Welcome to our annual newsletter, especially to those new to Leigh Woods or the Society. In a settlement such as ours with no pub or shop it can be difficult to meet your neighbours and air any community concerns. This is where the Leigh Woods Society comes in. We organise a summer and winter party, litter pick, occasional talks and the twice yearly visit to Bracken Hill gardens. We keep an eye on proposals—planning applications, state of the roads and traffic management—that will have an impact on the neighbourhood. We talk to such bodies as the Suspension Bridge, Ashton Court and the National Trust as well as our Parish and District Councils. Now in our 20th year our subscription has not altered, £5 for a joint or £3 for a single household. If you are not a member do consider joining, the higher our membership the more weight our representations carry. Contact our treasurer, Bob Whiffen on 0117 9738043 or email bob.whiffen@virgin.net

We communicate through this newsletter, the column in the monthly parish magazine, The Link, and now, thanks to Ian McKay we also have a website, www.leighwoods.org. When you join we also request an email address which we can add to our email list for alerting you to matters of concern or imminent events. We try to be inclusive, invitations to the AGM, the parties and the newsletter are put through every door in Leigh Woods.

Of course this only works due to lots of people’s efforts: thanks go to our Parish Councillors, Audrey Moser and Martyn Harris, Neighbourhood Watch coordinator Liz Corri-gan, Angela Probyn and Tricia Bedford who have put this newsletter together, and last, but not least, the officers and the committee.

Kate Buss, Chairman

Committee Officers
Chairman: Kate Buss   katembuss@aol.com
Secretary: Angela Probyn   angelaprobyn@gmail.com
Treasurer: Bob Whiffen   bob.whiffen@virgin.net

On the evening of 21 May last year, Bill Morris, took us on a fascinating walk around Leigh Woods. He gave us insights into the archaeology, history and natural history of this wonderful space on our doorstep. We kept Bill talking until it was dark over drinks and nibbles in his office – many thanks Bill.

Our summer evening party in July was held in brilliant sunshine, with no need to provide shelter from the elements. It was kindly hosted by Jo and Jane Davis in their delightful garden at Broadoaks and was well attended. The Society photographer had his first official outing and as may be seen from his efforts the company, wine and ‘nibbles’ were much enjoyed.

Laura Hilton (Centre Manager) and Helen Jeffrey (Education and Outreach Officer) gave an illustrated talk about the architectural, interior plans and the aspirations for the new Suspension Bridge Visitor Centre in October, which was held in the Church Vestry. The displays will be designed to appeal to everyone from children to serious researchers. They emphasised that the Bridge itself remains the focus of attention and that the Centre is not intended to draw vast numbers of people but to enhance a visit by providing information.

At Christmas, David and Jane Worthington held the Christmas Party at Sancreed for which we thank them. There was a bumper turn out and it was good to see children and many new faces. Sparkling lights, a large consumption of festive wine and delicious canapes set the mood to start the Christmas celebrations.

Notice Board
12 April—Litter Pick - meet 10am at The Vestry
22nd July—Summer Party at the Vicarage in Vicarage Road 6.30-8pm by kind invitation of Lynne and Michael Bothamley
4th October—Open Garden at Bracken Hill House 2-4pm
Burwalls House

Burwalls is Grade 2 listed building situated within the Leigh Woods Conservation Area and borders the Special Area of Conservation that is the Avon Gorge. Two thousand five hundred years before the Victorians developed the area, a multivallate Iron Age Hill fort stood on the site of Burwalls, also known through the ages as Borough Walls, or Bower Walls. This fort together with Stokeleigh camp, still in evidence on the other side of Nightingale Valley, and a hill fort, where the observatory now stands on the other side of the gorge, formed a triangle controlling access to the River Avon. The Burwalls garden still contains substantial remnants of this fort.

In fact excavation on the site of Burwalls camp has thrown up some Bronze Age artefacts, which could date back to 2500BC.

There is also a cave in Burwalls Woods which has often been a stop off for folk wishing to stay in Bristol but not wanting to pay for accommodation!

Future Plans: We were all invited by Kersfield Developments to see their outline plans for the future of Burwalls on 5th March. It gave everyone the opportunity to explore the gardens and fort remains. We were also able to discuss the intended plans which are sensitive to the historical importance of the site. In brief the house will be converted to five flats. The old university accommodation will be demolished and 4 new houses sited there but the old stables (as a pair of semi-detached houses) and gatehouse will be retained.

We will get a chance to make any comments when detailed planning is submitted to North Somerset Council in the near future.

Bracken Hill House

The Committee were delighted to meet so many from Bracken Hill at the Christmas party. The developers are in the process of moving out leaving the destiny of the main house still to be decided.

The results of last year’s Bracken Hill House quiz:
Top Left = Bottom right; Left 2 = top right; left 3 = right 2; bottom left = right 3

Life in the Botanical Gardens by Liz and Ray Lowman

“What: over the bridge?” These words were uttered by some Clifton friends before our move to Coach House Mews in what we continue to think of as the Botanical Gardens (still tended and improved by Robert Webber). The three properties in the Old Coach house have been occupied since the end of October and use the Old English Garden with the sunken pond and also the lawn and herbaceous borders on the east of the site. The Lodge is to be occupied imminently and just two town houses are still to be sold, which have access to the woodland at the back.

It really is a great place to live and we feel privileged to be part of it. The pros? A rural feel yet 20 minutes walk into Clifton Village - a good constitutional once Ray got over his fear of walking across the bridge. Another pro is the quiet: here: the only sounds at night are from an occasional owl. Blissful! There’s an active village ‘feel’ with the summer and Christmas parties, the Christmas fair etc and we have felt welcomed into the community. Cons? Well, we haven’t found any yet!

Great War Centenary 1914–1918

In grateful memory of:
A.E. Allward of Avon View or Rose Cottage
J.S. Davey of Bannerleigh House
R.P. Harvey of Glenside (now Telford House)
B.G. James of Woodlands
D.A.H. McDougall of Towerhurst
E.T. Woodville-Morgan of Rosemont
H. Stevens of Leigh Cottage
C.R. Watson
F.S. Watson
B. Melville Wills of Bracken Hill

The Watsons were three brothers and R.P. Harvey was married to their elder sister. Their widowed mother continued to live at The Knoll.
Leigh Woods National Nature Reserve News

Standing at Stokeleigh Camp above the gorge shows why Bristol has just been voted Britain’s best city to live in. The view here illustrates the amazing combination of a stunning landscape full of incredible wildlife right on the doorstep of the city. Yet turn around and in five minutes you’re in an ancient woodland feeling miles from the bustle of a major city.

As Spring has come earlier this year the bluebells will be in full bloom in the next few weeks. The Peregrines have also returned from their migration and are nesting in the gorge. Look out for them circling above the river.

To help us manage this amazing place we need to understand what makes it special to each of you. You can help us develop our ‘Spirit of Place’ statement by describing in a few words or a sentence what you find is Unique, Distinctive and Cherished about Leigh Woods. Send us your thoughts by emailing leigh-woods@nationaltrust.org.uk or posting them though our office letter box. Please respond by April 26th.

If you’ve got children or grandchildren come and try one of the ’50 things to do before you’re 11¾’ events. There are also a wide range of events if you’re after something more active. Full details of all these can be found on our website: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/leigh-woods/

The Leighwood’s Spy Ring

It started with a radio-controlled truck carrying a camera draped with fur. My simple plan was to send the faux creature on a suicidal mission towards a lioness. But instead of charging, the lioness curiously investigated my weird creature and carried it gently into its den. Even more remarkably, half an hour later the lioness returned my toy, dropping it beside my vehicle. Unfortunately, the film had run for just a minute but the lion’s unexpected reaction spawned a succession of Spy films.

The truck was replaced by Bouldercam; a camera disguised in a moving rock. Dungcam then chanced its luck under the feet of elephants and an array of increasingly sophisticated cameras spied on pandas, tigers and polar bears.

Recently, ingenious animatronics created walking Penguincams. They were so realistic one amorous penguin took a shine to one, a romance cut short by the arrival of a mate. But the idea of Spy Creatures was so successful, our recent dolphin film had a menagerie of them: Spy Nautilus, Spy turtle, Spy Squid, Spy Tuna and Spy Ray all captured clandestine footage of dolphins.

They say the only thing that separates men from boys is the size of their toys. I have been very lucky to spend my life playing with some very sophisticated and expensive toys indeed.

by John Downer

Natural habitat: Leighwoods
Award winning producer of the ‘Spy’ programmes

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by Bill Morris, Head Ranger

January 1914—2014

Foye House was turned into a hospital for the wounded
Source: ‘BRO 43207/9/49/41’ Bristol Record Office

Penguincam holding court

Peregrines have also returned from their migration and are nesting in the gorge.

by Bill Morris, Head Ranger

Beautiful Beech Tree with Yew Trees in the background

Information Board

7th-10th August: 36th Balloon Fiesta: needs no introduction! / 29th May: Antiques Road Show 9.30am—4.30pm

by E.T. Woodville

H. Stevens of Leigh Cottages
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Origins of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin.

Part 2.

continued from last year .... The contract to build the Church went to Messrs R Wilkins and Sons and by 1st August 1891 the work had progressed enough for Lady Greville Smyth to lay the Foundation Stone with a canister of contemporary artifacts beneath. Although photos of the occasion exist, the stone can no longer be found and is probably concealed by the later addition of the Choir Vestry. Owing to bad weather the building was not completed till the autumn of 1892.

The task of the committee was to raise further funds to furnish the Church. It was fortunate that the Registrar had earlier gained promissory notes, which were legally binding if the donor died. Chairs for 5/- a 4 cwt bell, Communion plate, eagle lectern, altar table and frontalts were purchased in time for the Church to be licensed for marriages in October 1892. The first wedding was held on 19th October between Mr Garnett and Miss Harvey when they sang ‘Oh Perfect Love’.

As the Church was part of the parish of Long Ashton it was agreed by the committee that the offertory from one service a month would go to the poor of Long Ashton as Leigh Woods had none. This was surprising as Mr Swann gave coal and blankets to the poor of Leigs Wood and Abbotts Leigh. This distribution continues to this day as £100 cash at Christmas from the Swann Bene- faction.

next year will be the final part of the Church History

Our thanks to Michael Marston for making his historical research available to us.

Neighbourhood Watch News - Leigh Woods Triangle

Neighbourhood Watch is Important as: it is one of the most successful crime prevention initiatives ever. Schemes can: cut crime and the opportunities for crime; help and reassure those who live in the area and encourage neighbourliness.

Have your say and come to the partners and Communities Together (PACT) meeting on 9th April at 7.030 pm at Royal British Legion, Providence Lane, Long Ashton. You can hear the latest crime figures and influence the police priority for Leigh Woods: currently it is parking! We all need to assist the police by photographic evidence of illegal parking: e-mail PC Peter Rooke (contact details below).

To report an incident or contact the Neighbourhood Police Team

999 at the time you witness or are involved in a crime
101 for police general enquiries, non-urgent calls (e.g. reporting a past event) or to speak our police team or watch scheme administrator
101 to speak to a member of our neighbourhood police team or e-mail

PC Peter Rooke 3494) Peter.Rooke@avonandsomerset.police.uk
PCSO Penny Gatenby 7278 penelope.gatenby@avonandsomerset.police.uk
PCSO Laura Wheeler 7510 laurawheeler@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Administrator Lindsey Stone lindsey.stone@avonandsomerset.police.uk

If anyone would like to join NHW or know more please ask them to contact me.

Bridge News:

The Suspension Bridge Trust is celebrating its 150th Anniversary with the opening of the Visitors Centre in December. We have no details of these celebrations as we go to press but let’s hope they organise something spectacular and lots of fireworks!

After all the effort of last year’s 3 day Public Inquiry into whether the Bridge could raise the cash toll to £1, the Inspector’s report is still lying on the Secretary of State for Transport’s desk. Instead the government has announced a consultation on the proposal to let tolls increase annually at 1% below inflation. This is in an effort to stop the yearly circus of a Public Inquiry which the toll payer has to ultimately pay for, but does require the Trustees to justify the increases.


Report from the AGM

We held our AGM in the Church on the 25th March this year. Everyone enjoyed a drink beforehand and welcomed new members. The evening was in three parts: the first was the report on Neighbourhood Watch: PC Difford, accompanied by two PCSOs, gave us an update of the problems of policing with apparently ever reducing police numbers. Next we held the formal AGM at which Angela Probyn was elected as the new Secretary and all the other committee members were re-elected. The Chairman’s report can be found on the website. Finally we had an Open Forum during which we had presentations from Bill Morris of the National Trust, David Anderson, the Bridgemaster and Carl Francis-Pester, our District Councillor. There were plenty of questions for all of them and details can be found on the website. Thank you to the Churchwardens for making us very warm and welcome.