

Backies News

NEWSLETTER FROM THE FRIENDS OF CLIFTON BACKIES

The Backies by Doug Heald

In September Doug led an Art Walk at the Backies, and as we were expertly taught how to hold a pencil and sketch with perspective, Doug would tell us about his childhood exploits on the Backies. We thought it would be a great idea to share some of his recollections with you. Here is an excerpt from the local publication "The Changing Face of Clifton" by Van Wilson.

Tony Fairburn

Clifton Backies, which was part of the airfield, was designated a local nature reserve in 2002 because of its diversity of wildlife and its potential for education. After the war it had fallen into disrepair and became overgrown. The Friends of Clifton Backies was founded. By not using artificial weed killers, the area has developed naturally and incorporates unimproved pasture, scrub woodland and hay meadow. It provides a habitat for voles, rabbits, foxes, shrews, mice, hedgehogs, weasels and even deer.

Doug Heald, who lived in Burton Stone Lane, enjoyed playing there.

The name came about because we used to say 'over the back gardens'. They were fields that hadn't been put into any use, remnants of allotments from the war years. Towards where the Burdyke beck runs along, you had a military camp. We'd go there and find all sorts of artefacts. It was a wonderful play area for kids, all the shelters and bunkers. There were hydrant reservoirs, which we'd build rafts and float on. We'd go fishing for sticklebacks in the beck.



airfield, and towards the beck side is now just bushland. The buildings were empty and decaying but wonderful for climbing about. It was a vast area of moorland, an open theatre of sky and fields. My father built a fence with a gate at the back [in our garden] so you just went out and you were in the fields. I got this early interest in wildlife and flowers. We'd have small gangs, six or seven lads, on hot summer days, dressed up as Indians in warpaint, and our arrows, the ends would be wired to give them balance, quite lethal things! You stayed out till dusk, your parents didn't worry, they knew you'd be back for supper.

I've gone to The Backies all my life. It's one of the very few remnants where it's untouched. It's good that it's managed, because people who are professional know how to bring back the habitat, but I still want that derelictness and there's not many places in the UK where you can get that, where nature does its own thing and humans are a secondary thing.

Doug Heald

The industrial part of Clifton Moor was the

Upcoming events

- 21st February, 10am - 2pm - Volunteer event to carry out further Water Vole habitat improvement. Meet at Woodland Chase car park. Please come and help!

We are planning to hold more events this year. Tony has had the idea of linking some Backies events to national nature events and special days, e.g.

Dawn Chorus Day	3 May
Dragonfly Week	4-12 July
Big Butterfly Count	Late July/early August
Bat Weekend	29-30 August
Moth Night	10-12 September

Further details to follow.

Latest News

News from our January meeting

- We had our first meeting of the year on 12th January. Jenny from City of York Council came along and we discussed building relationships with local schools to encourage them to make use of the site. Jenny had met with the Head of Burton Green School, who are members of the Friends group. Tony has previously led a nature walk for pupils from Lakeside School on the Backies, which was well received. He will contact the school about possible future walks.
- We are keen to build links with local schools and encourage children's' interest in nature. We already have 3 schools that are members of the Friends group and plan to contact additional local schools.

Continued...

Water vole latest

- Only the three committee members turned up for the bank clearance volunteer session last November but we managed to remove more blackthorn from the banks of Bur Dyke. There had been a lot of rain so the beck was high and the bank very slippery but nobody fell in!
- A large volunteer group from Aviva and one from the Environment Agency had previously cleared quite a long stretch of the bank, so little by little we will get there.
- See the events section for details of our next clearance session. All helpers will be very welcome!

Stop Press! Great news – Paul (former Friends Chairman) and his Environment Agency colleagues are to carry out more volunteer work on 17 February.

Dog-fouling

- Sadly this is an on-going problem on the Backies, both with people who don't clear up after their dogs and others who use bags but leave them on site. Jenny, the Smarter York Officer, told us that a city-wide dog control order may be brought in which will mean that fines could be imposed. Hopefully this will make a difference.

Next meeting

Monday 13th April 2015. We are still hoping to hold future meetings at a local school – watch this space!

Also

If you have any ideas for events, information or sightings you would like to report for Clifton Backies, please pass them to Vanessa (Vanessagrants9@aol.com) or Tony Fairburn (antony.fairburn@gmail.com or 07714307709). We would be delighted to include them on our website or in our newsletter.

Please tell everyone about the great things we have planned at Clifton Backies and pass on a membership form - we always like to see new faces at meetings and events.

For further information regarding the Friends please see the Clifton Backies web pages : www.cliftonbackies.org.uk.