



# Friends of Corstorphine Hill

## NEWSLETTER No.48

OCTOBER 2013 Editor: Fred Davies Tel: 337 9232

[www.corstorphinehill.org.uk](http://www.corstorphinehill.org.uk)

(e-mail: [daviesfd@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:daviesfd@blueyonder.co.uk))

Registered Charity No. SCO 28842

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As usual we have had a busy summer. Our events on the Hill have been well attended, helped no doubt by much better weather than last year. We had a Birdwatching Walk in May, Wildflower Walk in June and a Tree Walk in August. Also we had storytelling for children in the Walled Garden and a butterflies, bees and beasties hunt also in the garden and the popular Fungus Foray on the hill.

**Listed elsewhere in this Newsletter are the details of our winter programme of talks.** Visitor numbers to the Tower on Sundays are also better than last year, probably for the same reason. We have welcomed a number of groups to the Hill for guided walks, including church groups, schools, Brownies, and Beavers. We are looking forward to a large number of visitors on the afternoons of

**September 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> for Edinburgh Doors Open Day**

The Ranger Service, along with volunteer groups have continued to try to control invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and Salmonberry on the Hill. This is an ongoing task and any offers of help are very welcome. We again won the **Community Garden Green Flag Award**, which is just reward for our dedicated team of garden volunteers. Please come along and help (Tuesdays 11-1pm & Thursdays 2-4pm) or just bring a trowel on any other day and tackle the **buttercups and docks only**.

Edinburgh Field Archaeological Society are carrying out a number of investigatory digs on the Hill this year – check their website for details. We hope to receive their reports and in future have walks and talks on their findings.

We have contributed our thoughts to the Council for the 10 year Plan for Parks and Greenspaces currently being prepared.

At present we are conducting a major revision of the FoCH website : we have contracted a website designer, and are currently revising much of the content, some of which is out of date, so watch this space.

Gordon Swann (Chairman)



## WINTER TALKS PROGRAMME

We have an exciting and varied talks programme for this year, we hope there is something to interest everyone.

All the talks will be held in the Capital Hotel, Clermiston Road.

### “Birds of Corstorphine Hill”

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 7.30pm

**Ian Moore**, who lives locally and is author of the Michelin –I-Spy Guide to Scottish Nature. He has collected photo’s and recordings made on the hill over the last 7 years.

### “Houses of the Old Cramond Parish”

Bill Weir

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm

### “Secret Shipwrecks of the Forth”

Mike Clark (Diver & Photographer)

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014 7.30pm

The following is NOT at the Capital Hotel

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2014

We will visit the Corstorphine Heritage Centre in St Margarets Park, to see and hear about their archive of the history of Corstorphine. Numbers are limited for this visit, so please book a place with Gordon Swann Tel. 334 4769

### *OUR NEW BENCH.....*

Towards the end of 2012 we commissioned Chainsaw Creations to carve a memorial bench in memory of our late chairman Eddie Price, using money donated to the garden fund.

The commission was to create a bench depicting the woodland life of the hill. You will see from the picture below it has been a great success, with badgers, rabbits, squirrel, fox, bird and even a butterfly captured with great expertise.

The finished article weighed in at a hefty 1 ton and presented a problem of how to get it into position, up a slope on to the site where it is today. The zoo came to our rescue, Robert Harden, Head Gardener at the zoo came with his team and with pulling equipment and much sweat they hoisted it into position. Our sincere thanks to him and all his team.

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June around 30 people gathered in the garden, including Eddie’s wife Margaret and their family and friends to hear Paul Eadie dedicate the bench in Eddie’s memory.

The bench has already proved a big hit with everyone visiting the garden.



Bench by Chainsaw Creations. Technical support by Edinburgh Zoo Garden Team

## **BARNTON QUARRY PROJECT.....**

**How did the idea for restoring Barton Quarry come about?** We've been planning to restore the complex since 2005, but we knew that the restoration project needed the right people with the vision, enthusiasm and determination to make it successful. It's only been in the last two years that we've been able to assemble the right team and get the restoration project started. The reason that we want to restore the site is two-fold. **Firstly**, the site has a long history which dates back to the formation of the Fighter Control Unit of the famous RAF 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron during WWII. The site is of great historical importance as it is the only surviving example of this type of bunker in the UK which retains the original RAF three-level operations room. **Secondly**, the Cold War is over and the threat of nuclear attack from behind the iron curtain has long gone. The Cold War was a dark, complex and fascinating period in which the people of the UK lived under constant threat of nuclear annihilation. We want to restore the site to enable us to open an education centre to allow visitors to learn about what really went on during this period in the context of a real government bunker.

**What scale of work still needs to be done on the bunker** The bunker has been neglected for many years and has suffered theft and fire damage. We plan to bring the bunker and the site back to its original glory, and we're now working hard to recover it. It's a huge project, but we're very much focused on our vision. When we started work, the bunker was little more than a badly vandalised shell and the site was overgrown and littered with fly-tipping. We've focused the past six months on recovering the site, which has gone to plan. Our next phase is to take the buildings back to the shell and restore from scratch. We've been overwhelmed by community interest in the site, we now have lots of volunteers working with us on the renovation. Volunteers are the lifeblood of what we're doing here and we're keen for volunteers to get involved in the project.

**How valuable are lessons learned from creating the secret bunker in Fife?** The Secret Bunker was handed over in pristine condition in 1994; quite a different start to what we've been handed at Barnton Quarry! A lot has changed in the intervening 20 years, particularly in relation to technology and options open to us for museum displays. There are exciting new options which we plan to use to replace the mannequins and static displays which we used in the 90s to depict what was going on at the Secret Bunker. With Barnton Quarry we plan to leverage interactive technology to create rotating exhibits, all relevant to the teaching of Cold War history. The space we have on the site is huge, hence we plan to reserve a chunk of our display space to invite guest exhibitors to display with the objective of providing new and interesting display topics for returning visitors.

**What kind of exhibitions can you envisage there being put on?** Our vision is to create a highly interactive learning experience in order to expose the secrecy around the site and to preserve its fascinating history. We want to make the site a landmark museum which preserves our national history and gives everyone the opportunity to see what went on behind closed doors during the Cold War, right where it happened. The scale of the operation here was astonishing; the central operations well is vast and exists over three floors deep underground. We plan to restore it exactly as it was in 1952 so that visitors can experience it for themselves. We also plan to restore and display the communications technology which existed at the time of the Cold War. The bunker had many thousands of phone lines, a full telephone exchange and a room full of teleprinter equipment to ensure that protected officials could continue to communicate when the worst happened.

**What was the bunker's main purpose when it was in operation?** The history of Barnton Quarry reflects the fascinating nature of the Cold War from beginning to end. After WWII, the UK government identified Russia as a key threat to national security. Barnton Quarry was the response to that threat, built in 1952 as the Sector Operations Centre for coordinating RAF Fighter Command response to UK airspace intrusion. The staff at RAF Barnton Quarry protected Scotland from attack by Russian long-range nuclear bombers up until around 1960. With the advent of nuclear missiles in the early 60s, the role of the bunker changed to maintaining government in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. The bunker would have held hundreds of government staff in complete isolation of the outside world for up to 30 days should it have been necessary. The bunker was specifically designed to withstand Russian attack. It's buried 100ft under Corstorphine Hill with walls of 10ft thick reinforced concrete, tank-metal blast doors and a complex air conditioning and filtration system.

**What kind of impact could it have on the Corstorphine area in terms of its economy and community?** Many of the restoration team members live locally, hence community involvement is central to our project and community matters are at the top of our agenda. We're also very keen to make as little environmental impact as possible. We are sensitive to the fact that our site is located in the middle of the Nature Reserve, hence we've been working with local interest groups, the Forestry Commission, the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and wildlife experts to make sure that our project continues in harmony with our surroundings. In terms of the wider community, our intention is to minimise the environmental impact of our project as far as possible. One of our objectives is to offset our carbon footprint on-site, with an object of making the site carbon neutral. We'll be encouraging visitors to use sustainable travel options when visiting the bunker by providing secure bike parking and live bus tracking information (there are bus stops both ways right outside our front door already!). We're working with tree experts to formulate a tree felling and planting programme as the natural balance of woodland trees has been artificially skewed by the presence of the bunker over the operational years. We plan to bring the trees on site back in harmony with the surrounding woodland. To cap it all off, our new 1500m<sup>2</sup> roof will feature an insulating layer of soil and grass on top of the original concrete, literally turning the bunker green! The presence of the museum will of course attract visitors to the area, hence we anticipate a positive impact on the local economy.

## Friends of Corstorphine Hill thank the following for their funding:-



**City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service**

**September 2013**

The summer of 2013 brought with it some fantastic sunshine clearly enjoyed by lots of people far and wide. Such good weather brings with it added pressure on Edinburgh's Natural Heritage Sites. Several abandoned campsites were dutifully cleared across Corstorphine Hill alongside the usual fire debris and litter. Litter bins are provided at all major access points to Corstorphine Hill and as a responsible user; it is up to you to remove any litter generated from site. Most people do this but unfortunately, an irresponsible minority still persist!

The spectacular weather not only encouraged high numbers of people to get out and about but made for good growing conditions especially on Corstorphine Hill where a good part of the site always retains some moisture towards the northern and eastern parts. Unfortunately, these areas tend to be dominated by Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS). You may have noticed piles of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) (HB) especially towards the perimeter fencing of the Nuclear Bunker and Queensferry Road, all hand pulled by a variety of local volunteers and corporate groups. Combined with this approach has been some trial strimming of HB and if deemed successful will be widened out next year. Alongside the problem of HB sits salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*) – both now dominating large tracts of Corstorphine Hill to the detriment of native flora. Again, concerted efforts aimed at controlling salmonberry have been undertaken and will continue to into the winter. Lastly, isolated stands of Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) have been targeted with glyphosate through the efforts of the Friends of Corstorphine Hill who have certified personnel and equipment specifically aimed at dealing with this menace.

Corstorphine Hill Local Nature Reserve is managed carefully by the City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service aided by the Friends of Corstorphine Hill. Alongside day to day management of the site such as grass cutting and litter collection we are guided by a management plan which comes to the end of its 10 year period in November 2014. Most actions contained within this plan related to woodland management and more specifically the investment through the Forestry Commission which took place around 2005/6. The aim now is to have a new 10 year plan ready to implement by November 2014, therefore during the first half of 2014, the production of a draft document will be undertaken and made available for comment by August of that year. I wholeheartedly encourage people with an interest to read and respond accordingly so please keep a lookout for more information nearer the time.

Corstorphine Hill Local Nature Reserve also made the headlines this summer for the wrong reasons. Unfortunately, the discovery of a dismembered body was made on the southern slopes as has been widely documented in the press. The City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service worked very closely with Police Scotland at this time with regards to site information provision and management policies and procedures. The Natural Heritage Service undertakes fortnightly site inspections which cover all main paths and some informal paths, entrances, built structures, furniture and general infrastructure. Given the size of the site, the inspection is broken down to covering half the site one week and half the next therefore making for an official presence on the Hill normally on a weekly basis, if not more often when remedial actions are required. We still rely on information from regular users of the site so if you do encounter anything untoward or have a suggestion on how to improve the site please get in touch via the contact information below.

**City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service**

**Hermitage of Braid**

**69a Braid Road, Edinburgh EH10 6JF**

**[naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk)**