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Conservation Campaign
May 2007

The Cave Hill CAMPAIGNER



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'Improving' The Cave Hill?

How often do we need to say it? How many times must we emphasise the benefits of Cave Hill in its present state? The answer is every time some crackpot scheme to "improve" its surfaces. There are forces and influences which cannot leave something like Cave Hill alone without wanting to shape and mould it. Leave it alone, we say.

I don't mean to imply that Cave Hill does not need attention. Like any wild resource with public access, it needs to be managed. But the management should be minimal: it is enough to ensure that the paths are not dangerous, fences maintained and that the trees and vegetation are kept from overwhelming everything. There also needs to be an element of control on some of the younger, rowdier, elements who use the Park. We, in the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, have long argued that Belfast City Council needs to have a management plan in place which will set out values and standards to ensure this management and against which any new proposals for the use of the hill should be assessed.

For example, the land to the west and north of the big Wallace Quarry and stretching up to the summit has, until recently, been grazed by rare breeds of cattle from the zoo. This grazing ensured a measure of control in those grasslands. This practice has now stopped and this area is badly in need of such regular grazing lest it revert to impassable scrub. A management plan should incorporate such a strategy and make replacement of cattle a priority.

Such a plan would also ensure that the latest resurrection of the plan to put a cable car up to the top of Cave Hill from the proposed Giant's Park would never see the light of day. This particular proposal is daft. An earlier proposal to run a cable from the zoo to the summit was dismissed by the Council on the grounds of cost. The present proposal would be much more expensive. Moreover, it would present a hazard in that it would have to cross ten motorway lanes and a considerable number of houses, to say nothing about the visual intrusion and the disruption of wild habitat on the hill.

Such a management plan would also have given short shrift to a recently-hatched plan by the Council for mountain bike tracks. The proposal would have brought the walking public into contact with fast bikes (the proposal did envisage keeping them largely – but not completely - isolated from the public) and would have acted as a Mecca for bike riders

from all parts of Northern Ireland. Happily, this idea has died for the moment, but it was under consideration for an uncomfortably long time.

The eruption of these proposals from time to time emphasises the need for a body such as us, a body which can examine proposals and alert both our members and the wider public as to the threats. In order to ensure an efficient information flow, we are asking all current members who have e-mail addresses to tell us. Quite a number have already: if you are of that number, you will have already received summaries of our monthly meetings. If not, you can reach us through our website (www.cavehill.freeuk.com) or contact me directly at cormachamill@ireland.com

Cormac Hamill

IN THIS ISSUE

Chapel of the Resurrection.....	2
Charitable Status.....	2
Police Blitz the Park.....	3
Herbal Heaven.....	4
Saint Clements Housing Development.....	4
Cave Hill Survey Report.....	5
Bluebells.....	5
Hills on Fire	6
Cave Hill Fires: A Possible Solution?.....	7
Cable Car Threat for Cave Hill.....	8
Probably, Possibly, Never.....	9
Hedge-Laying.....	10
Of Grave Concern.....	11
News of Forthcoming Events.....	12
Membership Form.....	12

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In the interests of the environment, this magazine is printed on 80% recycled paper

Cave Hill Conservation Campaign achieves Charitable Status

We are delighted to announce that HM Revenue & Customs have now granted us charitable status. This, of course, has many benefits to organisations which include:

- exemption from the payment of tax on most income
- the right to apply for relief from the payment of rates on premises
- eligibility to apply to grant-making charitable trusts.

One of the major benefits to us as a voluntary organisation will be that we are now eligible to receive gifts made under the *Give As You Earn*, *Cheques for Charity* and *Gift Aid* Schemes and, provided this income is applicable and applied to charitable purposes only, the income tax already paid may be recovered. As such this is of great benefit to small groups such as ourselves as the recovery of income tax provides an additional source of funds that had previously been unavailable to us. So if anyone out there would like to give us some money as a gift all you need to know is our charity number (which is XR96728).

Whenever our members pay their membership fees we will now be able to claim back the income tax that was previously paid on that amount of money (providing of course that the member concerned is a current tax payer).

Charitable status does bring with it certain responsibilities that could possibly restrict the activities of a group as charitable organisations are not allowed to have political objectives. This will, however, have no adverse effect on the Cavehill Conservation Campaign's ability to carry out its activities as we can still seek to influence opinion on particular issues that are directly relevant to our objectives

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and experience. Other clauses are that we must confine our objectives and activities to those which are charitable in law and that we cannot be paid for any services we provide.

As you can see the benefits of achieving charitable status far outweigh any potential disadvantages and we look forward to ensuring that every pound we receive in the future goes a little further than it did in the past.

Chapel of the Resurrection: Progress at last

As an imposing figure on the townscape of North Belfast it is difficult not to notice the Grade B Listed Building *Chapel of the Resurrection* between Waterloo and Innisfayle Parks (off the Antrim Road) and under the shadow of Cavehill.

Those frequenting the area will also have noticed that, until very recently, the Chapel has been an eyesore, lying empty and neglected almost to the point where the fabric and structural integrity of the building was brought into question and the loss of Belfast's second Listed Building looked imminent.

As an ongoing feature of the Cavehill Campaigner we are pleased to inform you that as of 18th August 2006 new hope and a new lease of life have been secured for the Chapel. At this date planning permission was granted with conditions for the Chapel as part of a larger housing development whereby the building is to have its facades restored to their original glory and converted internally to three apartments.

In accordance with a condition of the planning permission, works to repair and renovate the Chapel commenced within three months of the date of the permission and are being overseen by one of Ulster's top Conservation Architects Mr Dawson Stelfox. In a recent interview for a local newspaper Mr Stelfox spoke positively about the restoration and future of the Chapel.

In regards the restoration of the fabric of the Chapel, Mr Stelfox highlighted the main problem as being the roof and its supporting beams stating that the roof slates and rotted timbers had been removed, with internal props being put in place to secure the building in order to make the Chapel's shell safe and watertight. Mr Stelfox also noted that following the refit of the roof the building will be let dry out for a year and only then shall the seven huge arched windows and fantastic rose windows be replaced. In the meantime the exterior stonework will be fully restored as accurately as possible by the quality stonemasons available in Northern Ireland. In addition to the exterior, the potential to retain and restore existing internal detailing such as the stencilled ceiling, upper wall embellishments of fleurs-de-lis and Gothic star-shaped decorations also exists.

While ambiguity now surrounds the intention of the developer to fully adhere to the planning condition of three apartments, there is potential he may re-apply for use as a single dwelling. The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign shall endeavour to monitor progress and keep you informed as to the future of this fine piece of our architectural heritage.

Police Blitz the Park

You may have heard an interview on Good Morning Ulster on Tuesday 17 April when I and another committee member, along with two teenagers, spoke to reporter Barbara Collins at the Belfast Castle. The item was sparked by continuing concerns about young people gathering in the Cave Hill Country Park and other visitors feeling intimidated. It coincided with an announcement from the PSNI that they will blitz the Park over the next few months in an attempt to deter the drinking, drug-taking and vandalism.

The two of us made the point that there were indeed problems in the Park and we welcomed the police initiative - we felt that a public space such as this needs management and that such management must necessarily involve the police. The two teenagers took the entirely reasonable view that not all teenagers abused the facilities and that it was unfair to tar them all with the same brush. It does not, however, take many unruly teenagers in the grounds to create a feeling of intimidation, especially in lone women and young families.

I reported that on the previous Saturday, I had seen the PSNI taking action in the park. They had intercepted a crowd of young drinkers below the tree-line above the main gates of the park. These youngsters had lit a fire and created a lot of litter. The police extinguished the fire, confiscated the drink and made the youngsters pick up the litter and then dispersed them. It will add much to the peace of mind of residents in the area of the Castle Gates if such actions continue as promised. It goes without saying that if any of us witness any anti-social activities, we should contact the

PSNI and it appears that action will be taken. If you have any comments in the future on the success or otherwise of such strategies, please contact me or any other committee member.

Another dimension of the problems in the park was illustrated on the night after the broadcast: extensive fire damage was caused to the area at the back of the hill facing Glengormley and the authorities reported that this was malicious. While it is true that vegetation regenerates after superficial burning, ground nesting birds such as pipits and larks are badly affected. There is also the danger that a fire can penetrate the peat layer and smoulder for weeks and indeed months, thereby irreparably damaging the habitat. These problems need to be publicised in the hope that people can be alerted to the damage being done, not just to the environment in the park but to our image in Northern Ireland. I have noticed in the last year an increased number of foreign visitors using the facilities in the park. What impression do they get of us when they come across groups of unruly young people creating noise and litter and indulging in other antisocial activities?

Cormac E Hamill

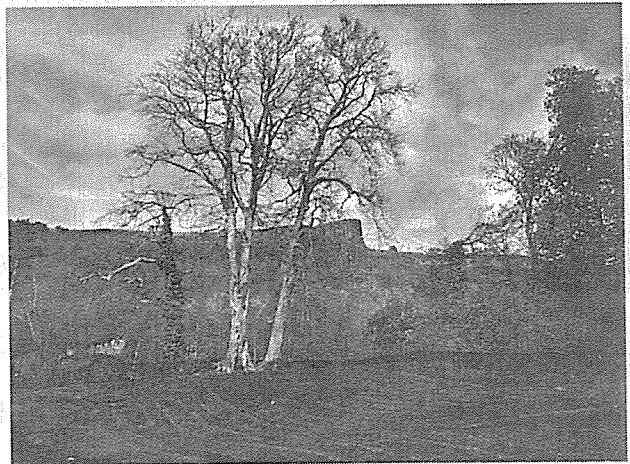
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St. Clements Retreat Housing Development - an Update

Fifteen months ago the Redemporists submitted a planning application to the Planning Service for planning permission for a proposed residential development. On Thursday 5 April 2007, the Planning Service presented this application to the Planning Committee of the Belfast City Council for outline planning approval.

At the request of Councillor Naomi Long, the Planning Committee agreed to defer making any decision as Councillor Long is seeking a meeting with the Planning Service for further information and clarification on a number of matters.

On 1st February 2007, residents living adjacent to St. Clements Retreat Grounds received notification from the Planning Service regarding amended plans in relation to a 5.5 metre access road leading from the Antrim Road past St. Gerard's Church into the grounds of St. Clements. A retaining wall is also to be constructed to contain the steep embankment opposite the Church and the Parochial House.

Questions still remain unanswered with regard to the volume of traffic generated by the proposed development, which could be in excess of 130 vehicles. The Consultants claim that the site access is adequate to accommodate the traffic onto a main arterial road and that there will be "no adverse impact on road safety".

The Cavehill Conservation Campaign has particular concerns regarding the future of animals and protected trees in the area of development. The Department has been asked to give consideration to the protected species in these grounds and it still remains to be seen what action will be taken to secure the habitats of the animals concerned.

With regard to the Tree Preservation Order, there still remains a question over whether or not the Department will enforce the conditions of the Order before and during development. When Full Planning Approval is granted it is imperative that the development is not permitted to become larger in terms of the number of housing units as that would have an adverse effect on both trees and animal habitats in the Grounds.

BRIAN CALLAGHAN

Herbal Heaven

Seven years have passed since the Millennium Herb Garden was planted at Belfast Castle and it is progressing well as is the Ginkgo Tree which is in bud. As is well documented, there are great benefits and pleasure in growing and using your own herbs. They can be grown in pots on a window-sill, in raised beds in a garden or indeed in any available space. Years ago the keen gardener would have had a herb bed but nowadays plants of all different types are readily available from many sources including the local DIY store.

Historically plant remedies have been our medicines, our friends in maintaining emotional balance and key ingredients in our skin and hair care formulas. Today we are rediscovering this nourishing connection to the earth, reviving a tradition long practised by our forefathers. Past generations knew a lot about plant home remedies and the pharmacists sold dried herbs and herbal products. People grew and gathered medicinal herbs as well as culinary ones. The use of these was handed down through generations. Unfortunately, during the twentieth century, these remedies were gradually replaced by over-the-counter drugs and forgotten.

Think back: did your mother or grandmother ever put a mustard plaster on your chest to relieve congestion or give you onions to reduce a fever? Surely someone would have suggested cold wet teabags if you had tired and puffy eyes? If folk remedies like these sound familiar you have experienced a connection with the ancient healing art. Maybe you are using herbal remedies without realising it - have you relaxed with a cup of camomile tea, took ginger tea for indigestion or put cabbage leaves on painful joints? Even if you haven't, that doesn't mean that you are not benefiting from the healing powers of the plant kingdom. A lot of modern-day health care is based on nature's enduring pharmacy. When you are out buying your bedding plants have a quick look at the herb section, purchase a few to start with...you won't regret it and you will be well on your way to herbal heaven.

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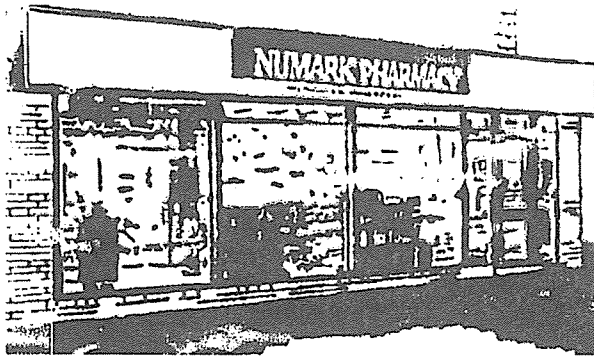
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2006 Cave Hill Survey - Update

It has been our habit in recent years to carry out a survey of the numbers of visitors to Cave Hill Country Park. For a number of years we selected a Sunday in June and counted visitors to the Caves and to McArt's Fort between the hours of 10 o'clock and 4 o'clock in the afternoon (surveys in earlier years showed that there were comparatively few visitors outside those hours) Over that time interval, we established that about 400 visit the vicinity of the caves and about 300 reach McArt's Fort.

We have given that information to the Belfast Parks Committee and to its officers in the Castle. It allows us to argue that quite a large number of visitors walk in the upper reaches of the Park, it means that we can make a case for effective management of those regions and it also means that we can show that the Park is already catering for substantial numbers of visitors and needs no fancy marketing strategies or unsympathetic development.

It is interesting to note that, in the last year, the Council itself has begun to survey visitor numbers and have set up a number of automatic monitoring positions throughout the park. You might have already noticed these: they consist of two wooden posts, one of which has a beam transmitter and the other a reflector. These record the numbers who break the infra-red beams and can distinguish between pedestrians and bike users. Last year we decided to change emphasis and to try to establish the routes by which visitors reached McArt's Fort. We hoped that this might inform any future debate we might have with the Council regarding priorities in spending on paths and litter.

We decided to survey five main routes. We found that overall, visitors to McArt's Fort were 373, up from the 300 average of previous years. Of these, 111 approached along the escarpment from the Glengormley direction, 99 came in on the track from the Hightown Road, 71 up from the caves, 63 across the summit of the hill from the McLaughlin's landfill quarry and 29 up along the old sheep's path from the northern edge of the Wallace quarry.

We intend to repeat the same exercise this year. The date is fixed for Sunday 17 June. Anyone willing to give three hours of their time (two hours to the survey and one hour for access and return) would be very welcome. I can be contacted at cormachamill@ireland.com or by telephone on 90291357.

Cormac E Hamill

BLUEBELLS

A Poem by Tom Honey

We could have chosen better –
any of those blue-ceilinged mornings
May had brought, but now we climb
through overcast. Cave Hill frets
in a drizzle, glum as the pewter Lough.
I turn, responding to your cry.
Gathered in drifts beneath the trees
we find the truant sky.

Many thanks to Tom for allowing us to reproduce the above poem. It can be found alongside many others in his debut poetry collection *A View of Water* which can be purchased from Copycats, 537 Antrim Road.

FIRES DEVASTATE

As you will be aware, the recent spell of good weather has brought a number of devastating fires to green areas across Northern Ireland. Here are two articles on the fire issue from two different perspectives: that of Jim Bradley (Manager of the Belfast Hills Partnership) and John Gray (committee member and ex-chairman of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign).

HILLS ON FIRE

As I'm writing this, the Black Mountain is on fire again, with a doleful pall of smoke hugging the back of the mountain and rolling down into the Colin Valley. This is the latest in a number of serious fires over Easter at Carnmoney, Cave Hill, Black Mountain and Divis as well as a range of other fires across other parts of the hills and Northern Ireland. Carnmoney lost 5000 young saplings, Black Mountain 75 hectares of upland heath plus a large part burning now, while Cave Hill has had 2km² burnt on the northern end last week. All of this adds up to much loss of wildlife, scars on our landscapes and loss of amenity.

There was a sense of unease and inevitability amongst site managers in the run up to the Easter school holidays, with this long run of dry weather more suited to May/June than March/April. Idle hands and tinder dry heather and grass was always going to be a deadly combination. What rain we have seen since is a spit in the wind compared to the weeks of downpour we would need to get the hills as wet as they normally would be at this time of year.

If there is a silver lining in the cloud of smoke, it's that all the fires so far have been extinguished within hours. This is thanks to the prompt reporting of fires (never assume

someone else has reported it!) and the great work on the ground by the Fire and Rescue Service. It's incredibly exhausting work fighting hill fires, often with a long trek in heavy gear before you even get there. All of this has meant that – so far – we have avoided a fire that has got hold over days. These tend to re-ignite but also often burn right down through the thin peaty soil to the bedrock. This kills all the vegetation, opening the soil up to erosion and taking years to recover whereas the sites which suffer 'quick' fires can show resprouting from roots in a matter of weeks. The soil is very thin in parts on the site burning at present in Divis so fingers crossed that it doesn't get a hold.

The Partnership has produced laminated Belfast Hill public site maps for all the fire tenders, showing the site access roads, water sources, contact details and any other detail which will be of help. We will be working further with the Fire Service to keep learning and improving on how we can best manage this major problem, but we may have a long hot summer in front of us....

JIM BRADLEY

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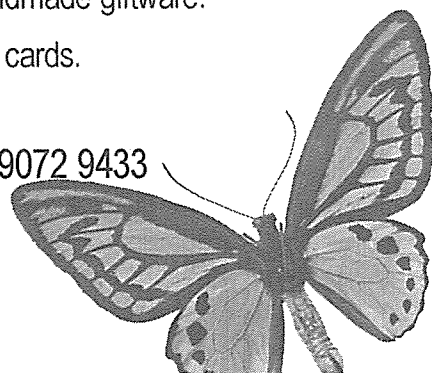
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THE BELFAST HILLS

THE CAVE HILL FIRES: A POSSIBLE SOLUTION?

On the evening and night of 17th/18th April a huge fire ravaged two square kilometres of the Cave Hill on the Glengormley side. For locals the hill appeared like a volcano. Six fire appliances were called out, and while they were able to prevent damage to surrounding housing and to prevent the fire spreading further, they had to leave it to burn itself out as darkness fell. The extent of this year's blaze was sufficient to make the regional news.

It is an all too familiar story. Barely a year goes by without a major fire on the Cave Hill. This one, like many of its predecessors, was certainly started deliberately: this was the conclusion of the Fire Service observing 'the number of fires and their locations'.

The season of high risk lasts from mid-March through to mid-May when dead brush from the previous year is tinder dry, and new growth has not yet provided green (and more fire resistant) shoots. In this crucial period we almost always get at least one or two weeks of sunshine and drying. This year has, of course, been exceptionally sunny and dry adding to the risks of a major fire.

So once again the nesting birds of the Cave Hill have been fried alive, including a number of protected species such as the skylark. Once again the fragile ecosystem of the upper areas of the hill has been degraded. Recovery, perhaps only partial recovery, will take years, but before then, if the experience of recent years is anything to go by, another roaring fire will have frazzled all before it.

The Fire Service 'will be carrying out further investigations and tackling the problems with other relevant agencies', and presumably including the police and the City Council. All right and proper then? It would be if there was any evidence of anyone ever having been prosecuted for setting the Cave Hill on fire – but there is no evidence of this kind. Surely going through the motions is no longer an adequate answer to this menace.

More generally, we have said in the past that there is a strong argument for a more pro-active park ranger presence on the upper areas of the Cave Hill. That could help deter a whole range of anti-social problems all year round.

Fire deterrence would, however, be a far less time demanding obligation. The period of high risk is at maximum two months, and in most years, given normal rainfall, might amount to no more than a week or two. Morning dew provides some protection so we are talking afternoons and early evenings only.

There would seem to be scope for the relevant agencies to meet in mid-March along with our own group and any other relevant voluntary organisations, and before the fire season, rather than after the disastrous fire has taken place, to agree an alert and response strategy.

The alert part would consist of a warning to all parties based on the ground conditions and the forward weather forecast if it indicated high fire risk. Our own group and other volunteers could certainly act as eyes and ears. Rapid reporting of fires is essential. Spotting can also include observing the route of fire raisers as they cross the hillside starting a series of fires.

We then have to depend on rapid response times both from the Fire Service and the Police. Perhaps we can do better in the early extinguishing of fires and hopefully we can achieve the arrest of some fire raisers.

We do recall an earlier venture involving co-operation between the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, the Council, and the police when an active watch was kept on the hill over a number of days leading to the arrest of a number of motor-bike scramblers. That problem has subsequently markedly diminished. Let's resolve to do the same with fire-raising.

JOHN GRAY

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"Misty morning on Cave Hill"



Photo courtesy of Cormac Hamill
7 • The Cavehill Campaigner

The Giant's Park: Cableway Threat to the Cave Hill?

The public at large is bound broadly to welcome the end of dumping on the north foreshore of Belfast Lough and its prospective conversion into the Giant's Park. It will certainly improve the view from the summit of Cave Hill, indeed the proposed name for the park suggests a Cave Hill link. It is said, although there is no documentary evidence for it, that Jonathan Swift while riding daily along the foreshore from Kilroot to Belfast perceived the Cave Hill as a sleeping giant and, thus inspired, dreamt up the idea of *Gulliver's Travels*.

The City Council's web-site provides some outline proposals for the park. These are commendable enough. It will provide:

200 acres of open public parkland, with educational, leisure and recreational facilities which will be determined following a rigorous and extensive consultation process which has been taking place with the close communities of North Belfast, other community groups throughout Belfast, and the key stakeholders and user groups in the wider community. Whilst the content of the park should not be pre-determined, the park could contain a wide variety of components, such as jogging and walking paths, an extension to the National Cycle Network and a festival space which can host concerts, exhibitions and gatherings.

If you look at the sketches on the website, up pops something not mentioned anywhere else in the narrative – a cableway from the park to the summit of the Cave Hill. It is a relief to find that *'the sketches are purely for demonstration purposes and have not been agreed'*, but this is short-lived because *'they show possible ideas and activities that the Giant's Park could be used for'*.

It is lamentable that any such notion should even surface when as recently as 2002 public opposition to another Cave

Hill cableway proposal was evident (as voiced in the May 2003 *Cave Hill Campaigner*). In our editorial then we recalled how the public had had to resist plans for a ski lift in the late 1970s and cableway proposals in the early 1990s. Responding to the 2002 proposal we highlighted the threat that such a proposal would pose to birdlife, flora and fauna as well as archaeological sites. Path erosion and safety were also significant issues. Later, when examining the proposal in more detail, we were also able to establish that the proposal was not financially viable.

We little thought that yet another notion of the same kind would surface in a new Council proposal as soon as 2007. It may be that its insertion in the Giant's Park proposal is another example of the ability of overpaid consultants to come up with serial disasters for the environment. We hope so. If that is the case, our councillors should ensure that this folly is deleted from the list of possibilities for the Giant's Park immediately.

Unfortunately there always are non-walking councillors who are peculiarly enamoured by the idea of cableways. If that is still the case we will have to, as in 2002, rely on the little matter of hard cash. The 2002 proposal which involved a prospective cableway from Bellevue to Cave Hill was estimated to cost £5-£6 million. A cableway from the Lough foreshore to the summit would be a great deal longer and infinitely more expensive.

And a final cautionary thought. The Bellevue proposal would not have passed over residential areas. A Giant's Park to Cave Hill cableway would pass over (and peer into) the homes of many a north Belfast constituent!

JOHN GRAY

gapwines

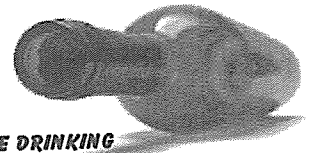
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Probably, Possibly, Never ?

Enduring City: Belfast in the 20th Century – a book review by Edward McCamley

Belfast City Council is to be congratulated on its contribution to the publication of a splendid new book on the city - possibly the most comprehensive book to date on Belfast and one that should be read by anyone interested in and concerned about the development of the city. Produced in association with the Royal Irish Academy, this handsome volume is edited by Frederick Boal and Stephen Royle. It includes chapters on virtually every significant aspect of Belfast's development over the previous century, and contains essays by Jonathon Bardon, author of the most recent general history of the city. Those who live in this area of Belfast will, no doubt, derive particular pleasure from the fact that *Enduring City: Belfast in the 20th Century* also includes some thoughtful reflections by the literary critic Patricia Craig on Cave Hill as a setting in work by a number of important twentieth century Belfast writers, and a full colour reproduction of a wonderful painting by Catherine McWilliams of the *Cavehill Gallery*.

However, emotion of an entirely different kind will be engendered by the material contributed by Austin Smyth who deals with an aspect of Belfast's recent development which may, at local level, have serious environmental repercussions on the Cavehill and Antrim Road areas. Smyth, who headed the University of Westminster's Department of Transport Development, and in 2002 became Director General at the Institute of Transport and Logistics in Dublin, describes the increasingly malign influence of the motor car on the community.

Belfast, he points out, - and readers may be surprised to learn - is the most car dependent medium size city in Western Europe. The result is an environmentally unsustainable urban structure. There are, to be fair, many reasons for this, not least a prolonged period of civil disturbance. But an additional and obvious one was the failure to plan for a high quality public transport system which would be an attractive alternative to the private car, of which there are now about 800,000 in Northern Ireland. But, more recently, this failure of strategic oversight has been exacerbated by the proliferation of residential development along the city's main arterial routes.

Daily, the consequences of this are becoming obvious in the vicinity of the Cave Hill. Over the past decade many family homes have been demolished and replaced by high-density housing units - both public and private. Thus, in the not so distant future, there will be even heavier pressure on main arterial routes such as the Antrim Road with the associated increase in traffic congestion and air pollution. The recent and dramatic rise in house prices will, in turn, result in pressure for further high-density development and the possible encroachment on greenfield areas. Such an approach may very well threaten the integrity of the Cave Hill itself. This, it will be obvious, is a long way from the vision of friendly neighbourhoods and sustainable communities envisioned by the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

The absence of a clear commitment to long-term planning which acknowledges the interdependence of housing infrastructure and transport facilities will result in a car dependent American style urban development, the dangers of which have been mentioned before in *The Cave Hill Campaigner*. Austin Smyth believes that this is increasingly likely if planners do not take appropriate action to forestall it.

There are as many good reasons as there are chapters in *Enduring City* for reading it; for those apprehensive about the pressures on the Cavehill area, Smyth's contribution may be an alarming read. In 1990, he says, the development he outlines could probably have been avoided; at the moment, appropriate action might possibly avoid it; when the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan is reviewed in 2015, the answer is likely to be "too late".

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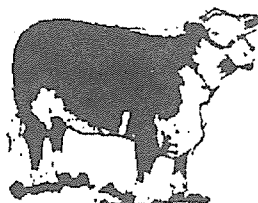
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HEDGE-LAYING - it can be fun!

I first heard about hedge-laying a few years ago when Prince Charles was shown doing it on a television programme about his organic farm in Gloucestershire. The practice of hedge-laying, like other country skills, largely died out during the twentieth century. Many hawthorn hedges were allowed to fall into disrepair and their role was taken over by fencing. The sight of a row of hawthorn trees with large gaps between them is a common one along our country roadsides. But in recent years, it would be fair to say that hedge-laying has experienced something of a revival - but what exactly is it?

The purpose of hedge-laying is simply to maintain a hedgerow that is thick enough and strong enough to stop cattle and sheep from escaping from a field. The main technique used is to cut through about 90% of the width of the stems at a height of about one foot above the ground and then gently lay the stem over so that they are either horizontal or nearly horizontal to the ground. After that is done, it will be necessary to secure the stem to ensure that it does not snap off in high winds. This is usually done using stakes which may have been cut from the hedge or from nearby trees or bushes. Then there is a bit of weaving of stems to make the hedgerow more compact. Within a year, vertical stems will be growing from the laid-over horizontal stems and the result will be a thicker, stronger hedge. The same technique can be repeated at intervals of around ten years. It can be applied to any deciduous hedge, including beech, but was traditionally most commonly employed in hawthorn hedgerows.

Ireland's hedgerows mostly date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the open field system of agriculture was replaced by enclosed fields for both arable and livestock farming. On the uplands, the "hedges" are often much older and mostly take the form of dry stone walls

which have survived intact into the present. Most of the hedgerows have also survived, even if neglected, and help to create the traditional Irish patchwork quilt landscape of small fields. Although there has been some destruction of hedgerows in recent decades to create larger fields, it has not been on as big a scale as the destruction in England.

In Ireland, country hedgerows are traditionally dominated by hawthorn, which usually blooms in May and is known as may blossom. However many hedges also contain a mixture of native species, including blackthorn whose white blossom appears in early spring before the leaves appear on the stems and whose fruits (sloes) are popular with gin drinkers. Other common species include elder, holly, wild roses and blackberries. Hedgerow trees are also common, typically ash, willow or sycamore.

Hedgerows are very important for biodiversity in Ireland and are important wildlife habitats, not least for nesting birds and of course hedgerow fruits are an important food source for many birds in winter. In addition, many hedgerows are accompanied by small banks and drainage ditches which provide a habitat for insects and amphibians as well as water-loving plants.

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign hopes to get involved in hedge-laying in the Cave Hill Country Park in the future. This would be as part of a hedgerow restoration project which would also involve new planting.

Peter McCloskey



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OF GRAVE CONCERN

This year, European Cemetery Week will be from 26th May – 3rd June and introduces a series of guided tours of cemeteries throughout the summer. Here in Belfast, our Cemetery week starts on 26th May with a tour of Clifton Street Cemetery where Henry Joy McCracken is buried. For more information on this and other tours contact www.glenravel.com or www.deadireland.com

At the web site www.irishgraves.com Ray Bateson highlights the artistic, cultural and historic importance of cemeteries in Ireland. He maintains that “cemeteries are part of our culture, part of our history; the head stones tell stories and are symbolic in many different ways.” Bateson is the author of two books: *The End-An Illustrated Guide to the Graves of Irish Writers* and *Dead and Buried in Dublin*. The Irish Times described *The End* as a “highly readable and intensely visual guide”.

Nowadays some people are looking for an alternative to the traditional funeral. In October 2005 the group *Bury Me Green* held a conference in Dublin to promote Natural Burials. The conference was initiated by Judith Hoad, a respected practitioner of herbal medicine. You may have previously read about Judith when she laid her beloved husband to rest in the back garden of their Donegal home.

Below Judith tells us a little bit more about natural burial grounds:

ECOLOGICAL BURIAL – A GROWING PRACTICE

In a custom built workshop, encircled by windows, a basket-maker bends and tames strong willow rods. Another week of work and a new burial casket will be available. The work

began in the osier bed outside the workshop where the willow rods were harvested from the parent crowns, which are now sprouting new growth for another harvest, next year. The casket is a rectangular one, not the conventional wedge shape of a willow coffin, though these are also made here. The rectangular one is dual purpose, designed for the forward thinker, who would use it as a blanket chest, or a toy box, or similar, until such time as it is needed for a burial.

Willow caskets are just one of a range of innovative funerary goods that accompany the movement for ecological burial. Writing a **Living Will**, expressing the wish for no embalming fluid (full of environmentally harmful chemicals) and a desire for an ecological coffin, whether of willow, or moulded recycled paper – like the **Ecopod** – or a plank with a woolen blanket to enfold the body, known as a **Shroud**, is another aspect of how more and more people are accepting and preparing for that inevitable day when they will die and their body can be returned to Nature.

Natural Burial Grounds have been established on nearly 200 sites in the UK since 1993, when Carlisle City Council inaugurated the first one. Some are in private ownership, others are owned by public authorities. In all of them, large permanent grave markers are absent. Instead, trees, bushes and wildflowers are planted, ultimately creating a natural meadow or woodland area, nourished by the full cycle of growth and decay and unpolluted by anything chemical.

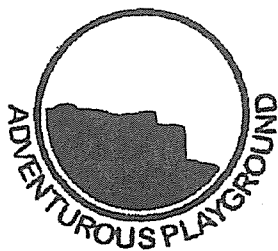
The **Bury Me Green** movement aspires to create such sites here, in Ireland, as well, where the ecological coffin is rapidly becoming the coffin of choice.

For details of **Bury Me Green** or for further information on contacts, **Ecological Coffins Living Wills** etc., please telephone *Living Earth Funeral Options* at (0035374) 9736406 or check out their website at www.dublin.ie/burymegreen

Introduction by Catherine McWilliams
'Ecological Burial' by Judith Hoad



Photo courtesy of *The Irish News*



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NEWS OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign has a number of events coming up over the next couple of months. Hopefully there'll be something to interest you so please read on!

GUIDED WALK - SATURDAY 19 MAY

Ever wished you knew one birdcall from another? If you are an early riser (and even if you aren't) you are very welcome to come and enjoy the dawn chorus with us. RSPB expert Lee Toal will be there to help us learn more about the birds making the sounds. This won't be a strenuous hike, I'm reliably informed it'll be more of a dander! Anyone who wishes to come along should meet us at the Castle Gates (top of Inisfayle Park) at 4.30am (yes, 4.30am!!!!) on the morning of Saturday 19 May.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - WEDNESDAY 23 MAY

All members (and others who are interested in joining) are welcome at our Annual General Meeting in the Lansdowne Hotel at 7.30pm on Wednesday 23 May. We intend to make this a very interesting night for all - it's your chance to raise your concerns about any aspect of the Cave Hill, tell us what you think we should be doing and for you to find out more about some of our activities. We also have a guest speaker arranged who will be providing an insight on environmentally-friendly building products. Hope to see you there!

CLEAN-UP DAY - SATURDAY 2 JUNE

Every year the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign devotes one Saturday afternoon to cleaning up some of the rubbish strewn across the Hill by unthinking people. With the recent increase in visitor numbers and the ever-present danger to wildlife it is even more crucial that we continue to keep our Hill free of rubbish. Over the last few years the number of people willing to help us out with the clean-up has dwindled away so go on - do your bit! If you are willing to help us out, please meet us outside the main door of the Belfast



CALLING ALL MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS!

If you are a member wishing to renew your membership for 2007 or a new member wishing to join, it's never been simpler! You can either join at our Annual General Meeting at the Lansdowne Hotel on Wednesday, 23rd May or attach a cheque to this form and sent it to: Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, 32 Waterloo Park, Belfast, BT15 5HU.

All email addresses supplied will be kept secure and only used to communicate with our members.

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£10 Waged

£5 Unwaged (please tick appropriate box)

If you are a current British taxpayer please tick here (we will then be able to reclaim the income tax already paid from the Inland Revenue - ticking this box will not cost you any more money but will benefit the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign)

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign is a Registered Charity (Charity Number XR96728)

Castle at 2.00pm on Saturday 2 June. Please come suitably dressed but gloves and rubbish pickers will be provided. This event suits all ages - sometimes you don't have to walk very far to find rubbish...and who knows, you may even get your picture in the paper if you come along!

CAVE HILL VISITOR SURVEY - SUNDAY 17 JUNE

This year we intend to continue our annual tradition of counting the number of people who use Cave Hill. If you'd like to volunteer, all you have to do is sit at McArt's Fort for two hours and count the number of people you see! All volunteers will be arranged into pairs to ensure safety. For more information please see our article on last year's survey on page 5 or contact Cormac Hamill on 90291357.

GARDEN FETE - SUNDAY 24 JUNE

During recent refurbishing of the Belfast Castle, a promotional poster was found of a fete that was held in the Castle Grounds on June 21st and 22nd 1929. Present management were keen to restart the tradition and have, as a result, scheduled a Garden Fete on Sunday 24 June from 1.00pm to 5.00pm.

The original fete (for which admission was one shilling) was held under the auspices of the Earl of Shaftsbury and the Mayoress of Belfast, Lady Coates, was in attendance. Events included dances (held every half hour), a mongrel dog show and a gymkhana & horse jumping event! Music was provided by the City Tramways Military Band and all proceeds were in aid of St. Peter's Church.

Anyone wishing to purchase a framed copy of the rediscovered poster advertising the 1929 Fete can purchase one from *Cellar Antiques* in the Belfast Castle.

As you may expect, the 2007 Garden Fete will be decidedly different in content and will be very family orientated with activities including storytelling, guided walks, falconry, entertainment for children, music and dance displays.

If you plan to attend, please park your car at Park Lodge School where a shuttle bus will be available to transport you up to the Castle Grounds. And even though the poor people of 1929 had to pay an admittance fee of a shilling, you can leave your shillings at home - admittance is free!

LIZARD & NEWT IDENTIFICATION - SATURDAY 30 JUNE

We are lucky to be able to call on the services of Catherine Bertrand for an evening that will help those who attend to identify lizards and newts. Catherine is Nature Reserve Warden for the Ulster Wildlife Trust Reserve at Slievenacloy and is Northern Ireland's representative to the Amphibian & Reptile Groups UK. Modesty refrains her from declaring herself an expert (though in my opinion she is one) but her enthusiasm is self-professed and she is bound to provide a very informative and entertaining evening for all. Anyone wishing to attend should meet us at the entrance to Belfast Castle at 7.00pm on Saturday 30 June - the talk and walk are expected to last until about 9.00pm.

EVENTS AT SLIEVNACLOY - SAT 26 MAY & SAT 30 JUNE

Although Slievenacloy is under the management of the Ulster Wildlife Trust, they also have a couple of upcoming events which may be of interest. A Primrose Picnic will be held on Saturday 26 May and a Bloomin' Butterflies Walk will be held on Saturday 30 June (both events 12.00-2.30pm). For more details please contact the Ulster Wildlife Trust on 44830282 or email the Warden directly at catherine.bertrand@gmail.com

Well, hopefully you've found something of interest in our varied programme of activities. Now that you've read about them, all you have to do is turn up and have a good time!

MARTIN McDOWELL