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The Friends of Troopers Hill

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Spring 2015

Strange how different the winter weather can be, isn't it? Early 2014 saw very heavy rain and storms resulting in considerable flooding around the country. This year, not so much rain and we have been fortunate in our part of the country to have avoided the heavy snow that areas further north have had to endure and had a fairly mild



winter, although perhaps a bit colder than last year. Spring is on its way, but is running, perhaps, a couple of weeks later than 2014. Fingers crossed for a great Summer.

Speaking of hoping for a good Summer, the original band we scheduled for our annual "Music on the Hill" on Saturday 27th June, "Shooting the Crow", have regrettably had to pull out. However, we are delighted to say we have succeeded in booking the "Fantasy Orchestra" as a replacement. Go to www.fantasyorchestra.org to find out more about them. So put the date in your diary, bring the family, friends and a picnic (NO BBQs please. They are a fire risk and damage the rare grasses). Again, fingers crossed for the weather!

As Spring gradually takes over from Winter, it won't be long before we start to hear that familiar screeching high in the sky, together with the sight of the lofty, delta-winged Swifts criss-crossing like an aerial dog-fight. But although Swifts spend virtually all their lives on the wing, they do come down to nest in high places. You can sometimes see them forming "Screaming Parties" close above roof tops where they are breeding. If you notice such activity anywhere in your area, "Bristol Swifts" would like to hear from you at their website: <http://www.bristolswifts.co.uk/>. If you do not have Internet access, just let us know and we will pass the details on to them on your behalf.

Well, despite assurances given to us last year, it has happened as your Editor expected. BCC have announced they will no longer be applying for any "Green Flags". A strange turn of events given that Bristol is currently "European Green Capital". Budget cuts are inevitably the reason. It was felt, perhaps not unreasonably, that too many resources were being spent on the few Green Flag spaces in Bristol at the cost of other spaces. Still, I guess the Flag has served its purpose in raising the profile of the Hill. Now we have nothing to put on our flagpole, perhaps we should have a competition to design a Friends of Troopers Hill flag?

Shepherd's Way

Producing 'Shepherd's Way', sometimes catches me out. I generally have guests lined up five weeks in advance. This gives me time to relax a little and get on with audio editing, find music with a nature or wildlife theme, think of questions for guests, produce the show-reels, research news items, events and other topics. Of course, some of the guys on the team help out here.

However, occasionally I've been caught out. Days before a show, I realise that time has crept up on me and all the guests that were scheduled to come and talk, have been on the show already, and I've forgotten to replace the guests on the show guest list! Panic-stricken, I look through the cards people have kindly passed to me at events. I pick up the phone, call a number and, most times, a friendly voice replies "I'd love to come onto the show and chat about..." whatever their chosen subject is. I sigh with relief and relax in the knowledge that a guest is happy to give their time and come and talk to us.

Bristol is an absolutely fantastic place to find people who are passionate about wildlife and nature, and want to come and share their stories on the radio.

But, talk about time creeping up on me. One moment it's autumn, then winter. Before you know it, I'm walking over Castle Park, smack bang in the centre of the city, and I'm witnessing struggles in the park between a beautiful male blackbird, who wants to tug a big fat juicy worm from the comfort of the warming spring earth, and the big fat juicy worm that doesn't want to leave the comfort of his spring warmed earth. Needless to say the blackbird won this struggle, watched by, I think, his partner, an equally beautiful female blackbird.

I witnessed bumblebees gently meandering on the spring air, five or six wood pigeons plodding the grass in search of food, magpies collecting twigs and making a raucous, but fantastic racket high up in the trees. Sparrows, wagtails, and all in one small area of this city we live in. Bristol, the Green Capital of Europe.

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Living "The Good Life"

I had wanted Hens for a long time – years, but we have a dog and we thought they might not go well together. For a long time I had also wanted an allotment I could easily walk to, but when I asked about it, I was told there were years to wait.

Then somebody who had an allotment at St Aidan's told me they had heard there were some available. So I went up there and said that I had heard that there were some plots available. They said that there were a couple, but they were very overgrown. Well, I am not bothered by a bit of hard work, so I took one on in March 2013. It was only a small plot, although it looked enormous at the time. Once I had cleared it and put stuff in it I could see that it was quite small. I became hooked!



I also knew that some people on the site had chickens, so I obtained permission to have some on my allotment. But then I thought, I could try having them at home in the garden instead and if it didn't work, I could always take

them up to my allotment.

They are not laying at all at the moment (but they will start again) as they tend to take a break during the winter – they need some sun really. I know some people who when they stop laying, they despatch them and then replace them, but I wanted to have them as pets – to name them (Harriet and Gertrude) and keep them for their natural lives. They've been here ever since.

Then I got a bigger plot, further up the hill and away from my original one. I grew everything from seed last year, and did everything myself. Apart from the satisfaction of growing and eating it, I needed to find out if it would work, so that I knew whether to do it

Shepherd's Way continued..

I was conscious that, at 10 in the morning, there were not too many people in the park, despite the warm morning air. But of those that were in the park, no one seemed to be noticing the signs of spring just happening before their very eyes. I wanted to stop them and point out the fascinating things I was witnessing, but I thought better of it.

I felt truly privileged to be witnessing all these things happening around me. It was wonderful, like a private wildlife show. People did however notice me, just standing and watching the wildlife. They probably thought I was on another planet, and indeed I was! What a spectacular time of year.

Steve Shepherd

BCFM, 6-8pm every Wednesday

again or change something. It was very successful. All the veg we ate on Christmas day was off my allotment and it was a lovely feeling to be honest.

Every day in the summer I am up there, to water. Either very early in the morning, or in the evening – I can walk the dog (Jasper) up with me as they are allowed on the site if they are on a lead – so he gets exercise. Once a week I water everything. Daily I water things like the runner beans, the tomatoes, that kind of stuff. It's just part of the routine.

It takes a lot of work. Mine is all prepared now as I knew I was going to be out of action for a couple months because of an operation on my hand. The first things I put in the ground will be my potatoes. I have loads of things in trays at the moment around the house, so the seedlings I plant in February are tomatoes, peppers, cucumber and parsnips, which were very successful last year. Brassicas – kale, cabbages, sprouts – and courgettes. All the stuff will go in the ground at about the same time. Some just take longer to grow, so you get produce all year round.



You eat it as you pull it which is the beauty, you are eating seasonally. If you ask the children the most successful thing they like, it is corn on the cob! The taste is just unbelievable. Vegetables that have just been freshly picked taste so much better than anything you will buy in the shops. They are juicier and so different. I am going to grow double the amount of some things this year.

It's a lovely feeling up there on the Allotment. It's the satisfaction of knowing that all your work produces such wonderful results. It is great for lifting your mood if you are feeling a little down. You come back feeling just so much better. It's just a lovely feeling.

Deb Allison

The Bull Inn

You may remember that last year, Friends successfully had the Bull Inn on Crews Hole Rd registered as an "Asset of Community Value" (ACV). This was the first pub in Bristol to be registered as an ACV. The Dept for Communities and Local Govt have nominated Mon 23rd March as a [national celebration day for pubs](#) that have been nominated and ACV. Allan, the manager of the Bull, is arranging a celebration event on the day, so come along and join us there on the evening.

Troopers Hill Field Play Area

A local resident has started the process to have a play area installed on the Field. Chris Deane has been talking to the Council and a company that builds playgrounds. We are hoping the St George Neighbourhood partnership will ringfence some money which could potentially "match fund" a grant from a Landfill charity. This may actually happen this time, but Chris needs as much support as possible. You can email him at: thefield@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.troopers-hill.org.uk

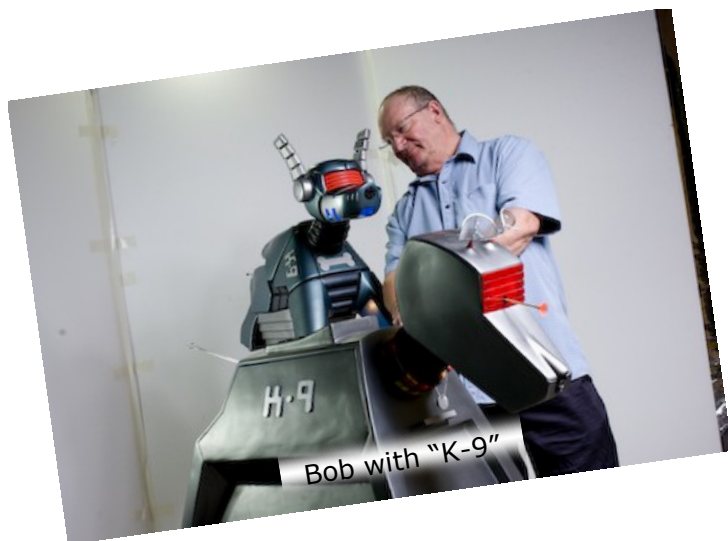
Bob Baker grew up in East Bristol and went on to be a scriptwriter for "Doctor Who". Amongst other things, he was responsible for the arrival of "K-9", which many of our readers will remember became Doctor Who's trusty companion for several years. He now lives in Gloucestershire and has more recently worked with local Bristol animators, [Aardman](#). In fact, he wrote the script for "The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" - not that different to his earlier Dr Who efforts, since it gave one of your Editor's nieces nightmares! His second book, a novelisation of a seventies serial he did for HTV and entitled "SKY" is out this month, along with the paperback version of his autobiography. He has very kindly sent us these memories of growing up in St George.

Troopers Hill

Memories, by Bob Baker.

"You're not going over Troopers Hill". Said my mother, her voice full of concern. "Why?" Said I. "There's a main road to cross, you're not going and that's that."

The trouble was, I could see Troopers as we called it from my bedroom window in Hillside Road. It looked like a paradise, all slopes, grass and rocks and that strange chimney like a finger pointing, rather pointlessly, heavenward. But for now I had to dream of what might be.



In spite of my mother's edict. I finally went 'Over Troopers' with a couple of friends, It was perhaps the thought of being there 'illegally' that made it more exciting.

To the child's eye, 'Troopers' was vast in scale and the different sections of it all had their names. There was the "Roman Wall" which was the remains of the flue pipe leading from the chemical

works at Crew's Hole to the chimney, which would have carried noxious fumes away over Hanham on the prevailing wind. It was in this section you might find grass snakes and slow worms.



There was climbing, The Lion's Head an imposing pinnacle of rock, like Everest to us kids, and it took me a while before I was able to scale such a height. This was reached by going through the 'Valley' where quarrying was last done, creating the perfect 'ambush' spot, just like in the movies!

The slopes down from the 'Valley' toward Crews Hole covered in tough long grass was marked by several holes, about three feet deep, all grassed over, there were our fox-holes from which we fired tommy guns and hurled imaginary hand grenades at 'Japs' or 'Jerries' and always won the day...

There was a slightly flat area down by the road from the Air Balloon hill side, this was our 'Lords' where we played spectacular games of cricket on long summer days and our winter Bristol City, or Rovers pitch.

I cannot but think how lucky we kids were to have such a place nearby, since in the normal run of things we were city dwellers, who left our suburban dwellings and within half a mile, were in a natural wonderland.

As a teenager it was a place to go for a walk, to mess about, throw stones, or on windy days, to challenge weaker beings to step inside the chimney to encounter the fierce maelstrom created inside. On hot summer evenings with a breeze blowing the grassy slopes could resemble waves at sea, rolling over the hillside.

To my utter delight I found that Troopers Hill has been made a wild life reserve and will not be built on. Thank God for that.

Bob Baker
2015

RSPCA Bristol Clinic and Bristol Dogs & Cats Home
 Welcomes you to our
Open Doors
 & Dogs Home Tours
Sunday 22nd March
 10am - 3pm
 Take a look behind the scenes at our Clinic
 & see our work in action!



Speak to our experts & take a tour to meet our residents
 Stalls, games, refreshments & much more

Entry: Adults £2, Children £1
 Raising money for animals in need

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 Registered Charity No. 205858 www.rspca-bristol.org.uk

Dates for your Diary

Work Parties: Saturdays 4th Apr, 2nd May, 6th Jun, 10am—midday. **New meeting point: Entrance from Troopers Hill Field to Troopers Hill, by red slide.**

Help us look after Troopers Hill. Gentle exercise and a bit of a laugh over some coffee.

Meetings. Thursdays 14th May, 9th July. 7.15pm, Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road. *Come along and share your views on our Local Nature Reserve.*

Music on the Hill Saturday 27th June. From 6.30pm. Band to be confirmed. *Bring the family and a picnic, but no BBQs*

St George Strollers: Thu 9th Apr: **Temple Meads and back.** Meet 10.30am, Junct Fireclay Rd and Blackswarth Rd. Mon 27th Apr: **Dundridge Panorama.** Meet corner of Parslow Bottom and Nags Head Hill, 10.30am Fri 15th May: **4th Birthday Walk and meeting.** Meet The Maypole, Hanham, 10.30am. Tue 26th May: **Lamplighters Walk.** Meet Lawrence Hill railway station, 10.25am. Bring £3 for train fare. Fri 12th June: **Warmley Wander and Siston Brooks.** Meet outside Aldi, Church Rd, 10am Tue 23rd Jun: **Bath River and Canalside Walk.** Meet outside Aldi, Church Rd 10.25am, for 37 bus Further details, contact Kit—see Contacts panel.

Walks:

Saturday 18th Apr: **Dawn Chorus Walk.** 5.30am at Dundridge Park. A guided walk to listen to bird song led by expert Ed Drewitt, with the Friends of Dundridge Park

Sunday 17th May: **Avon Valley Walk.** 10.00am. A walk from Troopers Hill exploring the woodland and looking at the river and its wildlife. (Booking essential—see Contacts panel)

Events: Star Gazing with the Bristol Astronomical Society in March. 7-8.30pm. Numbers will be limited to 25. Email events2015@troopers-hill.org.uk or contact Susan to learn more (booking essential—see Contacts panel).

Other events: Friday April 3rd: **Good Friday Service on Troopers Hill.** *Procession starts from Summerhill Methodist Church at 11.30am*

ABC of Troopers Hill

V is for Views.

Stunning panoramic views are a feature of the Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The top of the Hill gives an impressive outlook to the west over the city of Bristol and it is easy to spot landmarks such as the tall spire of St Mary Redcliffe and the University of Bristol buildings. Looking south, the hilltop village of Dundry and the outlines of the Mendips can be seen in the distance.

At the foot of Troopers Hill the river Avon is visible as it flows towards Netham and onwards to feed Bristol's Floating Harbour. On this side of the river can be seen Netham park, Dundridge Lane playing fields, and to the east the steeples of St Aidan with St George and the Wesley Memorial Church are visible. On the Hill itself, above and to the west of the Gully, next to the steps refurbished during the "Stepping Forward" project, is a bench for Virginia's view, named in memory of Virginia Spalding, a founder member of Friends of Troopers Hill. Another former Friend, the late Gillian Dyte, made a special personal donation for tree work to restore the view to the south of Troopers Hill Field. Just outside the LNR, at the entrance from Troopers Hill, is a bench where the eradication of invasive Japanese Knotweed has opened up a view informally called "Little Elizabeth's" after the author, Elizabeth Emra, who wrote about Troopers Hill in the 1830s.

Friends have helped to make these views accessible by raising grant funding for a level path between Troopers Hill Field and the Chimney at the top of the Hill. The Hill provides a particularly good prospect of balloons taking off during the annual Bristol Balloon Fiesta and is a favourite destination for local residents gathering to view the morning and evening flights.

Bryn Friallen

Contacts

For the latest news and updates, phone our

Information line 0753 161 5983

If you'd like to talk to us, please contact

Susan Acton-Campbell (Chair) Tel. 0117 947 5037

You can also write to us at

3, Corkers Hill, St. George, Bristol, BS5 8DT

friends@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.facebook.com/TroopersHill

Or tweet us at

www.twitter.com/troopershill

To book a place on an event,

Phone Judith 0117 955 9819 Or email

events2015@troopers-hill.org.uk

Walking for Health (St George Strollers)

Contact Kit Elliott 02036405867

strollers@troopers-hill.org.uk

To report incidents on Troopers Hill, phone Bristol Parks 0117 922 3719

Report criminal activity to the police on 999

or Police local beat manager, Pete Crawford. He can be contacted via the Police non-urgent phone number 101

www.troopers-hill.org.uk