all those with responsibility for the upkeep and good governance of the Downs.

The Committee



Photo: Derek Catterall



## FROM A FOD+AG MEMBER

My wife was walking up Saville Road and happened upon a Parking Warden who was issuing a ticket to the red VW Golf below – amazing to see Parking Services on patrol on the Downs – so far so good. When my wife asked whether or not he was going to ticket the longstanding (ie more than 6 months) Static Caravans on Parry's Lane and up Saville Road, she was advised:

'We don't do Parry's Lane anymore, and we never ticket the static caravans anyway as there's never a number plate on them' regarding the vans on Saville Road she was advised 'we rarely bother coming up here as it is too much hassle...'

So the poor owner of the VW Golf is fair game – but Static Caravans and Van Dwellers aren't even on the target list for Parking Services – and whole roads are now left off the patrol even though they carry the same level of restriction as throughout the city where residents are heavily penalised all the time. That is neither fair nor right, and the authorities responsible should be ashamed that this is the mentality permeating their teams. This is a conservation area in the middle of your City and you have facilitated its demise. Giles Drewett



Photo: Giles Drewett

## FOD+AG ACTIVITIES

### A Spring Clean...

Led by Terry Hannan, FOD+AG members gave the Uriah Thomas Memorial Garden at the top of Blackboy Hill a bit of a spring clean. The bulbs are looking brilliant and all other plants seem to be flourishing. The bulbs were augmented by Martin Collins' donation of his prize and the squirrels seem to be getting most of their nourishment elsewhere. It is worth a look as you walk up the hill to the Downs – it certainly cheers things up for motorists waiting at the lights. Many thanks to Terry for organising this. Robin Haward



Photos: Robin Haward

### That White Tree...

FODAG youth wing has repainted the white tree again - which caused a lot of excitement and hooting from passing motorists and nice comments from a passing pedestrian who was delighted to see that it



actually did get painted. There are several stories about how it came in to being – and of course the current lime tree is not the original! My favourite origin story concerns the well-to-do resident who used to visit Clifton for his drinking and, returning home incapable, had trained his horse to turn left at the white tree. Other stories also involved social activity – so that visitors or their coachmen could find the correct house easily. Anyway, it's part of Bristol's history and tradition – but we did not have time to run after the motorist who went round the roundabout twice to make sure we heard him shout 'waste of paint!' to tell him its history. Robin Haward



## ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

At the beginning of February, the Downs was once again subjected to unacceptable levels of motorised vandalism. The flat wide-open spaces of the Downs attract a nocturnal element who think its fine to hurtle across the Downs revving their engines and executing tight turns that leave the greensward seriously damaged. This is not just some random activity but well organised and advertised on social media with their exploits proudly posted on YouTube.

FOD+AG members and Downs neighbours have been awoken in the early hours to screaming engines as groups of inconsiderate drivers leave carnage in their wake. The Downs team then have the job of reinstating the damaged grassed areas, particularly where soccer pitches have been trashed. These are not isolated incidents; they are regular occurrences. Local Councillors have been made aware of the situation and Cllr Paula O'Rourke as Chair of the Downs Committee has taken a personal interest.

Police on previous occasions have taken action and issued appropriate penalties but they do have to made aware of the situation and they do need evidence to prosecute.

This quote from a local councillor. *'Police prioritise their responses based on how many calls they get about different types of problem. They tell me that they get very few calls about this, so don't think it's a big problem and therefore don't put much resource into policing it. I think the key message for members (or at least those living close enough to know when this is happening) is that it's really important to call 999 as soon as it starts*



FOD+AG have recently leafleted houses facing the Downs asking residents to complain to the police when this happens to make sure they have the numbers to promote action.

Robert Westlake

## MANDY LEIVERS PRESENTATION

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> FOD+AG members gathered to present a unique artwork to Mandy Leivers. The presentation marked Mandy's departure from her post as the Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager. After many years of dedicated service teaching, leading walks and giving talks on the Downs and the Gorge Mandy decided the time for a new challenge was imminent and accepted a post at Westonbirt Arboretum.

Mandy and FOD+AG worked together closely on numerous projects over the years and her valuable support for all Downs related activities will be greatly missed.

FOD+AG presented Mandy with an original work by local artist, Christine Howes that depicted a twisted Hawthorn tree and some of Mandy's favourite local birdlife.



We wish Mandy well in her new role and hope that the artwork will serve as a reminder of her time on the Downs.  
Robert Westlake

Shown right is the actual tree with its unusual twisted trunk.

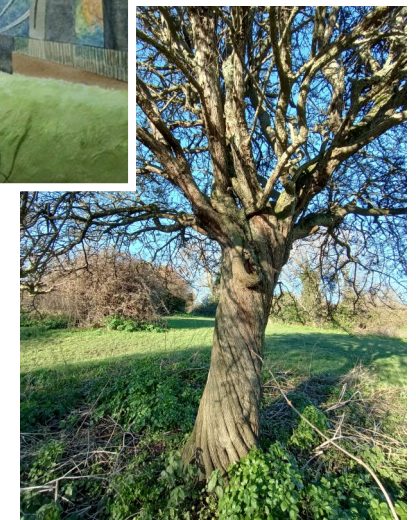


Photo David Jones

## AVON GORGE AND DOWNS EDUCATION PROGRAMME QUARTERLY REPORT JANUARY - MARCH 2023 (EDITED)

In January, February and March we directly engaged with 459 people through the learning and community engagement programme.

**Events** We ran: two Wildlife Talks ('Sensational Silky Wave Moth' and 'Delightful Dormice'); an 'Amble with the Avon Gorge goat keeper' a Discovery Walk, and a 'Brilliant Birds' children's holiday activity.

**School education sessions** During this period, we taught 354 school children. We have taught children from 2 schools on the Downs and in school. Our in-school sessions support the sessions we will run on the Downs with the same children but have the advantage of raising a small amount of income for the Project (£250). This was at the discretion of the AGDWP Engagement manager as the school has access to a small budget for the provision of outdoor learning in the school grounds. Downs Committee members are welcome to observe any education session AGDWP runs this year in order that they can understand how we operate in the formal education capacity. AGDWP will need to seek permission from the education group attending.

**Publicity** We publicise our events in various outlets and noticeboards including the Downs Café, the Botanical Gardens, and at Leigh Woods as well as in the 27 libraries in the Bristol area. We advertise our events in the BS9 magazine, as well as the Bristol Naturalists Society and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge newsletters and *Wild Times*, the Bristol Zoological Society's internal magazine. We share our Facebook posts to the general public as well as specialised Facebook groups and this has increased views: 3,029 in January, 6,612 in February and 20,991 in March. Find us at [www.facebook.com/avongorge/](https://www.facebook.com/avongorge/)

**History walk** Anna and Vanessa went on two history walks with Francis Greenacre in order to learn the history and heritage of the Downs. Francis has kindly agreed to run a history walk for the general public during Bristol Walk Fest in May.

**Bird survey** We have started a monthly bird survey with Alastair Fraser, a bird identification expert who already works with the native species team at Wild Place Project (WPP). We have been on four

transect walks, one per month covering four different habitats on the Downs and in the Gorge. We are recording our data on BirdTrack which automatically uploads the data to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and allows us to view our data at any time. There is a lack of bird survey data within the AGDWP and this will allow us to monitor any changes in species richness and abundance at different times of year, over time. We aim to tie this information in with the scrub management plan to note impacts. Highlights so far are sightings of the elusive firecrest and a peregrine falcon.

**iNaturalist project** With the help of the Natural History Consortium (NHC) we have now set up a project for the Downs and Avon Gorge on iNaturalist so that the general public can upload sightings of plant and animal species in our designated project area, and this will be recorded officially. The aim is to allow citizen science to play a part in our survey and monitoring programme and to establish a record of which species have been recorded on site – sightings are verified to research grade. Over the City Nature Challenge weekend in late April we will be guiding and helping the general public at two Downs' sites, to set up the iNaturalist app in order to take part in the NHC national bioblitz.

### Collaboration with the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (CSBT)

We worked in collaboration with the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust to aid the creation of an Avon Gorge mural sited at the learning annexe by the suspension bridge. A well-known street artist, HazardOne, was keen to create a mural representing the rare and scarce species here in Bristol. AGDWP provided scientific detail and images of the botanical and invertebrate species in order that the portrayal is scientifically accurate. The mural was officially opened on 24<sup>th</sup> March and a fundraising competition launched by CSBT to win one of the mural panels. The mural is beautiful and engaging; a wonderful way to reach the large numbers of people who frequent the suspension bridge but may not normally engage with our local biodiversity. There is information next to the mural on AGDWP so that people can find out more about and engage with the project. The Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust are offering a unique opportunity





to win one of three panels through an online prize draw raising funds to support the educational work of the Trust's free entry Visitor Centre. Each donation of £6.50 will count as one entry into the draw. Details on how to enter online or by post can be found at [www.cliftonbridge.org.uk/prize-draw](http://www.cliftonbridge.org.uk/prize-draw).

Featured in the mural are species such as the Bristol onion, a small and graceful nationally rare and protected plant with a distinctive ball of magenta flowers on a tall stem; Bristol whitebeam, an endangered tree species unique to the Avon Gorge discovered in 1852 by Miss Martha Maria Atwood; and autumn squill, a rare plant with pale mauve flowers carefully removed and replanted by Brunel, on the recommendation of Elizabeth Glennie, wife of Brunel's Chief Engineer, during the Suspension Bridge construction.

The mural will be on display to the public throughout the summer at the recently renovated Clifton Hub (postcode BS8 4DU), with prize draw winners announced at the end of October 2023.

## DOWN'S AMBASSADORS

*Reports from individual ambassadors have been combined in the following report. Many thanks to all who contributed. Dave Jones*

Weather has been a big factor over the last month, significantly for the Funderworld attraction, and particularly the difficulties with car parking, with cars sometimes driving through standing water on the grassy areas of the Downs. Earlier in March there were observations of the purple crocuses planted by the Rotary Club for their campaign to end polio, two sites, one near Christchurch and one on the Granny Downs. It was possible to read the words 'end polio now' in the planted crocuses. A concern with introducing flower species to the Downs is they become invasive and crowd out other plants, this doesn't seem to be happening with the crocuses. The timing of the first grass cutting in the season may be influencing how much they spread, when later the seed has time to set. We are also hoping to see orchids along the east side of Westbury road soon.

The gas pipe laying work across the area near St Monica's is complete and restoration works to the grass surface are understood to have been implemented, the heavy rain and continual foot traffic appear to be slowing the recovery down.

Antisocial activity persists, with fast cars and bikes racing loudly on the roads on Easter Sunday. In a routine neighbourhood speed watch, 20% of the cars were exceeding 25mph in the 20mph zone. On the 12th April there was even a car crashed into a tree near Peregrine Watch. Also, observations of unregulated electric trail and quad bikes driving across the Downs, many of these have been reported to the Police.

Parking of cars on grass verges and frontages around the Downs has been mentioned a few times, and in this extreme wet weather the damage has been particularly noticeable.

The council have started to do clearance of unoccupied caravans, and parking enforcements are now more regular.





Above: Purple crocuses planted for polio on Granny Downs (see story left)  
Below: Felled horse chestnut on Granny Downs (see 2nd February, page 17)



## GRANNY DOWNS –Winter into Spring 2023

**Travelling hopefully, a few surprises and even a touch of magic**

1<sup>st</sup> January. Dark and wet. And yet here's a buttercup, fully open.

3<sup>rd</sup> January. Wet and dark. I can hear a nuthatch! I want to record that I saw it, but I didn't.

6<sup>th</sup> January. Can hear two nuthatches up this sadly condemned horse chestnut. Yet I cannot see them! This is going to become a fixation.

9<sup>th</sup> January. It is a fixation. Oh the sun and the black sky and the intensely green grass.

12<sup>th</sup> January. A crow is circumnavigating the enormous puddle by the birch tree. He is plodding round in an anti-clockwise direction. Four hours later and the crow is still circumnavigating the puddle. Mind you, I cannot be sure it is the same crow. Same direction though. Avian direction choices are interesting. I will say more in another episode.

13<sup>th</sup> January. A starling murmuration led by a seagull. Often wood pigeons take the lead although they are not capable of much sustained effort and relinquish the position after a short time.

14<sup>th</sup> January. And here's a gull swimming in the enormous puddle. This is getting ridiculous.

15<sup>th</sup> January. A tale of two squirrels. The first one dashes along the horse chestnut branch and makes a fantastic leap first into the unknown and then on to a slender branch of a neighbouring horse chestnut. The second squirrel eases along the same branch but stops, not attempting the leap. Then after a while, he retreats to the bottom of the tree and thumps with his hind legs in the way that rabbits do. It is all but impossible for a squirrel to lose its life falling out of a tree. Disbelievers, please study the terminal velocity of squirrels.

23<sup>rd</sup> January. At last! It is sunny and I wait and sure enough, the nuthatch comes into view. The colours!! Nuthatches always seek out the sun. In honour of the colour of those feathers, I will quote famous bird photographers Heidi and Hans Jurgen Kock: *'for us, bird feathers are probably the most poetic masterpieces of evolution'*.

31<sup>st</sup> January. And not expecting magic on this cold, dark day. I stare ruefully across the Granny Downs and suddenly a moving searchlight



of sun highlights grass covered with brown leaves. A jay flying through the birch, wings wide open like a magician's cloak, and as it flies across the turf, the brown leaves turn into redwings, floating straight up to the top branches of this lime tree where they become leaves again.

2<sup>nd</sup> February. Felled horse chestnut logs and on top of a neighbouring lime tree, starlings sit facing the logs, perching in unusual silence. It is hard not to read this as reproach.

3<sup>rd</sup> February. Song thrush more confident in choice of verses. My goodness, how birdsong graces our souls. Naturally, there is a wood pigeon sitting on a branch close by. They, too, are drawn to vibrant singers. Especially blackbirds and thrushes.

6<sup>th</sup> February. Silver frosted carpets in Camelot. Bluetit and dunnoek calling. This is the time of year when birds take it in turns to sing rather than a little later in the dawn chorus when they all belt out together. And so many purple crocuses! I know, like the aconites, they are planted and not wild, but I have long ceased to care.

8<sup>th</sup> February. A nuthatch near the Methodist church, bouncing from tree to tree like robins do. Oh the colour, the coral pink and grey of these exquisite, lively little birds.

9<sup>th</sup> February. The sticky buds are indeed very sticky!! I have to wipe my fingers on the wet grass.

14<sup>th</sup> February. High above, two gulls synchronising movements in an exquisite dance, almost touching wings and reminding me of our human joy in holding hands.

17<sup>th</sup> February. Three celandines out now. So good to see. And I suddenly remember the orange celandines in the Old Botanic Garden in North Road. Dr Mark Smith, the then curator, kept a flower bed full of exceptions, such as the white rock rose and red violet. Please, does anyone else remember the orange celandines?

19<sup>th</sup> February. And blackbirds assume that look of self-importance and chase each other under parked cars. Sometimes it is hard to fathom the mind of a blackbird, especially at this time of year.

22<sup>nd</sup> February. Bluetits playing kiss chase, all fluffy and acrobatic. And

robin courtship swaying! Both on same branch, close to each other. Extend their bodies, tall and slim and start to sway. Some experts think this signals hostility but I'm not convinced. And here's a magpie with a twig in its beak. Winter survival time is largely past, creation begins! Even though with magpies it's a bit hit and miss! 28<sup>th</sup> February. I rejoiced too soon. This morning it's so dark and bleak that even the song of the robin sounds like crying. I must pull myself together. Four hours later, it is much brighter and I spot two wrens, a robin, a couple of magpies and a tree full of starlings.

2<sup>nd</sup> March. Cruelly cold, yet here, on the Granny Downs ladybird tree, there is a six spot ladybird! I want it to burrow back under the protective bark again.

3<sup>rd</sup> March. I have to admire the way magpies persist in choosing the perfect twig for their nests, submitting it for approval to their mates and then flying away with it to goodness knows where. Their nests are notoriously scrappy.

5<sup>th</sup> March. It's such a privilege to wander in the land of nuthatches. And today I want to pay tribute to early spring's supporting cast, green alkanet, which of course has blue flowers, and dandelions, too often taken for granted.

8<sup>th</sup> March. Snow. A robin snow, called that because it is snow which has fallen since robins started to sing again. So now we have snowmen in Narnia.

9<sup>th</sup> March. A cold, wet no magic day, the Granny Downs is the lake district and a dark one at that. BUT THEN a crow marches into the puddle by the birch tree and bathes, dips, rolls, shakes, splatters, ducks, paddles out and then back in again to re start the performance. And today, the crow is the sweetest bird in the world...

12<sup>th</sup> March. Little punnets of primroses line my route.

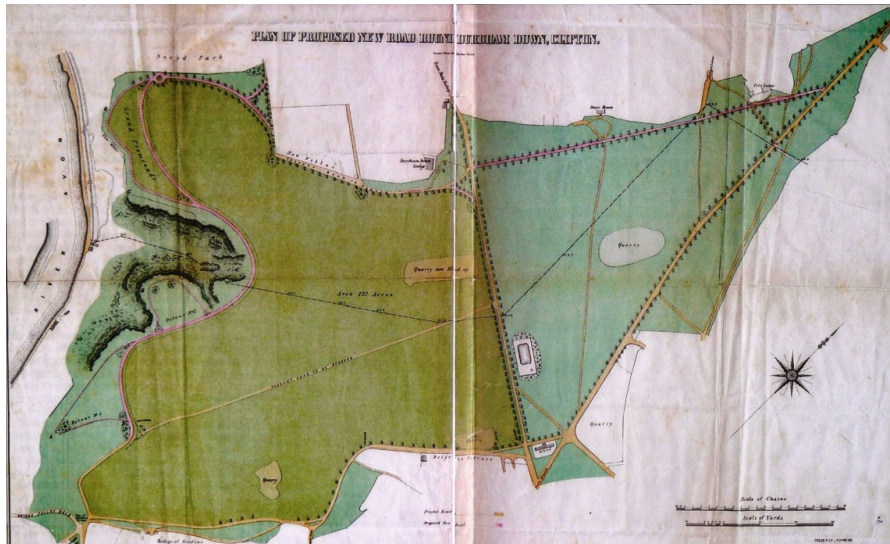
15<sup>th</sup> March. A song thrush singing midday and bright white and green buds on the horse chestnuts!

20<sup>th</sup> March. So now it is spring! Even the crystal light seems to be rejoicing and a blackbird is singing in Camelot.

Geraldine@geraldinetaylor.co.uk

## ALDERMAN PROCTOR'S PROPOSALS FOR CIRCULAR ROAD 1869

As part of my desire to close Ladies Mile occasionally during the Summer months to provide a cleaner, quieter environment with fewer hazards for the users of the Downs, I've been doing some research into the history of the roads on the Downs. Francis Greenacre who is an art historian, fine art consultant lecturer and author very kindly sent me this wonderful old map of the first roads crossing the Downs.



Ashmead and Lavars 1869 Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

This map, dated 1869 is Alderman Proctor's proposal for the building of Circular Road, shown in pink. Ladies Mile is marked: Present road to be removed.

Baker's Road is shown dividing the Downs. Very soon after the passing of the Downs Act William Baker laid a road across the Downs from Worrall Road to Ivywell Road largely for the convenience of Sneyd Park's ever-increasing residents, some of whom were members of the Downs Committee – both Merchants and Councillors. The Downs Committee contributed to the costs, but the public objected so strongly that the road was re-turfed at the Committee's expense. In 1881 it was re-laid as a footpath. Parts of the original road can be seen at the Worrall Road end.

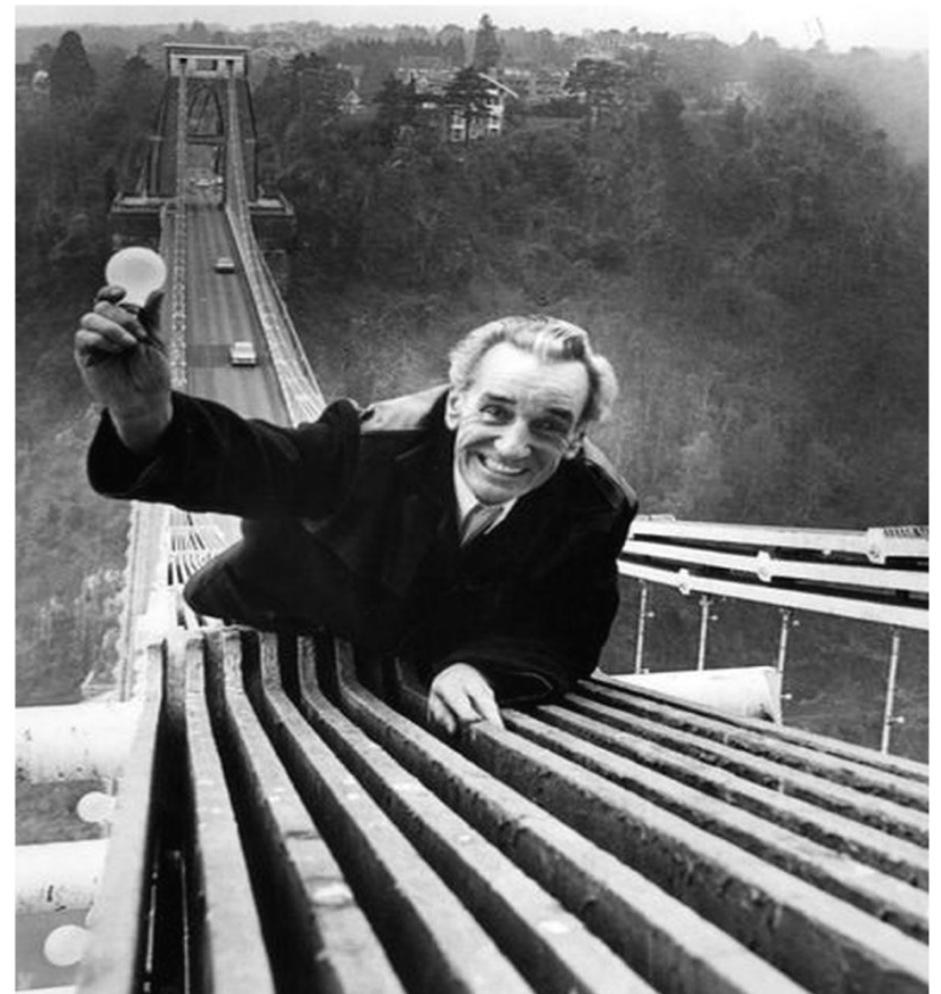
Derek Catterall

## LIGHTING THE BRIDGE December 3rd, 1981

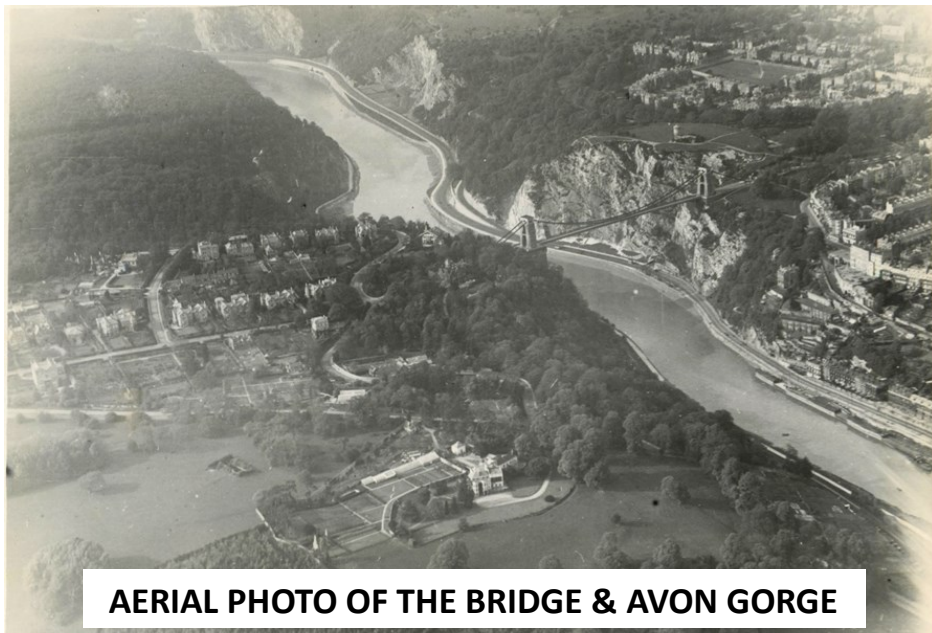
Archie Roddof of Withywood really was a high achiever. He was the man who climbed the Clifton Suspension Bridge to make sure the 4,500 light bulbs were working.

There would seem to be scant regard for Health & Safety in the early eighties as Archie's only protection seems to be his trusty donkey jacket.

Robert Westlake (photo courtesy of the *Bristol Post*)







**AERIAL PHOTO OF THE BRIDGE & AVON GORGE**

**(circa 1930's Source - Know Your Place)**

In the centre of the image is Rownham House which was the Dower House to the Smyth family. Beyond the bridge you can just spot the Observatory tower.

Below: Aerial photo of the Downs with a light coating of snow.



Photo: Barry Beard

## 'THE MOST IMPORTANT ROAD IN THE HISTORY OF ROADS'

Some years ago when Richard Bland was near the end of his life, I joined one of his walks/talks about the *Trees of The Promenade* in Clifton. We met at Proctor's Fountain. He talked about the layout of the area, the grand houses on the east side and the changes in the landscape. He said his favourite tree on the whole Downs was the magnificent sycamore opposite us at the top of the hill.

Then suddenly he electrified us. 'And look across there...you see one of the most important roads in the history of all our roads.' Richard was a level-headed economic historian so we listened carefully. He was referring to Bridge Valley Road, opened in 1822 to link the road from Hotwells with Clifton Down.

At that time Hotwells Spa was undergoing one of its doomed revivals in its long decline. A visit to Hotwells included taking the pure air of Clifton Down by horse or carriage. The problem was that the only access to Clifton then was extremely steep - up Granby Hill or Clifton Vale. Horses had to stop halfway and rest or be changed. A better route was sought. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1819 to allow the building of a carriage road along the river bank and up the rocks to Clifton. The man to take on the challenge was John Loudon Macadam. He was born in Ayr in 1756 and came to Bristol in 1802 as a 'Manufacturer of Lampblack, Mineral Paints and Oils'. He lived in Park Street. His obsession was road construction. It was therefore appropriate that he was made a trustee of The Bristol Turnpike Trust which controlled the maintenance and repair of 178 miles of road. Then Macadam was appointed General Surveyor for the Trust in December 1815 at a salary of £400 a year.

At last Macadam had the chance to build a road rather than simply repairing them. He was bursting to put his ideas into practice. All he wanted to do was summed up in his great book, *Remarks On The Present System of Road Making* published in 1816.

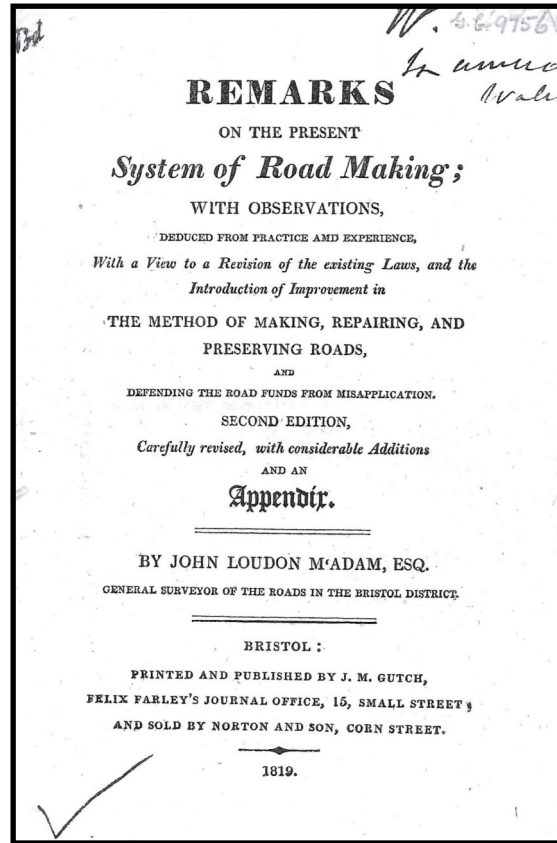
Macadam proposed a new method of construction. He said construction was more important than maintenance and repair: prepare the subsoil carefully; make a camber of one inch per yard; break up the stones so that you use only one size (it must fit a

workman's mouth and weigh no more than 6oz); lay these to a depth of ten inches; compress them with hammers; finish the surface with small stones to make it smooth. You then have a road that will survive rain and frost and snow and sun.

We stood amazed at the detail of Richard's history lesson. He said that Bridge Valley Road had demonstrated all these features for the first time in the history of road-making. In addition the gradient was so gentle that horses did not have to stop or change half way up. It was a miracle of engineering. People came from all over the country to view Macadam's wonderful road. So great was its impact that by 1825 he had given a new word to the English language: macadamize, to make a road in this way. His methods were copied up and down the land. His book was reprinted nine times by 1827. A sensation. Then came the punchline. Richard said: 'Remember this: the road you see in front of you changed the speed of travel more than the first railways. It was the most important road in the history of road-making in the world, a macadamized road.'

It's perhaps not surprising that the Trees of the Promenade were a bit of an anti-climax after this.

Barry Williamson



Title page of Macadam's best selling book

## THE GREAT HOUSES OF THE DOWNS 4 & 5 ROCKLEAZE



Some of the most valuable properties in the City are located around the Downs. Many were originally the homes of wealthy merchants and civic dignitaries. No's 4 & 5 are a pair of attached grade 2 listed houses built around the date of the signing of the Downs Act (c1860) They were originally named *Southside* and *Woodborough* and are now converted into flats. Interestingly the conversion into flats was carried out in the 60's by a development company owned by the famous clarinettist Acker Bilk. It seems that Acker (West Country slang for mate) invested his considerable showbiz earnings in property development and ownership. His rendition of the instrumental *Stanger on the Shore* became 1962's biggest-selling single in the UK, spending 55 weeks in the charts, kept off the top spot by Cliff Richard's *The Young Ones*.

One of the early residents of *Southside* was one John Cordeaux who went on to develop a thriving draper's business, later setting up work-rooms, warehouses and shops in Regent Street, Clifton, stretching from the corner of Merchants Road to Saville Place. John Cordeaux &



Sons employed around 300 drapery and shop assistants, many living above the Clifton premises, in 45 departments manufacturing costumes and home furnishings made from material, lace, silks, etc from the Orient, the Americas and from across Europe. The business moved to Queens Road in 1909 but seems to have closed down around the time of the First World War.

A little later the Wait family were in residence naming one half of the property *Woodborough* which was likely named after their house in Camerton, Somerset where the Wait family lived prior to moving to Clifton. William and Caroline Wait and their five daughters moved in during the late 1860's. Tragically both parents died soon after the move; William died on 11th August 1869 and Caroline on 28th January 1870. In the 1871 census the five daughters were living in 5 Rockleaze, possibly as the first occupants, with a complement of servants. The five daughters eventually dispersed across the country with the eldest Frances (1850-1941) marrying in Stoke Bishop before moving to Rodbourne, Wiltshire the family home of her husband Sir Richard Hungerford Pollen. (4<sup>th</sup> Baronet). John Moore & Roger Chubb



Photo: Derek Catterall

Members of the West Bristol Climate Action Group preparing the ground on the Zoo Banks for a wildflower meadow.

## DOWN'S FORWARDS FESTIVAL

In September the Downs will play host to the *Downs Forwards Festival*. The two-day event will be on September 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> and feature Erykah Badu, shown right, Aphex Twin, Bonobo and Primal Scream. Spread across two stages, *Forwards* complements its music line-up with a space for discussion and debate at 'The Information' stage, featuring a host of experts, disruptors, creatives, writers and thinkers.



Team Love return as the outfit behind the festival. Organiser and co-founder Tom Paine said 'We're proud to be bringing *Forwards* back this year to the best city in the world, and our hometown Bristol. Building on our work from our inaugural year, we are incredibly excited to be able to pull together a musical offering with such an amazing array of talent.'

Tickets are on sale on the *Forwards* website starting at £49.50, with weekend tickets available from £89.50. Concessions are available for children aged 5-15, local residents and low-income individuals. Gates open 12 midday on each day of the festival with the last entry to the event at 8pm. As last year, *Forwards* will offer discounted tickets to those that work in the NHS as a small way of saying thanks for all their hard work and dedication.

### ARCHIVIST WANTED!

As things about FOD+AG and the Downs get more and more interesting we need an archivist—could this be you? It involves sorting and storing documents/articles/newsletters/magazines in some sort of order! Contact Robin for more details at [robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk)



**COMMITTEE:**

Robert Westlake (Chair), Bob Bell, Martin Collins, Derek Catterall, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Tim Clarke, Luke Hudson, & Dave Jones.

**Secretary:**(application welcomed) **Membership:** mail@gubbin.co.uk

**Subscriptions:** £10.00 per individual or £19.00 per household per calendar year. Please ask for a standing order.

You can apply via the website: [www.friendsofthedowns.org](http://www.friendsofthedowns.org)

**OR**

by post: The Membership Secretary, 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, Bristol BS6 6XJ.

**Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Summer edition is 20th July 2023.** Articles/photographs to: [fodagcontent@gmail.com](mailto:fodagcontent@gmail.com)

**Disclaimer: Articles submitted to the magazine express the author's views and these are not necessarily endorsed by the Committee.**

**SOCIAL MEDIA:**

**Website:** <http://www.friendsofthedowns.org>

**Facebook:** Do please join the group on Facebook, and like/share the page to spread the word. @fodagbristol.

**Instagram:** Friends\_of\_the\_Downs.

**Downs App** is available to download.

**DOWNS EVENTS**

**Wildflower Walk** Renowned Ecologist Neil Talbot will lead a guided wildflower walk on June 18th. 11.00 - 12.30 Free to members £10 for guests. Vital to sign up: [robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Summer Social** At the FOD+AG committee meeting, members agreed to hold a Summer Social evening on July 5th. It is planned to hold it near the Downs cafe. Look out for details coming soon.

**Walk and Talk** A FOD+AG member has suggested a leisurely walk and talk looking specifically at the history of the great houses of the Downs. If you would be interested in joining contact [robertjwestlake@gmail.com](mailto:robertjwestlake@gmail.com)

