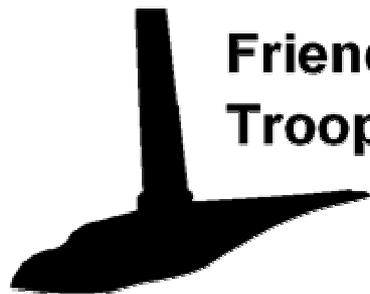




# **A Brief History of Troopers Hill**

**by Rob Acton-Campbell**



**Friends of  
Troopers Hill**

## **Introduction**

When Susan and I moved to Crews Hole in 1998 Troopers Hill was one of the main attractions. We sat on the hill, admired the views, and thought how lucky we were to have such a wonderful place on our doorstep. We also read on the signs about the chimney being linked to copper smelting and wondered if that was really true.

In 2003 we received a questionnaire about the hill from Sally Oldfield at Bristol City Council and then an invitation to a meeting. By the end of the year Friends of Troopers Hill had been formed, Susan was Chair and I was also on the committee.

Finding out more about the history of the hill and its two listed chimneys became an important part of our involvement with Friends of Troopers Hill. The more we found out, the more questions there were. We were lucky to meet experts such as Joan Day and John Cornwell. References to the hill were found in various books bought through the internet. Bristol Records Office provided access to the papers of local historians W T Sanigar and F C Jones. Various local people told us of their memories and stories they had heard. Gradually we built up a collection of information.

This year we decided, with Bristol Parks, that the Management Plan for the hill written in 2004 should be updated. Philip Williamson of Bristol Parks suggested it should include a brief history, so I said I would write a few pages – this is the result.

The history of the hill is tied to the history of the surrounding land and in particular the Avon Valley and Crews Hole. I have tried to restrict this history to the aspects that directly affected the hill. Much more could be written about Crews Hole but that will have to wait for a future version.

I hope you find this account interesting; if there is anything with which you disagree please tell me. I would also like to know if you have any more information on the subjects covered here.

## **Troopers Hill in the Seventeenth Century**

### **Harris Hill**

The area that is now known as Troopers Hill is on the edge of Kingswood Forest or Chase overlooking the river Avon. A map of Kingswood dated 1610 shows the hill as ‘Harris hill’ and a later map of 1672 shows ‘Harris hill lands’. In 1652 the government made a survey of the boundaries of the 3,432 acres of Kingswood Chase giving a description of its line. In the area of Troopers Hill it states:

“along down Conham’s Hill to the lower end of Stode Brook, so to Deanridge’s lands, rounding then to the river Avon; thence turning short about to the north-west by Harris’ Hill, unto the north-east of the said hill, near to the Bath Road” [History of Kingswood Forest by A Braine].

The 1610 map shows a single tree on Harris Hill, so it is not clear whether the area was tree covered at that time, though it may have been.

## **Civil War**

Local tradition has it that the Parliamentary army, under the command of Sir Thomas Fairfax, camped on Troopers Hill prior the siege of Bristol in 1645. It has also been suggested that the ditch between the hill and the allotments was dug at this time as a defensive earthworks. It is known that the army approached Bristol via Keynsham and Hanham as described in this extract from “Anglia Rediviva; England’s Recovery By Joshua Sprigg, M.A. in 1647”

“Friday the 22nd, there was a general rendezvous of horse, and all that day was spent in settling of guards on Somersetshire side, where the countrymen maintained a passage at Clifton, the headquarter that night being removed to Hanham. Saturday 23rd, the General and Lieutenant-General employed the whole day in the settling of quarters and guards on the other side of Bristol. This day the enemy’s cannon played from the great fort [The Royal Fort] and Prior’s fort, but hurt none but one dragoon, who had his thigh shot off. The enemy sallied out also with a party of horse, but were beaten in again, where Sir Richard Crane was mortally wounded, who presently after died of his wounds. The headquarter this night was removed to Stapleton.”

It is possible therefore that Troopers Hill, with its views of the city, was used while the Parliamentary army was headquartered at Hanham, but we have found no firm evidence of it. It has also been suggested that this is the origin of the hill’s current name; this is discussed in more detail later.

## **Baptists**

Another reference to the area in the seventeenth century is made in “The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol 1640 to 1687”. This is the story of the struggles of the Baptists in Bristol against persecution. In the record for August 1682 it states:

“On y<sup>e</sup> 20th, met above Scruze Hole, in our old Place, and heard Br. Fownes preach twice in Peace. Br. Terrill had caused a Work-man to make Banks on y<sup>e</sup> side of y<sup>e</sup> hill to sit down on, several of them, like a Gallery. And there we met also on ye 27th in Peace.”

The account again refers to the ‘Wood Gallery’ on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September. In his fictional twentieth century account of the Baptists story ‘The Wakefields’ S J Ford refers to these terraces being ‘on the woodland slope beneath Troopers’ Hill’. While it is not known exactly where this gallery was, this account does indicate that the slopes on the side of the Avon Valley were woodland at that time.

## ***Eighteenth Century***

### **Copper Smelting**

Crews Hole became a completely different place in the eighteenth century when the copper smelting industry was established in the area. Copper ore was brought by boat, mainly from Cornwall and north Devon and coal was sourced locally. The copper produced was mostly used with calamine (zinc ore) from the Mendips in the manufacture of brass at Baptist Mills and other sites in Bristol. Many of the brass products were exported to Africa to be bartered for slaves as part of the ‘triangular trade’.

## *A Brief History of Troopers Hill*

A local expert on the Brass Industry is Joan Day and she gave a talk to the Friends of Troopers Hill in July 2004. Much of the information below is taken from her book 'Bristol Brass: The History of the Industry' published in 1973.

Abraham Elton established a copper smelting works at Conham in about 1698 and according to the local historian William Sanigar he purchased 'Harris's alias Truebody's Hill' in 1704 from Lancelot Dobson of Patterdale. The name Truebody's was used for the hill until the nineteenth century. It appears that this purchase was only half of the area that now forms the Local Nature Reserve; the part nearest to the river.

The Eltons were a prominent Bristol family. Abraham Elton was a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers and Sheriff of Bristol. In later years he was Mayor of Bristol, High Sheriff of Gloucestershire and Member of Parliament for the five years preceding his death in 1727. He was created a Baronet in 1717. The family wealth came from the slave trade, other commerce and property (including mining in the Mendip Hills). Abraham's son and grandson (both also named Abraham) became Mayors of Bristol in their turn.

It is not known why Abraham Elton purchased the hill, but it may have been for the quarrying of pennant sandstone or possibly open cast coal mining. There would certainly have been quarrying in the area at this time and it may have started as early as the middle-ages.

In around 1710 a copper smelting works was established by the Bristol Brass and Wire Company on land between the River Avon and where the Bull Inn now stands. This works became known as 'the Cupolas' and were the main industry in the vicinity of the hill.

In 1725 officials in Sweden were concerned about the rapid progress in the techniques being used in England and they sent Henric Kahlmater from the Swedish Board of Mines to investigate. At Crews Hole he reported twenty-four furnaces grouped together in one well-constructed building called 'the Cupola'. This smelting works could produce up to 200 tons of copper per year and each furnace needed over a ton of coal every 24 hours.

Another Swede, Reinhold Angerstein visited Bristol in 1754. By now there were forty-nine furnaces at Crews Hole and seventeen at Conham which was now also owned by the Bristol Brass company. Angerstein also drew a sketch of the Crews Hole Works. As well as the Cupolas the sketch shows the river, fields on the St Annes side and, near the bottom of Strawberry Lane in Crews Hole, a glass works and a coalmine. Although Troopers Hill is not shown, the sketch shows that the slopes above the river were all clear of trees.

The sixty-six furnaces on a half mile stretch of river produced a lot of slag as a waste product and in 1749 the 'Report of River Nuisances' noted 'A great quantity of Cinders laid upon the banks of the said River by the Brass Wire Company being a very great nuisance and likely to choak up the said river if not removed'. It was about this time that the Brass Company started to solve some of these problems by casting the slag into moulds to produce black building blocks. The best example of the use of these blocks was in the building of the Black Castle at Arnos Vale by William Reeve.

Reeve was associated with the copper works at this time and it may be that the castle was built to show what could be done with these blocks that could be cast to any shape. The blocks were also commonly cast into triangular shapes for use as coping stones; they were used for example on the 'Sea Walls' at the edge of the Downs.

On March 1758 Sir Abraham Elton (the grandson of the original purchaser) sold 'Harris's alias Truebody's Hill' to the Bristol Brass and Wire Company for £150. Again there is no evidence as to what use if any was made of the hill.

Donn's map of Bristol in 1769 shows the Cupolas and also indicates the presence of a lead works in Crews Hole nearer to Bristol. This appears to be further east than the site that later became the Blackswarth Lead Works operated by Sheldon & Bush.

In around 1780 the Bristol Brass and Wire Company moved its copper smelting operations to Warmley having purchased the works of their rival William Champion when his business went bankrupt in 1769. The Crews Hole site was abandoned.

Bristol Brass and Wire Company had various names through the eighteenth century and many well known Bristol families were involved. As the century progressed the Harford family, who came into the possession of Blaise Castle in 1789, became more involved in the company and in 1788 it was reformed under the name of 'Harfords & Bristol Brass & Copper Company'.

The Harford Company were also involved in copper smelting works near Swansea, where coal was cheap and sea going vessels could reach the works without the need to transfer cargos of copper ore to vessels small enough to pass under a low bridge (as was the case with Bristol Bridge for all works upstream of Bristol on the River Avon). By about 1790 the company's copper smelting operations in Bristol were discontinued completely.

### **Troopers Hill Chimney**

The 1790s did not mark the end of copper smelting in Crews Hole; the site was leased to the Elton & Tyndall copper company until about 1796 and Matthews & Arnold had a brass and spelter (zinc) works in Crews Hole in the 1820s. So far we have no records of the use of the site between these dates.

A map dated around 1803 was shown to the Friends of Troopers by the late John Cornwell, who ran the Bristol Coalmining Archives and was very enthusiastic about the industrial history of the area. This showed the 'Old Brass Works' where the cupolas were sited but also shows a separate 'Copper Works' adjacent to Troopers Hill. This works is located exactly where the flue from Troopers Hill chimney came down to the riverside. There seems to be no reason to have built the works on this site, which was set back from the river, if it was not to benefit from using the hill. Since the hill and the riverside site were both owned by the Brass Company it seems very likely that the chimney was built to serve this new Copper Works, probably in the 1790s, a view supported by Joan Day. It is certain that the chimney was built before 1826, since it is shown in a drawing from this date of the view from Arnos Court commissioned by GW Braikenridge.

A plan of Troopers Hill from an 1886 lease held by Bristol City Council's property section shows the chimney and flue together with chambers at the lower end next to

the road. It is possible that the chambers were built to collect copper or sulphate from the smoke emanating from the furnaces. A similar flue and chamber system was described as existing at the nearby Blackswarth lead works in 1883 [Industrial Archaeology of the Bristol Region – A Buchanan & N Cossons 1969].

The smelting of both copper and lead in the Avon Valley throughout the eighteenth century will have had an effect on the natural environment of the hill. Both produce smoke laden with sulphur which will have increased the acidity of the soil in the surrounding area. The chimney is now a Grade II listed structure.

## **Early Nineteenth Century (1800 – 1840)**

### **Coal Mining**

While some copper and lead smelting continued in Crews Hole during the early years of the nineteenth century it seems to have been on a much smaller scale than in the eighteenth century. On Troopers Hill itself there was some quarrying of pennant sandstone during this period, but the most significant development was the opening of Troopers Hill Pit.

The chimney or stack that still stands at the junction of Troopers Hill Road and Crews Hole Road is all that remains of this colliery. Originally the chimney was at the corner of the engine house and parts of the walls of that building can still be seen. The corners of the stack are formed with black copper slag blocks. This structure is also Grade II listed. The mine shaft was behind the engine house on Troopers Hill in an area now covered in bramble; it is assumed that it was filled in after the colliery closed. The colliery, which was also known as Crews Hole Pit, was mining coal from the early 1800s and although the exact closure date is not known it was before 1845.

There is a drawing from the early 1900s by Samuel Loxton of an engine house in Troopers Hill with what looks to be the same chimney. This drawing was reproduced in the book 'Crews Hole, St George and Speedwell' by Dave Stephenson, Andy Jones and Dave Cheesley of the Barton Hill History Group, which was published in 2003. The reason that the road junction does not appear in this drawing is that this is in fact a different engine house that was further up Troopers Hill Road. Both engine houses and their mine shafts formed part of the same colliery. A photograph of 'coal digging on Troopers Hill' in the same book also shows the upper engine house surrounded by market gardens.

One of the coal seams that was worked from the colliery was the Millgrit seam which was 2ft 6in thick. When boreholes were sunk for the new housing next to the river an old pit prop was found in the open workings from the colliery at a depth of 80ft in this coal seam. The Troopers Hill pit was one of many in east Bristol, and is described in John Cornwell's book "The Bristol Coalfield" published by Landmark Publishing. Friends of Troopers were fortunate to have the opportunity to visit John and talk about the area and its industrial history in February 2005 and were very saddened to hear of his death in early 2006.

Given the closure of the pit by 1845 it is perhaps surprising that the chimney still stands. Friends of Troopers Hill have been told that this was because it was later used as an access shaft to Hanham Colliery; it has also been reported that it connected to

Speedwell Colliery. Neither of these reports are supported by any documentary evidence seen to date.

Traces of coal can be seen on the site above the end of the gully. John Cornwell was of the opinion that this was an outcrop of the coal seam, but this is disputed by other experts who consider it to be tipped colliery waste. Geological maps do show coal seams outcropping on the hill and coal was dug from the site during the 1920s as discussed later.

### **Scenes in our Parish, by a Country Parson's Daughter**

A unique record of the Crews Hole area in the early nineteenth century has been provided by Elizabeth Emra, the Country Parsons Daughter. 'Little Elizabeth', was the author of "Scenes in our Parish" the first part of which was published in 1830. A copy of the book is owned by the Friends of Troopers Hill.

Elizabeth was born on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1804, part of a large family with an older brother, four older sisters and 'several' younger siblings. Her father was John Emra, vicar at St George Church. The family moved to St George when Elizabeth was a few months old, a move that 'made them inhabitants of the country'.

Elizabeth lived with her parents in the Vicarage at St George for nearly 30 years until she married Marcus Holmes on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1833. She survived contracting smallpox and otherwise appears to have had a happy and healthy childhood. As she grew up she increasingly involved herself with trying to help the poor of the Parish.

After her marriage Elizabeth and Marcus lived in 'Homefield Cottage' next to the Church. Her first child, a girl, was born on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1834. In December 1842, following the death of her father the family moved to Westbury Hill. By now they had six children and had had one other that had died as a baby. Elizabeth died on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1843, just a few days after the birth of her own 'little Elizabeth' her eighth child.

"Scenes in our Parish" gives a fascinating insight into life and death (mostly death) in the 1830s in St George. It describes many of those who lived in the Parish who Elizabeth visited and tried to help and comfort in her role as the Parson's daughter.

Elizabeth wrote the book in two parts with the first chapter dated 1829 and the last chapter describing the Bristol Riots of 30<sup>th</sup> October 1831, which were centred on Queens Square, as seen from St George.

Elizabeth provides us with a description of the hillside above the River Avon which could well be written as a description of Troopers Hill today:

"the barren and quarried hill, with its yellow spots of gorse and broom, and its purple shade of heath, raising itself above the dark heaps of dross on our own side; and then the river, the beautiful, soft flowing river that we have all loved so well, laving as kindly our rough and barren banks, and holding its pure mirror to us, as truly as to the embellished and fertile scenery on the other side; and how clearly we saw every reversed image of the trees in the little copse-wood beyond..." [Dictionary definition of dross: 'The scum thrown off from metals in smelting']

## *A Brief History of Troopers Hill*

This is taken from a chapter called 'The Strawberry Feast' and actually refers to the hill at the top of what is now Strawberry Lane, however the same landscape will undoubtedly have extended all the way along the valley to Troopers Hill at that time.

In another chapter, Elizabeth describes a cottage near the river where she used to visit Henry and Sarah Curtis when she was young. She says the house and the area around it are now much altered.

"The precipitous bank, beyond it, where there used to grow gaze [???], and furze [gorse] and broom, is excavated into a very large stone quarry. There are noble masses of stone, displaying every variety of colour, from pale brown to deep red, and from cold neutral tint to bright purple."

"they have discovered, that the whole hill side can afford stone, and soon I suppose it will be one huge quarry. They have done worse than this. They have built a steam-engine for raising coal on a spot, which we used to think quiet and pleasant; and where, until then we could gather woodbine and blue violets."

Of the house she says:

"it was unlike all other houses that we had ever seen. It consisted but of one room on the ground floor, from whose corners a bed room, pantry, and the little sitting-room were partitioned off. There was a large flue in the middle of the ceiling, at which we used to gaze up in wonder; and I remember old Sarah's trying to describe to us the apparatus which once belonged to it, and which was used, as far as I understand, for trying the qualities of ore."

The house by the river must have been part of the old copper smelting works. The quarry is probably the area of Bull Lane and the steam-engine the one at the Troopers Hill Pit. Since Elizabeth was born in 1804 and this is written in 1831, the account confirms John Cornwell's suggestion that the pit was established after 1803.

Friends of Troopers Hill have named the viewpoint at the gateway to Crews Hole Woodland on the path through Sally's Glade 'Little Elizabeth's View' in memory of Elizabeth Emra.

In Elizabeth Emra's time Crews Hole was a very poor area and the area alongside the river must have been very desolate with abandoned copper smelters and slag heaps. The Brass Company sold the site in 1828, but it is not known who bought it.

### **Troopers Hill – Origin of the Name**

1830 marks the first recorded use of the name 'Troopers Hill' when it was used on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map of the Bristol area. As described earlier, prior to this date the hill had been referred to as 'Harris Hill' or 'Truebody's Hill'. 'Truebody's Hill' continued to be used on legal documents until the end of the century. One document has 'the Bodies Hill'; this must have been a transcription error, but it shows how easily names can be changed.

In 1937, William Sanigar wrote to the Ordnance Survey to ask about the name. In his letter he states that the Truebody family were owners and tenants of land in and around the neighbourhood for about a hundred years.

The Ordnance Survey replied only five days later saying that there was no record to show how 'Troopers Hill' came to be used but 'doubtless the name was collected locally during the course of the survey'. The letter went on to say that the name was also collected independently during the large scale survey of 1880 and was authorised by three local residents, whose names are then stated.

Troopers Hill and Truebody's Hill were therefore both used through much of the nineteenth century, with Troopers Hill becoming the accepted name by the end of the century, possibly because of its use on the Ordnance Survey map. It remains in doubt as to whether the name came from the use of the hill by troopers in the civil war or at some other time; or whether it was simply a corruption of Truebody's Hill.

Although the use of the name Troopers Hill was accepted from about 1880, there has been no consistency in the use (or not) of an apostrophe. The name has been written as *Trooper's Hill*; *Troopers' Hill* and *Troopers Hill* on different maps and legal documents through the years. Road signs are also inconsistent. None of these versions can be said to be wrong; Friends of Troopers Hill use the name without an apostrophe and this convention has been used throughout this history.

## **Late Nineteenth Century (1840 – 1900)**

### **Tar Works**

1843 saw the start of a new industry adjacent to Troopers Hill that dominated the area until 1981. The Great Western Railway from Bristol to Paddington was built under the direction of I K Brunel between 1835 and 1841. Brunel's broad-gauge track did not use sleepers in the way that we are now familiar with, instead the rails were laid on longitudinal timbers, supported on timber piles and with timber cross-ties. While the railway was under construction in 1838 John Bethell patented creosote as a timber preservative and Brunel realised that its use would be a benefit to his new railway.

Brunel took out a licence with John Bethell for use of his patent. He also took technical advice from Bethell in the erection of a Tar Distillery on the site of the original copperworks at Crews Hole. The works were owned and financed by Roberts & Daines who also owned an Iron Works in Silverthorne Lane. It is not known whether they purchased the site when it was sold by the Brass Company in 1828 or obtained it later.

William Butler was appointed as manager of the works from the start of operations. He had previously employed by Brunel on the Bristol and Exeter Railway so it seems likely that Brunel was responsible for his appointment. In 1863 a fire broke out that nearly destroyed the plant and Robert & Daines then sold the works to William Butler who operated the plant under the name of William Butler & Co Ltd.

In 1953 a book was produced by the company giving details of its history over the previous 110 years. Friends of Troopers Hill were given a copy of this book, which was written by Dr T. Howard Butler, the founder's grandson, at their history exhibition in September 2005.

William Butler & Co (Bristol) Ltd became a very successful and innovative company. During nearly 140 years of operation at Crews Hole the Tar Works gradually took

over all the land between Troopers Hill and the River. It also owned the land behind the Bull Inn and land at Conham that it used as a tip. The raw ingredient was coal tar which was a by product the production of both town gas and coke (which was used in the manufacture of steel). From the distillation of this tar a huge range of products was eventually produced; many as a result of research and experiments at Crews Hole. The majority of the tar was brought to Crews Hole by boat from the gas works in Bristol, but also from Bath and further afield.

As well as the site at Crews Hole, William Butler had a site at Silverthorne Lane, St Phillips. An indication of the company's enthusiasm for new ideas is shown by the description in the 1953 book of the installation of telephone communication between the two sites in 1879, only three years after Edison and Bell's first ever reciprocal telephone conversation. At two miles the first calls between the sites were the longest distance calls that had been made in the area. Butlers had also introduced an improvement over previous installations so that a person at Silverthorne Lane could ring the bell at Crews Hole without sounding the one at his end.

William Butler became a very well known and well liked local figure. He was instrumental in the formation of the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company and at his death in 1900 was its Chairman. He was laid to rest at Avonview Cemetery at 3pm on 10<sup>th</sup> October and at that time all Bristol's trams and the company's carriages came to a halt for 1 minute as a sign of respect. His grave overlooks the Avon valley and his Crews Hole Works.

### **Chemical Works**

It is not known who purchased the copper works sites and Troopers Hill in 1828 when Brass Company sold it, but it is known that by 1886 all the land, except that owned by Butlers, was owned by the Somers family of Clevedon.

Bristol City Council's property office has a copy of a document dated 1886 by which Troopers Hill is leased to the Bristol Fireclay Company. By this date the boundaries of Troopers Hill were the same as those that now define the Local Nature Reserve, but there is a split between two areas where the mineral extraction rights are different. This might reflect the original boundary line. A later document also refers to the fact that the hill was previously two parcels of land.

As previously mentioned, the plan attached to the lease shows the chimney and the flue leading to it, together with chambers at the base. The lease allows for the Fireclay Company to mine under the hill but required them to keep clear of a 30ft wide area under the flue and chimney so as not to remove its support.

In the area where the new copper works were shown on the 1803 map, the 1886 lease shows Stone & Tinson's Chemical Works. Given the requirement to maintain the chimney and flue mentioned in the lease it seems likely that this works was using the chimney at that time.

The 1890 Ordnance Survey map also shows another chemical works 'The Phoenix Works' between Stone & Tinson's and Butlers. The works apparently belonged to the Conham Chemical Company.

In his 2002 SCI Lecture Paper 'A History of Tar Distillation at Crew's Hole, Bristol' Raymond Holland says:

“The 33rd Alkali Inspector's Report (1895) comments upon the close proximity of three works, (the Victorians tended to use the singular word 'Work'): Conham Chemical Company, an Alkali Work; Wm Butler's Tar Work and Stone and Tinson's Muriate of Ammonia Work. The report says:

In considering the question of vapours and smoke in this particular locality, we must not forget that there are at least 20 different chimneys at the various works. The coal burnt at the alkali work, the tar work, the muriate of ammonia work and the brick and tile work, together with the fires in the houses, would itself constitute a considerable volume of smoke. It is unfortunate that traces of ammoniacal vapours escape from the muriate of ammonia work as well as from the tar work. It is still more unfavourable that the alkali work is situated between them, for when the ammoniacal vapours meet the muriatic acid gas (Hydrochloric acid) in the air a white cloud is at once created and on a wet day this is very visible.”

It can be seen from this that Troopers Hill would not have been a pleasant place to be at the end of the nineteenth century.

### **Fireclay Mine and Works**

The land to the west of Stone and Tinson was also included in the land leased to the Bristol Fireclay Company in 1886 and was stated to have been formerly occupied by Mrs Elizabeth Braine and Ann Randall followed by Messrs Johnston Andrews & Company and then the Crown Clay Company. It is shown on the 1890 Ordnance Survey map as a 'Brick and Tile' works.

In his book on the Bristol Coalfield John Cornwell also refers to the fireclay industry. Fireclay is often found alongside coal seams and fireclay mines were often operated in areas where the coal had previously been extracted. John states that the first recorded fireclay mine in Crews Hole was owned and worked by the 'Brain' family in the 1850s, John did not know its location but the mention of Elizabeth Braine on the 1886 lease points to it being at Troopers Hill. The mine was abandoned by the Fireclay Company in 1908 and John includes a plan in his book. Interestingly this plan shows the worked areas extending under the north-west side of the chimney, which might explain its characteristic lean.

John Cornwell also showed Friends of Troopers Hill part of the plan that was not published. This shows the locations of the three entrances to the mine. Two entrances were in the area leased to the Fireclay Company between the road and the river. One of these was uncovered during the site investigations prior to the new housing estate being built and a photograph of it appears in John's book. The third entrance was in the quarry on Troopers Hill itself. This is the now wooded area on the south-west corner. Investigations by Friends of Troopers Hill have identified the location and confirmed that the entrance has been buried by material tipped in the 1960s and 70s.

The Bristol Fireclay Company also had another mine and a larger works further down Crews Hole Road near the bottom of Strawberry Lane on the site of the eighteenth century glass works.

## **Pennant Sandstone Quarrying**

The industry that had the most effect on the shape of Troopers Hill as we see it today was the quarrying of pennant sandstone for use in building. As mentioned above quarrying probably started on a small scale very early on in the history of the area and Elizabeth Emra referred to a large quarry in her book of 1830.

The 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows a quarry in what is now known as ‘the gully’. Comparison of this map with the second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1904 clearly shows that a lot of rock was removed between the dates of the surveys for these two editions. The shape of the hill in 1904 was much as it is now so quarrying must have ceased soon afterwards. The humps between the gully and Troopers Hill Road are tipped waste from this quarry. A quarry is also shown on the south-west of the hill in the area of the fireclay mine entrance on the 1890 map that has become an ‘old quarry’ by 1904. The 1890 map also shows an ‘old quarry’ adjacent to the colliery engine house at the Crews Hole end of Troopers Hill Road.

Another feature noted by John Cornwell is a depression in the ground between Phylis’s bench and the chimney. John was of the opinion that this was effectively a crack formed by movement of the ground above the quarry. There are also various pieces of iron work, posts and other items which are believed to have dated from the quarrying having been used as anchors for pulling trucks etc around the works.

The exposed sandstone faces in the gully with their great range of colours from red to grey which were left when the quarry closed are now one of the hill’s most striking features.

## **Expansion of Bristol**

In 1897 the boundaries of the City and County of Bristol were extended to include St George and therefore Troopers Hill. Prior to this date Troopers Hill had been in the County of Gloucestershire. The new boundary was at the Stradbroke which runs through Magpie Bottom and Conham Vale to join the River Avon.

As well as this administrative expansion Bristol was also physically expanding. Some of this can be seen by comparing the 1890 and 1904 maps. Fortunately Troopers Hill and the fields of Troopers Hill Farm to the north both escaped development. The farm was to become allotments on the outbreak of war in 1914. Part of it remains as Bristol East Allotments Association’s ‘Farm’ allotments site, while the area now known as Troopers Hill Field was converted from allotments to public open space some time after its purchase by Bristol City Council in 1932.

## **Early Twentieth Century (1900 – 1956)**

### **White’s Bristol Flora**

An indication of the range of flora present on Troopers Hill at the beginning of the twentieth century is given in ‘The Bristol Flora’ by James Walter White and published in 1912. Troopers Hill is listed in this book as one of the ‘minor eminences on the Gloucester side of Bristol’. In the chapter on soils Mr White refers to the change in the vegetation to the east of Bristol due to the pennant sandstone and says “the trees are low in stature, as if stunted by fumes and smoke from collieries and chemical works; and the few remaining untilled portions of old Kingswood Chase are sprinkled with heather, broom, needle-whin, and uncommon forms of bramble”.

Troopers Hill is mentioned as a location where several of the 1178 species can be found. It should be borne in mind that the area considered to be Troopers Hill at this time may have been a larger area than that currently defined by the LNR. Also many of the records are taken from earlier publications.

Species number 219 is *sarothamnus vulgaris*, broom, for which Mr White states “The habitats nearest to Bristol are on the sandstone banks near the Avon under Crook’s Folly; along the GWR between Brislington and Keynsham; and about Troopers Hill, St George.” Another mention is against number 469 *sambucus ebulus*, dwarf elder which was recorded by Stephens in 1835 in “hedges on the north side of Troopers Hill” and by Swete in 1854 at “Netham, near Crews Hole”. White then says “these records refer to the same locality near the bottom of Troopers Hill Road where the plant still exists”.

### **Tar Works Expansion**

Butlers Tar Works continued to expand during the twentieth century. When the Conham Chemical Works closed in 1904 and Stone and Timson's in 1924, both sites were incorporated into the Butler Works together with the site occupied by the fireclay mine. Butlers then became the only industry in the area immediately adjacent Troopers Hill.

Many people have told Friends of Troopers Hill that they remember being taken on to the hill to breathe in the tar fumes which were considered to be a cure for bronchitis. Some people even report being taken into the works itself to breathe the fumes; many remember having tar-soaked ropes hung round their necks.

After William Butler’s death the business passed to his sons, William Henry, Joseph Beaumont and Thomas. They continued to be involved in local issues and took a great interest in the Methodist Church. The Butler family were great benefactors of the Wesley Memorial Church on Bryants Hill where Friends of Troopers Hill now hold their regular meetings. Butlers donated stone for its construction and later gave money towards the building of the church halls.

The Butler’s love of innovation continued; both William Henry and Thomas Butler purchased motor cars which were some of the first in Bristol. On the introduction of the 1904 Motor Act Thomas Butler obtained the first Motor Licence and had the first registered car in Bristol – registration number AE 1. That registration is now carried by the official car of Bristol City’s Lord Mayor. In another link with the brass industry, the Butlers bought the old mill at Saltford and used it for recreation. They installed a dynamo on the water wheel to provide electricity. This mill is now cared for by volunteers of the Saltford Brass Mill Project led by Joan Day.

The Somers family sold all the land between Troopers Hill and the river to Butlers, but not the hill itself. It is therefore unlikely that Butlers ever used the chimney, contrary to what many local people believe. The chimney was almost certainly not used after Stone and Tinson closed and may have been out of use before then.

### **Troopers Hill For Sale!**

The change in ownership of Troopers Hill through the twentieth century can be traced through the records at Bristol City Council's property office.

With the closure of the fireclay mine, the quarries and finally the chemical works of Stone and Tinson the industrial history of Troopers Hill itself came to an end. It was still owned by the Somers family, but they clearly had no use for it.

In 1920 Troopers Hill was offered for sale by auction and a copy of the notice is held with William Sanigar's notes in the Bristol Records Office. It was said to have 'over 2,000 feet of frontage to public roads and comprises some useful building sites'. The chimney stack and flue are mentioned as well as 'valuable Quarries of Stone and seams of Fireclay'. Potential buyers were obviously not attracted by this sales pitch and no sale was completed.

The hill was again offered for sale in June 1924 with a similar advert, but this auction also seems to have been unsuccessful. The Somers family were finally able to sell the site in September of that year when it was purchased by John Ballard of Holly Lodge, St George for £515.

### **Coal Digging in the General Strike**

In his book 'City Pit' published in 1986, Speedwell miner Fred Moss refers to outcrops of coal where coal was dug during the 1926 General Strike while the coal mines themselves were closed. Troopers Hill is one of the areas that are mentioned and he refers to Mr Ballard as the owner. He says of Mr Ballard "He lived in a rather large detached house, partly surrounded by a large stable yard and stables. He also owned a lot of property in Bristol, much of it slum property.

Friends of Troopers Hill have also been told that one of the coal diggers lost his life on the hill at this time. The photograph of coal digging on Troopers Hill in Dave Stephenson, Andy Jones and Dave Cheesley's book on Crews Hole mentioned earlier, may date from this time.

### **Troopers Hill as a Public Park**

In 1928 a dispute developed between Mr Ballard and Bristol City Council over a right of way which became the subject of a Tolzey Court action.

This dispute generated some interest in Troopers Hill in the local press, including an article with photographs of the hill looking very barren that stated: 'It is contended that the hill, if terraced, could be converted into a delightful park – a welcome addition to St Anne's Park in that part of Bristol.'

This article brought a response from S J Ford who mentioned the terraces dug by Edward Terrill in 1682. He says 'Troopers Hill is not a very beautiful place just now, because of the disfiguring hand of local industries'. However he also states that 'Artistically laid out as a park garden would make an attractive recreation place for the citizens of East Bristol, for the view from its summit is both extensive and beautiful.'

## **Purchase by Bristol City Council as a Public Open Space**

John Ballard died in 1936 and Troopers Hill was sold by J W Ballard in 1948 to Frank Viner of Whites Hill Farm, Kingsway for £600.

In the papers of the local historian FC Jones, held in Bristol Records Office, is a report from a local paper under the headline of 'Troopers Hill' it states:

“After visiting the area, the visiting sub-committee of Bristol Planning and Public Works Committee decided yesterday that negotiations should take place with the owner of 21 acres of land at Troopers Hill, St George, with a view to acquiring it for public open space purposes.”

A further report on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1956 states:

“Mr W H Jones, on behalf of citizens in St George East, welcomed a Planning and Public Works Committee proposal to buy 21 acres of land at Troopers Hill, St George as an open space at yesterday's meeting of Bristol City Council. Council approved the proposal.” The article which was headlined “Historic hill may be playing fields” referred to Cromwell's troops being there during the Civil War.

The sale was completed on the fourteenth of September 1956 for the sum of £600. This was said to be £420 for 'the existing use value of the premises' and £180 for 'the unexpended balance of the established development value under the Town and Country planning Act 1954 attributable to the interest of the Vendor in the property'.

Friends of Troopers Hill have a series of photographs taken in 1953 from Butlers Tar Works that show what the hill looked like at the time of its purchase. The photos were brought to a Friends of Troopers Hill History Exhibition in Sept 2005 and the owner, who used to work at Butlers, very kindly allowed the group to scan them, they can be seen on the website at [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk). The hill appeared dramatically different then to the way it does now, with significantly less woodland and more grassland. The quarry where the entrance to the fireclay mine was is clearly visible and there are only isolated hawthorn bushes.

It is also noticeable that there was open ground all the way along the side of the Avon Valley from Troopers Hill to Blackswarth. The land between Troopers Hill and Lamb Lane was also purchased by Bristol City Council in 1956; the area is now known as Crews Hole woodland.

## **Later Twentieth Century (1956 – 2000)**

### **Bristol and West Tar Distillers**

In 1952 Butlers separated their tar distillation and other businesses with the formation of Bristol and West Tar Distillers, in which the Southwestern Gas Board took a 25% stake. Then in 1962 the Gas Board became sole owners of this company, and soon afterwards Butlers moved all their operations away from Crews Hole and Silverthorne Lane to a new base at the Rockingham Works at Avonmouth where they operated under the name of Butlers Chemicals Ltd. This company became increasingly involved with the Belgian refiner Petrofina who, in 1988, finally purchased the Butler Group. Petrofina itself was taken over by Total SA in 1998, but the Butler name continues in the form of Total Butler Ltd.

Below Troopers Hill the Gas Board continued to operate the tar works to treat the crude tar generated from the production of town gas. The introduction of North Sea Gas took away this source of tar, but tar was still being produced by the coke works linked to the steel industry in South Wales and so a means of getting rid of this waste product was still required.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1970 the ownership of Bristol and West Tar Distillers changed hands for the last time when it became owned by the British Steel Corporation (BSC). Vernon McVeigh of the Friends of Troopers Hill, who lives on Troopers Hill Road, wrote about his memories of the BSC in the group's July 2006 edition of 'The Hill'.

“BSC used the Plant as an offshoot to their Port Talbot works shipping waste materials, from the steel production, to Crews Hole in large road tankers. These used to arrive throughout the day and night at about two hourly intervals, leaving on their return journey to Port Talbot twenty or so minutes later.

The residents of Troopers Hill Road felt these tankers were a danger to children and animals alike. So, one evening after the tankers had passed down the hill, residents' cars and a lorry were parked in such a way to prevent the tankers coming back up again. The police and local press attended and everything was resolved amicably. As usual, however, the Press blew things out of all proportion by describing non-existent angry scuffles between residents and drivers. As a result a three ton weight limit was introduced on Troopers Hill Road.”

The tar works finally closed in 1981, partly because of the increasing difficulties of operating in an increasingly residential area – most of the houses on Troopers Hill Road were built in the 1960s and 70s. The closure brought to an end the industrial history of Troopers Hill and the adjoining land, although the smell of tar can still be detected from time to time as you walk along the river path.

### **Malvern Road Tip**

As mentioned above, the area of land adjacent to Troopers Hill to the west was also purchased by Bristol City Council in 1956. This area of over 12 acres was described as ‘allotments and rough pasture land with 1 cottage in Lamb Hill and the sites of 3 other cottages’. The land was purchased for £2,120 on 21<sup>st</sup> December for use as a tip.

Malvern Road Tip, as it was known, operated until the early 1970s. It has been reported from several people that the material from the excavation of the underpass at Old Market was tipped here. It does not seem to have been used for domestic waste. The area of the tip extended partly into the quarries on the south-west corner of Troopers Hill and, as stated earlier, this covered the entrance to the fireclay mine.

There were some problems with the stability of the tip and a concrete berm had to be installed to stabilise it. Local reports state that Crews Hole Road had to be closed at one time due to the risk of the material slipping.

After the closure of the tip some trees were planted and these together with natural regeneration have created the woodland as it is today.

## **Regeneration of the Avon Valley**

Following the closure of the Tar Works the local authorities started producing plans for the regeneration of the Avon Valley. The land below Troopers Hill remained in the ownership of British Steel, while the closure of St Anne's Board Mills on the other side of the river only the year before had created another large derelict site also in private ownership.

In 1986, a company called Crews Hole Limited applied for outline planning permission for 'Crews Hole Village, a unique opportunity to make a better valley'. The Planning and Traffic Committee resolved on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1986 "that the Committee agree to amend the Avon Valley Development Brief and Conservation Policy by the addition of a residential option to the zones covered by this application".

This decision marked the end of any attempt to bring industry or other types of commercial activity back into the area and meant that Troopers Hill would now be surrounded only by residential areas.

The ambitious plans of Crews Hole Ltd that included shops, a riverside restaurant and provisions for boating and fishing never came to fruition.

The site was later developed by other developers as housing but without any of the promised facilities. The brochures produced at this time all feature the green space of Troopers Hill rising above the site to give it the appearance of a rural setting.

In 1989 the Government established the Bristol Development Corporation (BDC) with 'the task of bringing new life and prosperity to an area of 900 acres to the east of Bristol'. It operated until being wound up in 1996.

The BDC drew up ambitious plans in the form of an 'Avon Valley Project' that included keeping Troopers Hill and the adjacent Crews Hole woodland as open space. A number of public consultation meetings and 'Community Action Days' were held to increase the involvement of local residents.

## **New Fences and Paths**

For Troopers Hill itself an information leaflet was produced by the BDC and Bristol City Council's Parks Department entitled 'Troopers' Hill ...is wearing out!'. This invited the public to a meeting on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February 1991. The leaflet set out a plan of action for the hill which included building new fences around the perimeter and repairing the footpaths.

The leaflet highlighted the problem of motorbikes accessing the hill and proposed gates that would allow people easy access but not motorbikes. The leaflet also stated that the most seriously worn areas would be reseeded. The fences and paths were constructed during the Spring of 1991 and a leaflet produced later in the year shows part of the new path in place in that summer.

The introduction of fences around the site was a major change for a site that had always had open access from the whole length of Troopers Hill Road.

The Avon Wildlife Trust also worked with the BDC and Bristol City Council to organise community action days in Crews Hole Woodland during the winter of

1991/92. The meeting point was the gate on to Troopers Hill Field at the end of Malvern Road and were advertised mainly as ‘clearing bramble and hawthorn scrub to help maintain important areas of grassland for wildflowers and butterflies’. On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February 1992 it was proposed to ‘plant a hedge of mixed shrubs along the boundary with the recreation ground’.

The contact at the Wildlife Trust for these workdays was Helen Hall, who continues to support wildlife habitats in Bristol as part of Bristol Parks Natural Environment Team. Helen also played a leading role in the ‘Battle of Royate Hill’ to protect what is now another Local Nature Reserve from development.

The BDC also employed Landmark Environmental Consultants to draw up a Management Plan for the site and subsequent to this two interpretation boards were installed and there was a litter removal day.

### **Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve**

In 1994 Bristol City Council selected Troopers Hill as one of four sites in Bristol to be designated as Local Nature Reserves. Helen Hall was by now working for the Council and was involved in getting the designation through the various statutory hurdles which were completed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1995.

Local Nature Reserve (or LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities. The process of designating LNRs is controlled by Natural England (formerly English Nature). Following the designation Bristol City Council produced a leaflet ‘Introducing Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve’ which was written by Helen Hall.

In 1994 photographic monitoring of the site was introduced to track the changes in the vegetation; this was undertaken by Wessex Ecological Consultancy. Photographs of the site have been taken from 35 fixed locations every other year since 1994, with the 2006 photographs being taken by Friends of Troopers Hill.

In March 1999 Wessex Ecological Consultancy produced a Management Plan for the site. The plan did not propose any changes to the site’s management but did recommend the formation of a Community Action Group.

### **1995 Fire**

In its second summer as an LNR Troopers Hill suffered from a serious grass fire that swept across the hill. Although the short term effects did not look attractive the long-term effects were probably beneficial in controlling scrub. It is clear from speaking local residents that fires on Troopers Hill were regular occurrences in the past, though the proximity of the Tar Works meant that they were often cause for concern.

There have been no large fires on the site since this date.

### **Grayling Butterfly**

Drawings of the Grayling butterfly are featured on the 1992 interpretation boards and in the 1995 leaflet, which both state that Troopers Hill is the only place in Bristol where it can be found. A photograph of a grayling butterfly on Troopers Hill is also

featured on a leaflet about Bristol's Wildlife which was produced as part of the Greater Bristol Conservation Strategy, probably also in the early 1990s.

Unfortunately there have been no recorded sightings of the grayling on Troopers Hill since before the 1995 fire, though it is possible that it still exists. While the fire may have been the cause of its demise there may have been other factors. The Friends of Troopers Hill have been asked to consider its reintroduction but decided that more information was required before this could be considered.

### ***Nomada guttulata***

In 2000 Bristol City Council commissioned David Gibbs to carry out an invertebrate survey of Troopers Hill. His results were spectacular and it is worth quoting the first paragraph of his site assessment in full.

“Given the small size and isolation of this site its conservation significance for invertebrates is really quite extraordinary. The only sites so far investigated which have proved to be better than Troopers Hill are very large more diverse sites, often abutting other good areas in the wider countryside. If we had sufficient information to score all the species according to their rarity Troopers Hill would probably come out as the most important site of its type in the Bristol region. This is not only because of the large number of local rarities including some new county records but the presence of an endangered species, *Nomada guttulata*, massively increases its importance. Not even the spectacularly productive Dolebury Warren has any species so rare. Records from previous years only serve to confirm these conclusions.”

*Nomada guttulata* is listed as a Red Data Book 1 endangered species and is cleptoparasite of the mining-bee. This means that it behaves a bit like a cuckoo. It lets *Andrena labiata* do the hard work of mining in areas of bare earth on Troopers Hill and then lays its eggs in the burrow. When the *Nomada guttulata* larvae hatch they eat the food that the host has left for its own young. The fact that mining bees need bare earth for burrows makes the areas of erosion that the BDC were so keen to 'restore' some of the most important areas on the hill!

## ***Twenty-first Century***

### **Wildspace!**

In September 2002 Bristol City Council created the post of Local Nature Reserve Officer. The post was 75% funded through English Nature as part of the national Wildspace! scheme for which English Nature received funding in turn from the National Lottery. Initially the post was funded for three years, but this was later extended to four.

Bristol was fortunate to attract Sally Oldfield to the post who was then working as Community Conservation Officer (Berks) for the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

In considering Troopers Hill, Sally realised the importance of involving the local community in the site's management. Sally sent out a questionnaire to approximately 1000 local households and received 192 replies.

The respondents to the survey were invited to an initial meeting to discuss the site on 5<sup>th</sup> June and this was followed by a guided walk in July with Rupert Higgins of

## *A Brief History of Troopers Hill*

Wessex Ecological Consultancy. Another meeting in September was followed by a litter pick in October and a further meeting at which it was agreed that a friends group should be established. Friends of Troopers Hill formally came into existence with the election of a committee and the adoption of a constitution on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003.

As Local Nature Reserve Officer Sally continued to give great encouragement and support to Friends of Troopers Hill as part of the Wildspace! Project. There is no doubt that without her enthusiasm the group would not have achieved its current status as one of the most successful park groups in Bristol.

On the July 2003 guided walk Sally gave an excellent description of the work that could be done by local volunteers to cut back bramble, particularly from areas of the hill where broom was present. The area of broom where she talked about this was in a glade on the edge of the woodland on the west of the site. Following this talk Friends of Troopers Hill have always referred to this area as 'Sally's Glade'.

The Wildspace Project ended in August 2006. Fortunately Troopers Hill is still able to benefit from Sally's work through the Nature in the City Project which is due to run until August 2007.

### **Friends of Troopers Hill**

With the support of Sally Oldfield, Friends of Troopers Hill has attempted to meet the aims set out in its constitution 'to ensure that Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is maintained as a nature reserve, of benefit to both wildlife and people'. A full record of the groups work can be seen on the website [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk).

Highlights of the first three years included:

- Over 800 hours of volunteer time spent on work parties;
- Raising over £18,000 in grants and donations;
- Organising approximately 25 public events;
- Producing a 5 year Management and Action Plan;
- Working with Bristol Parks to improve paths and access;
- Building a membership list of over 350 households;
- Producing and distributing bi-monthly Newsletters;
- Launching and Developing a website at [www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk);
- Raising the profile of Troopers Hill within various Bristol based organisations.

### **Current Status**

In August 2005 Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) carried out an Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) favourable condition assessment on behalf of Bristol City Council. The conclusion stated:

"The application of the SNCI Favourable Status assessment methodology to the acidic grassland on the site results in the community being awarded 77 points and is therefore grade A site. Current management practices are supporting the communities on this site.

An overall grade of A+ is assigned to this site."

## **The Future**

The prospects for Troopers Hill LNR are now probably better than at any time since the Council purchased the site.

This year's decision to apply for a Green Flag Award has demonstrated Bristol Parks' ongoing commitment to Troopers Hill and its management. The Green Spaces Strategy to be launched next year will further emphasise that commitment and give Troopers Hill and other green spaces throughout Bristol added protection against development. The general increase in public awareness of 'green' issues and the importance of the environment and bio-diversity will also benefit the site.

Friends of Troopers Hill continue to go from strength to strength and the recent grant award from the Big Lottery Fund through Breathing Places gives a sound foundation for 2007. Initiatives such as the proposed collaboration with Woofers to tackle the problems of dog fouling and the occasional irresponsible dog owner will bring further benefits.

Rob Acton-Campbell  
Friends of Troopers Hill  
December 2006

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