As we come towards the end of year it is perhaps a time for reflection, and a chance to look back on what has been an interesting year for the Downs.

The long hot summer saw thousands of visitors enjoying the wide expanses of the Downs. The whole appearance of the Downs changed during July and August with normally verdant grass turning to desert like conditions. Good news for the grass cutting teams, not so good when it came to dealing with a huge increase in litter collection, bin emptying and clearing up after alfresco diners, and their ironically named ‘disposable barbecues’

Founder member and Chairman Jack Penrose has decided to resign from our committee. Jack has led the Friends group with distinction since its inception and leaves behind some big shoes to fill.

The past twelve months may well be remembered as a watershed year with increased threats to all our parks and public open spaces. Even the Downs, despite the efforts of the Downs Committee, has not been immune to the vagaries of political financial decisions to cut and cut again.

The City Council has no statutory obligation to provide and maintain parks so they become an obvious target when it comes to setting Council budgets. This is despite everyone agreeing that parks play a vital role in the health and welfare of our citizens.

The Downs, though better placed to weather the storm of financial uncertainty than most of our parks, still needed to consider an alternative approach to the day to day running of the Downs.

All our parks have been forced to accept swingeing cuts and their future survival may well be dependent on their ability to generate income. The Downs are no different, with tough decisions needing to be made. Responsibility for the governance of the Downs lies with the Downs Committee and they were obliged to consider increasing charges for sport provision, concessions and site hire for events, keeping the Downs toilets open, retaining floral displays, reducing out of hours security cover, significantly increasing the frequency of Downs’ events and accepting a proposal to permit a café to be erected at Seawalls.
Chairman’s Report October 2018

FOD+AG supports the Downs Committee in its efforts to ensure the Downs remain financially viable, but we do have reservations, and as members we must all remain vigilant to ensure we don’t lose sight of the very thing we all want to enjoy and preserve.

If our parks are to avoid a rapid spiral of decline then we must recognise that a fresh approach to sustain our parks will be required and there is some hope for the future.

There is a move politically to make parks provision and good maintenance a statutory obligation.

Your committee is supporting Bristol Parks Forum to consider a new business model that could transform how parks are managed in the future. We are also working with an organisation called Groundwork South on Lottery funded projects that will support young people to gain work experience on initiatives that will directly benefit the Downs.

We have an obligation to those that have gone before us and an even greater responsibility to those that will follow.

Robert Westlake
Rare Trees of the Downs - Cluster Oak

This tree can be found on the triangle of land round Proctor’s Fountain. It is a sport variety of the Common Oak, and has the latin name of *Quercus robur cristata*. The original tree was found in Savernake Forest in the 1940s, and, surprisingly for a sport, it comes true from seed.

Its key feature is very distorted leaves tightly bunched on very short shoots, and it grows very, very, slowly. There is no other example in Bristol, and I believe only round half a dozen mature trees in the UK. This tree was almost certainly planted after the last war when this triangle had, I have read, fifteen bomb craters. It was planted at the same time as the massive Red Oak which dominates much of the triangle, and the Tree of Heaven which collapsed spectacularly some six years ago. It is small in both girth and height, and unremarkable until you take a closer look.

This year it had an exceptionally heavy flowering of its catkins, and there is a chance that it may produce more acorns than the Squirrels can cope with. It is well worth trying to grow one if you find an acorn in October.

Richard Bland
Rare Trees of the Downs One - Cluster Oak

We will be running further articles on unusual trees of the Downs, in the meantime you can download the leaflet below by googling ‘Downs Tree Trail’ or emailing Mandy Leivers: mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk

Extracts from The Downs Tree Trail (Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project)
The Avenue to Nowhere

During the 2017 Westbury Park Festival, Richard Bland led a walk around the ‘Granny Downs’ focusing on the trees. At one point he noted that the trees along the diagonal footpath from Westbury Road (shown on map 1) were the oldest in that whole area, around 200 years. This triggered a question that I - and others – had long pondered: why that avenue there and where did it go to? There is no definitive answer but I'd like to offer a very strong contender.

Putting in an avenue to nowhere in the early 19th century, is clearly not an option. Carrying on the line of the avenue leads to no major house or estate of the time, and anyway the fields beyond were known to have been farmed until the late 19th century. But there may be a clue in that the avenue touches to the end of the land now occupied by St. Christopher’s School. So what was there at the time?

Map 2 is an extract from the tithe map of the area in 1844. The ‘Granny Down’ are to the left, the fields on the right are what were eventually developed as today’s Westbury Park. The building in field 473 was Redland Lodge. This was a very large, grand house and its owners also owned field 471 to the immediate north. In fact both fields – 471 and 473 - appear clearly as a single estate, named as Redland Lodge, on the first Ordnance Survey map.
inch map of around 1830.

The house was built around 1825 by Mary Wait, one of Bristol's first women bankers. The census of 1861 tells us that the house was then owned by John Cresswell Wall, eventually the Director of the Great Western Railway. He lived there with his wife, 6 children and 9 servants – so it was certainly grand – and “their dinner parties were considered models of their kind”.

Several changes then took place - was Mr. Wall getting short of money? First he, (or Mary Wait), sold the lower part of field 473 quite early for the site of Redland Knoll, (the building now on the corner of Blenheim Road). He then sold most of field 471 for seven large houses, now the main part of St. Christopher's School. Finally, after he died in 1897, the house and all of field 473 and more was sold for the development of Blenheim Road and other roads.

This takes us back to map 1, which is from 1902, showing Belvedere Road, some new houses and a rather sad looking Redland Lodge now surrounded by development. The house was badly bombed in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} World War and finally demolished in the early 1960s. There is very little about it in the city Records Office other than two photos taken from Belvedere Road showing
The Avenue to Nowhere

what looks like the back of the house, certainly not a grand front.

So now back to the avenue of trees. The avenue would have been put in when Redland Lodge included all of fields 471 and 473. The entrance road across field 473 on map 2 looks important but, as the photos suggest, this arrived at the back of the house. My proposed solution to the problem is now shown on map 3, a simplified version of the tithe map.

As of now, the likeliest explanation of the avenue of trees is therefore that it used to turn into what was field 471 and create a grand entrance avenue down to a Redland Lodge at the peak of its social life. Sound convincing?

Jeff Bishop

For more information on this, and how all the fields to the east became the neighbourhood of Westbury Park, contact Jeff (patandjeff@cbnd.com) for a copy of ‘Villas, Cottages and Houses: The Making of Westbury Park’ (£5).
A reminder that the FOD+AG AGM is on Wednesday 21st November, at the Redland Green Bowls Club from 7pm.

As well as the formalities there will be a talk from Susan Sanctuary regarding the proposal for a Parks Foundation to manage and generate income for Bristol Parks. Paul Wood will also be giving a short presentation on the history of the New Hotwell.

The bar will be open as well as teas and coffees. FOD+AG committee members will be circulating to get your opinions on what issues matter and where FOD+AG should be putting its efforts —so this is your big opportunity of the year to have your say.

Committee Nominations

The following have been nominated to serve as FOD+AG Committee for 2019, subject to approval by members at the AGM.

Robert Westlake  Bob Bell  Luke Hudson
Robin Haward  Terry Hannan  Karen Findlay
Caroline Baker  Derek Catterall  Martin Collins
Joan Gubbin

In addition the following are to be co-opted onto the Committee:

Stephanie Wooster  Kay Snowdon

Tree of the Year

The Bristol Tree Forum is having an annual competition to vote for your favourite tree. If you wish to vote for a candidate (preferably one of the trees nominated by FOD+AG but it’s a free country), go to:

http://bristoltrees.space/trees/treeoftheyear.xq

This is part of the build up to National Tree Week which is held from the 24th November to the 2nd of December.
Bishops Knoll - The Hidden Garden

Tucked away in between Stoke Bishop and Sneyd Park is a little known piece of Bristol's natural and civic history - Bishop’s Knoll Nature Reserve. The reserve sits on the grounds of the former Bishop's Knoll, a Victorian mansion built in the 1860s on the site of a medieval deer park. Terraced Gardens, with pergolas, gazebos and an arboretum were planted, with paths wandering up and down through the steeply sloping site overlooking the Avon Gorge.

The mansion’s key historic significance arises from Bristol born Robert Bush, who left the UK for Australia in 1877, and made a fortune as a sheep farmer in Western Australia. He returned in 1908 and bought the House. During World War 1, he opened this up to become a hospital for injured servicemen, principally Australians - all paid for from his own funds. The standard of care was considered some of the best in the country. A commemorative plaque sits at the entrance acknowledging the gratitude shown by veterans for Robert and his wife’s kindness.

The house was demolished in the 1960s to build flats, and in 1986 the developers gave most of the grounds to The Woodland Trust, presumably because it was too steep to build on. The Woodland Trust are now slowly restoring the ornamental terraced gardens and arboretum, repairing the metal railings and stone walls. They have also put the orchard back into the old
kitchen garden, and are thinning out the line of ashes and cypresses on the southern boundary to let light into the understorey and give the specimen trees room to grow.

The Monterrey Cypress
These include a huge Monterrey Cypress, and a multi-stem Sessile Oak. The latter probably predates the mansion by several hundred years, although it is not clear whether it is pollarded, or is the result of several closely space saplings merging together.

From a nature perspective the reserve provides a very valuable link, with the nature reserves of White’s Paddock (Avon Wildlife Trust) at its southern edge, and Old Sneed Park (BCC) to the West— it provides a corridor bringing wildlife into the heart of suburban north Bristol and is one of the few examples of wood pasture in the Bristol area.

The Friends of Bishop Knoll, organise volunteer parties for those interested in conservation work, contact details below. The trust obtained a Heritage Lottery grant in 2017 and there is a 5 year plan to restore the historic features, including the elegant Victorian railings on the wonderful lookout which has views eastwards down the Avon Gorge. They are also installing interpretation boards regarding some of the interesting features of the site, amongst
them a rather unusual walk in horse trough, and replacing trees as they reach the end of their lives.

If you wish to visit the reserve the easiest entrance is from Blackberry Lane in Stoke Bishop. You can then walk over or under the railway line, into Bennetts Patch to see the wicker whales, and the wildflower meadows. Alternatively you can bear right, follow through to Old Sneed Park, and carry on through the woodland towards Sea Mills.

Resources:

There is a BBC radio documentary about the hospital at:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p022nlmd

Alternatively there is book by local historians Chris Stephens and Clive Burton: ‘Bristol’s Australian Pioneer; The Story of Robert Bush and His Bishop’s Knoll World War 1 Hospital.’

Luke Hudson

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**Bishops Knoll - The Hidden Garden**

The Kitchen Garden
That’s what the Bristol Museum guide said so that’s what I did on my quest. Having ascended three flights of splendid stairs, I lingered at the crystals and then crept down more stairs, bizarrely with blue seats on either side of them. I whispered into a special entry pad … and a door opened. Almost there, few more stairs, a corridor and the Holy Grail and kindly keeper awaited.

And if, like me, you are passionate about natural history, (and of course you are passionate because you are a Friend of the Downs), and a researcher on the side, then what can I say? Well then, this secluded library is the place to be and the keeper of the Holy Grail is one of the Bristol Naturalist Society librarians.

This library is full of books on wildlife of every kind, its offering is astonishing and its range world-wide. Me, I’m a bird person.

Dazzled and overwhelmed, at first I stayed with the books I know – the New Naturalist monographs (all those fantastic covers – to see them altogether!). Then I branched out and scanned the general books, and here is where I searched for and found the kind of treasure I wanted.

I read about behaviour of birds and birdwatchers during the war, great stuff! Goldfinches colonising central London: I saw as many as twelve together on the anti-aircraft rocket site just north of the Hyde Park Bandstand.

I learned about albino house martins and an albino skylark! And, as I had hoped, these things triggered my own memories – in this case a golden skylark at Ashton Court, (covered in pollen from running among buttercups), and a high minded blackbird with an albino collar on the Westbury Park Downs this year.

I also treasured some amazing opening lines:

Turn Left at the Dinosaur
'A nuthatch was shot by the Keeper at Bottisham Hall today while feeding, as he asserted, on a dead sheep.' (1843).

‘In song, the songthrush seems to be working very hard to please, and he succeeds.’

Viscount Grey, the longest-serving foreign secretary of the twentieth century, and best remembered for saying that ‘the lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime’, wrote a whimsical bird book, available here. In it he states firmly:

‘Robins are capable of ANYTHING.’

He also compares the Treecreeper with the Russian army in 1915, and you will have to track down his book, or wait until mine comes out, to find out why.

Geraldine Taylor

Details of the Bristol Naturalist Society
The Library of the Bristol Naturalists’ Society, Bristol Museum.

Opening times

Wednesday 1.15 pm – 2.15pm,
Saturday 10.15 am – 12.15pm.

Members of the Society only.

Join the Society by contacting membership@bristolnats.org.uk
News: Sea Walls Café Proposal

The proposal for a Café by the current toilet block at Sea Walls has been withdrawn, with Bristol City Council asking for it to be resubmitted with amendments. FODAG will comment on the proposals when they are released. We are hoping to have an update at the AGM, and we will be seeking member’s views at that time.

News: Lottery Grant for the Downs

It has recently been announced that Durdham and Clifton Downs is to receive a lottery grant. This is part of a £10 million award by the National Lottery aimed at getting more young people involved in preserving their local parks and greenspaces. Across the UK, in 5 hub areas, 12 projects have been awarded between £500,000 - £1,000,000 to focus on Heritage and Historic landscapes. In the southwest these areas will include the Stoke Park Estate, Blaise Castle Estate, Mendip Hills and Durdham and Clifton Downs.

The charity Groundwork, have received an award of £920,000 to coordinate these projects in the Southwest. They have at their core a group of young “Heritage Ambassadors” who will get involved with their local Park Friends Groups to help with the future preservation of our precious parks and greenspaces.

Future meetings between Groundwork, FOD+AG and other interested groups have been arranged to agree the best way forward. Groundwork will also be consulting with the Downs Committee to agree any future programme of works.

For those wishing further detail or a comprehensive look at the proposals go to: [www.groundwork.org.uk/hlf-future-proof-parks](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/hlf-future-proof-parks).

Terry Hannan
**News: FOD+AG Litter Initiative**

Following various correspondence you may be aware of the concerns of members about the proliferation of litter on the Downs. Throughout the winter FOD+AG operates a deep litter collection starting at 10 am on the last Sunday of the month. This is primarily aimed at dealing with litter that accumulates in the shrubs and bushes. However, in response to feedback we have launched a more general initiative.

To supplement this you can now borrow FOD+AG branded long handed litter grabbers and waste bags, from Café Retreat on Stoke Road, in order to make your own contribution to dealing with litter. (This service has been opened up to all members of the public in an attempt to build a culture of addressing litter and to complement what is done by the Downs Rangers on an ever decreasing budget.

There are currently six pickers available, but hopefully in time this can be increased as demand rises. We would like to thank Gayle Tait at Café Retreat for her help in supporting this worthwhile initiative.

**News: Recent Events on the Downs**

**National Bee Week** - FOD+AG were again represented at the Bee Festival at the Botanic Gardens by the Downs which attracted nearly 2000 visitors.

**Fresher’s Fair**—this lasted for 3 days in September, and FODAG manned a stall and had some very positive interactions with students, whom we are seeking to increase in our membership. Concerns have been raised about further damage to the site as this is the most heavily used area for events and is only starting to recover from previous activities.

**The Downs Festival**—again not always popular with FOD+AG members, a one day concert over near the Sea Walls, headlined by Paul Weller and Noel Gallagher. Interestingly for future events this was not sold out.

**Balloon Fiesta**—this year the ballons actually landed on the downs as shown by the photo courtesy of Jacque Solomons on this quarter’s cover.
Travellers on the Downs

It does seem appalling to me the ease with which travellers can set up camp on the Downs in Bristol, and the amount of time it seems to take to remove them. This now seems to be a recurring problem, with travellers moving onto the site with impunity every few months.

Just recently after spending several weeks camped out near St Monica’s on the Downs the caravans finally moved.............about 500 yards to an area near Ladies Mile!

So what’s going on ? And what is the legal position ?
Evicting travellers from council-owned land - what are the procedures and why does it take so long? Councils can't remove unauthorised encampments from their land immediately, as they have to follow national legislation and guidelines. They have to be able to show the gypsies or travellers are on the land without consent, look into the general health and welfare of the travellers and their children's education, and they have to comply with the Human Rights Acts 1998. Following this procedure will allow the council to obtain authority from the courts to order the gypsies or travellers to leave the site.

The police will visit any sites reported to them, but trespassing is a civil and not a criminal offence. This means preventing trespass and removing trespassers is the responsibility of the landowner - not the police. Of course, if criminal activity has happened on land occupied by travellers, the police have the power to move them.

What happens next?
Local authorities must apply for injunctions and court orders. The council must firstly show that the travellers are on the land without consent. Removal time will depend upon when a court hearing date can be obtained. In many instances, however, a leaving date will be agreed with the travellers to prevent eviction.
What about the police?
The council or landowner can contact the police if a traveller site is trespassing and they can be immediately evicted from the site if there are two or more people, they have six or more vehicles parked on the land, or one of them has caused damage or behaved in a threatening or abusive manner.

The police are bound by the Human Rights Act, and may be constrained to avoid using section 61 in circumstances where it would preclude welfare considerations from being applied by the civil courts.

The duty of the police is to preserve the peace and prevent crime. Trespass on land by itself is not a criminal offence. Prevention of trespass and the removal of trespassers are the responsibilities of the landowner and not the police. The police will investigate all criminal and public order offences. There are those arguing that the government should emulate Ireland, which in 2002 made deliberate trespass a criminal offence.

So as you can see it’s a slow process. The police, (and I’m sure the council), must be sick and tired of being contacted by local residents complaining about this problem. Not forgetting the Downs Rangers who have to clear up after them. It’s not only the time involved with dealing with this issue that’s of concern of course, it’s also the huge expense involved.

I must point out that this is happening all over the country, as well as on other parks and green spaces here in Bristol. Bristol has one permanent caravan site in Ashton Vale (12 pitches), and one transit site in Lawrence Weston (20 pitches). These are run and managed by Bristol City Council.

I hope this goes some way towards explaining the process.

Derek Catterall
FODAG Social

In September around 35 members of FOD+AG met at Café Retreat on the downs with food kindly supplied by Gayle Tait, and bar run by the ever capable Martin and Derek. The evening started with Francis Greenacre kindly leading a walk round the downs, highlighting some of the more interesting and unusual features of the Downs. A photo from Francis Greenacre’s walk can be seen on the back cover showing the stones that mark the boundary between the parishes of Westbury and Stoke Park.

This was followed by a speech from the incoming Chair, Robert Westlake. Robert gave some views on the future of the Downs and FOD+AG’s role, and paid generous tribute to FOD+AG founder and departing Chair Jack Penrose for his huge contribution to the work of FOD+AG. Guests also had a chance to voice their opinions with members of the committee.
2018’s unusually hot weather has led to a proliferation of hornets (Vespro crabo), who will remain on the wing till November. This imposing social insect is the largest European member of the wasp family—averaging nearly an inch in length with distinctive yellow striped abdomen. Despite their fearsome looks they are generally less aggressive than wasps, except when around their nest.

This picture of a group of hornets in an ash stump was taken by FOD+AG member Graham Balfry. Their nests are made of paper and are typically in hollow trunks. They are principally carnivorous, although they will feed on fallen fruit etc, and also practice Kleptoparatism—stealing prey from the webs of spiders and other hunters. On the bright side they also prey on many garden pests. Hornets are more common in the South but have been spreading northward with the climate and have now reached south Yorkshire.

There is a concern that the introduced Asian Giant Hornet will reduce the native population, along with that of bees, through predation. The interloper is almost entirely black, compared to the yellow striped abdomen you can see below, and highly aggressive.

If you see one report to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk,

A fact sheet is available at www.nonnativespecies.org
Noticeboard

EVENTS:

Conservation Sundays: Second Sunday in the month November 11th and December 9th

    Robin Haward robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

Deep Litter Clearance: November 24th 10.00 - noon.

    Martin Collins - martinandglen@hotmail.com

AGM: The 2018 AGM will be held at Redland Green Bowls club on Wednesday 21st November at 7.00 pm.

Butterfly Monitoring and Goat Monitoring: If you would like to get involved please email: martinandglen@hotmail.com.

Dead Hedging and Alexanders Attack: Working parties to help maintain the hedges and remove invasive weeds.

    Robin Haward 01179 743385 or robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

Stargazing: Monday to Wednesday 11th - 13th December. 7:00pm-9:00pm. Join the Bristol Astronomical Society to learn to identify the winter constellations. Coffee, Biscuits and Bar available, plus star related singing and festival activities. £7.50 adults / £4.00 children, Event may occur on any day due to weather conditions.

    Email: mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk
COMMITTEE :
Robert Westlake (Chair), Martin Collins, Karen Findlay, Derek Catterall, Richard Bland, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Bob Bell, Caroline Baker & Luke Hudson.

KEY CONTACTS-:
Membership: Joan Gubbins
Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward / Luke Hudson

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Winter edition is 20th January 2019. Articles to robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk or fodagcontent@gmail.com)

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

mail@gubbin.co.uk OR by post: 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, BS6 6XJ, 01179739799.

SOCIAL MEDIA:
Website: http://fodag-bristol.weebly.com The website has further information on events and a weekly blog on the Downs.

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

Instagram: Friends_of_the_Downs.

Do please send any Downs & Gorge photos to fodagbs@gmail.com.
Mere Stones marking the boundary between Westbury and Clifton Parishes