



An Illustrated Oral History

This book was created as part of the Hollybush Histories project in 2019, run by the Friends of Hollybush and funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The stories and information have been gathered by volunteers during the project and cover the time from before Hollybush came into being, through to the present day. These stories have become part of an archive of the Hollybush Story which will be preserved by the Friends of Hollybush for future generations to enjoy. This book is three times the size originally planned and could easily have been twice again; we apologise if your story wasn't selected or your favourite picture hasn't been included. The website www.friendsofhollybush.org.uk has the full original stories and until March 2025 will allow you to add your own story to the collection.

The silk paintings that feature in this booklet are based on a collection of current and historic photos of Hollybush, and were created as part of a workshop with Year 6 pupils, led by artists Helen Thomas and Tony Wade. The workshop took place at Hollybush Primary School, which is on Broad Lane in Kirkstall, in July 2019.

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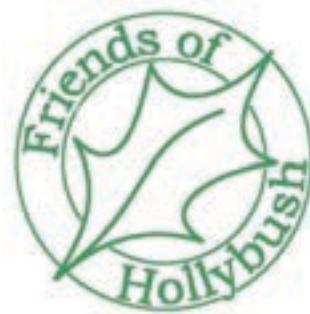
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Hollybush Histories

1979 - 2019

*40 years of stories from the
Hollybush Conservation Centre*

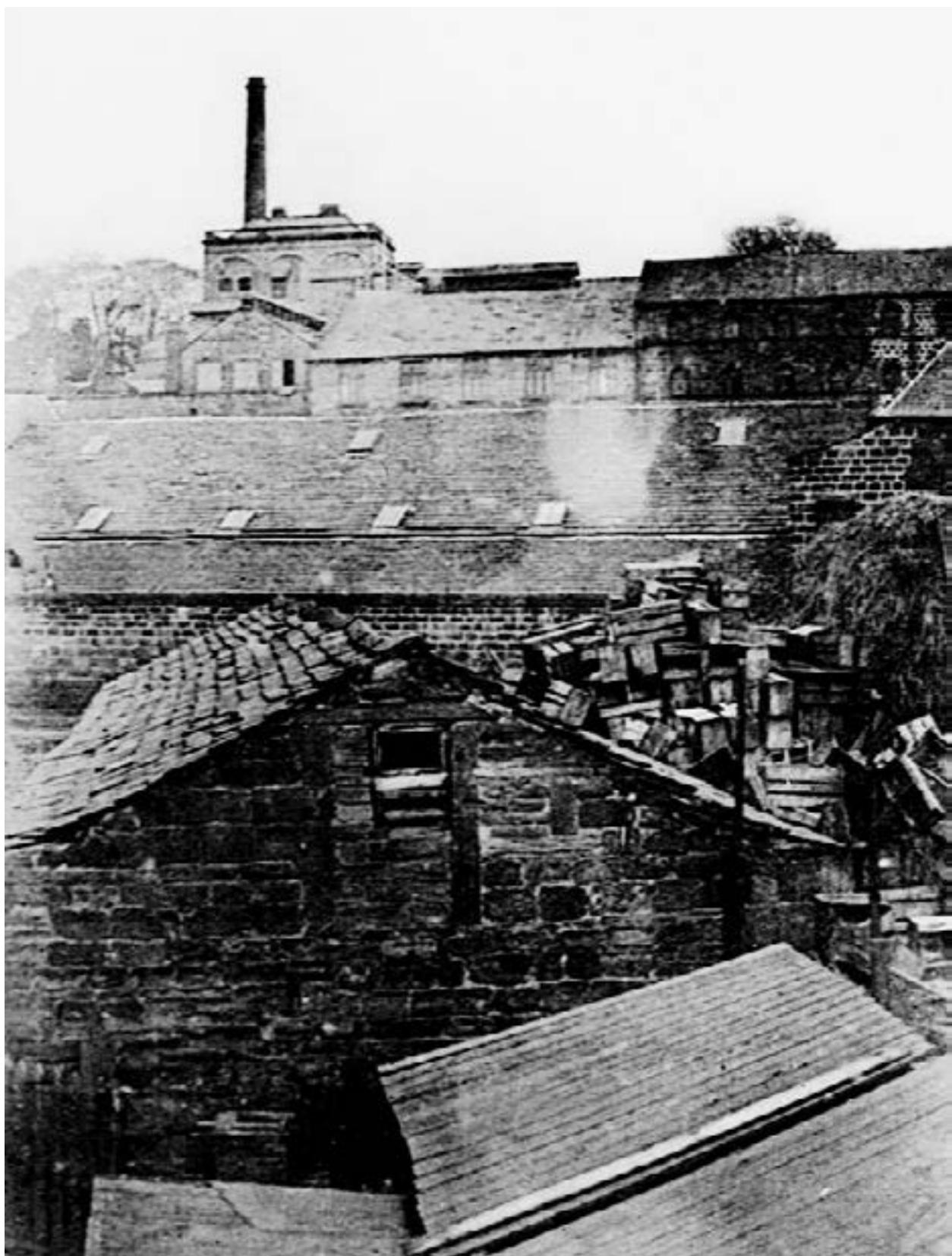




Rear of Hollybush from the road, silk painting by Karoline at Hollybush Primary School



Time for Tea, silk painting by Amierose at Hollybush Primary School



Kirkstall Brewery and yards (now Hollybush yards) in 1919. Photograph provided by the Dawson family in New Zealand

Foreword

It's not just TCV's 60th anniversary we are celebrating this year – 2019 marks the 40th anniversary of our Hollybush Conservation Centre in Leeds.

My first visit to Hollybush was as a Volunteer Officer (or 'VO', as I was proud to call myself) on a training course in the late 1990s. I was struck by the incredible buzz around the place – so many people, from so many different walks of life, coming together to be part of this movement to create and care for green spaces, for people and for nature. That, for me, has always been the magic of TCV – people, many of whom might not otherwise connect with each other, joining forces for a common good. Hollybush, and all those involved over the last 40 years, has always been incredibly effective in conjuring up those connections.

It was a pleasure to attend this year's annual volunteer celebration and hear so many colleagues, volunteers and partners talk so affectionately about everything the Hollybush team currently achieves. This included the Leader of the Council and officers from three key departments – Parks and Countryside, Social Services and Employment & Skills – many of whom spoke of their long personal, as well as organisational, links with Hollybush.

The Friends of Hollybush team have gathered some fantastic stories together here. I hope that you, whatever your link to Hollybush might be, enjoy this celebration of the people and place who, over the last 40 years, have come to epitomise what can be achieved when people connect with green spaces and with each other.

Happy birthday Hollybush. Long may your remarkable work continue.



Darren York
CEO
The Conservation Volunteers



BTCV Landrovers on task in the 1970s, photograph provided by the BTCV Archive



Wyther Lane in the 1930s, , photograph by kind permission of Leeds Libraries,
www.leodis.net

Hollybush

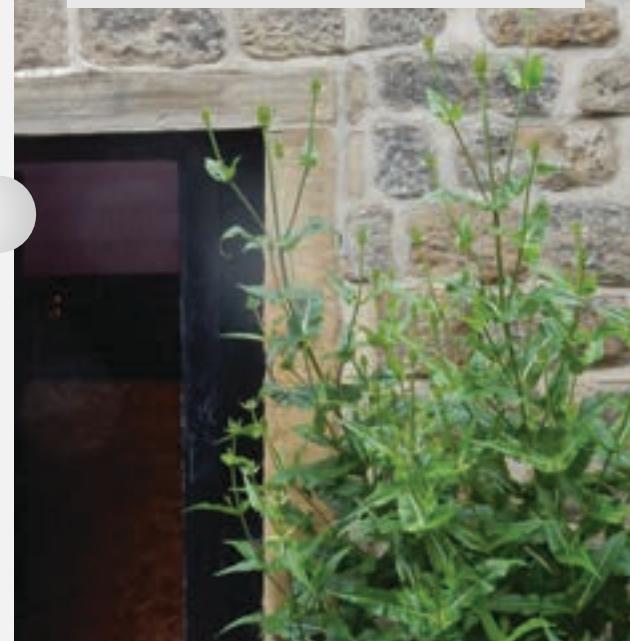
1600-1940

Hollybush sits by an historic river crossing of the River Aire two miles upstream of Leeds city centre.



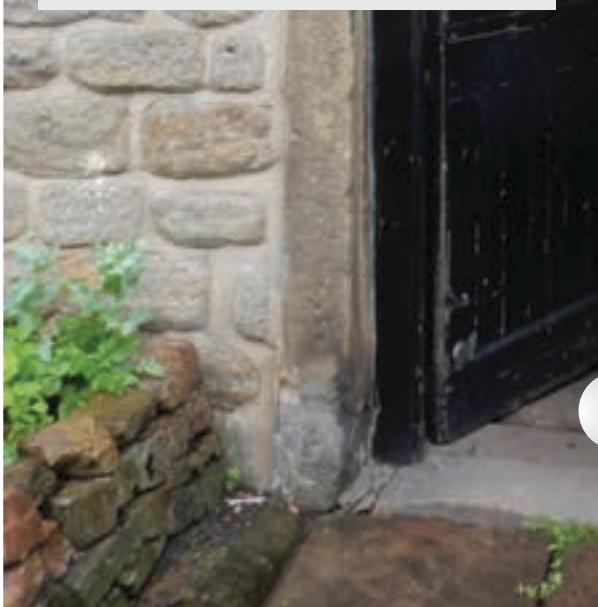
1940-1979

Hollybush House passed through several families and was used as a Methodist meeting room, and a home for canal lock keepers.



BTCV in West Yorkshire pre-1970

The early northern office of BTCV was at Tong Hall, just a few miles from Hollybush.



Restoration 1979-1982

In March 1979 sledgehammers were used to gain entry and the restoration began.



Timeline

1982-1989 Community Programme

The Hollybush Conservation Volunteers (Hollyvols) were launched in March 1982 and run three days a week ever since.

County Days 1990-2000

One county manager, a tree nursery officer and the Cookson Training Officer grew to a team of 8 across West Yorkshire.

Expansion 2000-2010

The Friends of Hollybush was founded in late 2004. Further Education funding saw the creation of the Hollybush Project for learning disabled adults and NVQ training.

Modern 2011-present

Continuous improvements to the building and a new accessible meeting room. On a busy day, there can be over 50 people and 20 staff on site.

Before BTCV

600-1940

Hollybush sits by an historic river crossing of the River Aire two miles upstream of Leeds city centre. The predominance of township names ending “ley” (origin Old English “lea” meaning clearing) suggests settlement in the 7th and 8th century by the Anglo-Saxons within a wooded landscape. Nearby woodlands, notably Bramley Falls and Hawksworth, are remnants of the original forest.

The Domesday Book (1086) entry for Bramley records that two thirds of the land is ‘waste’, possibly a consequence of drastic reduction in local populations by the Harrying of the North in 1069-70 when many villages were destroyed, and those not killed were left to starve as crops and livestock were destroyed.

Just across the river are the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey. The abbey was founded in 1152 as a daughter house of Fountains Abbey and it was dissolved in 1539. Adam de Reinville made over his whole lordship in the manor of Bramley stretching from Newlay to Armley Ridge to the abbey. This almost certainly included the land around Hollybush. After dissolution abbey lands went to Archbishop Cranmer and through various families to the Brudenells, Earls of Cardigan. Fields to the north west of Hollybush are clearly shown on the 1711 map of the Cardigan estate.

Much of the abbey stone, good millstone grit quarried in nearby Bramley Falls, was reused elsewhere, possibly even at Hollybush. The river bridge at Kirkstall was destroyed by Royalist troops in 1642/3, causing the Parliamentary troops to cross at Apperley Bridge on their way from Calverley to take Leeds on 23rd January 1643; however, we don’t yet know if the farm buildings were established at that point.

Whitecote at the summit of the present Leeds Bradford Road may refer to a possible encampment of the King’s troops, certainly a good vantage point. From examining the buildings today, they have a long and complex history of alterations, but date from at least 1700.

The barn was originally aisled with a thatched roof but was remodelled with higher walls and a new roof in the nineteenth century.

In 1777 the canal was open from Leeds to Gargrave but would only be completed to Liverpool in 1816. The farm buildings are marked on Priestley mid-1770s map for the route of the canal and on the Tuke map of 1783.

The Kirkstall Brewery whose big buildings dominate the local skyline opened in 1833, exporting Indian Pale Ale via the canal.

The railway opened in 1846 linking Leeds and Bradford, and Kirkstall station opened in 1860. The railway was widened to four tracks and the station rebuilt north of the Bridge in about 1904. The gap between Hollybush and the river is tight, and the railway bridge comes within feet of the house; at times freight trains literally shake the building. Kirkstall station closed in 1965.

A trade directory of the 1870s lists Joseph Whitwell champion rhubarb farmer of Hollybush House. He is believed to have farmed the land either side of the railway up to Kirkstall Forge and land now the Broadleas estate. The land opposite the abbey was accessed via a tunnel under the road (now the wood store) and a level crossing. Mrs Whitwell was struck by an express train and died in 1876. The Whitwell family were pioneers of using forcing sheds in what became the Rhubarb Triangle. Joseph's brother farmed in the Scotthall, Meanwood area. Joseph was cited as largest grower of the finest quality of forced rhubarb from any one place (Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society 1880). The Rhubarb Express ran from Kirkstall Goods yard to Covent Garden Market, and in the 1950s lorries were loaded at Hollybush on a Friday for the trip to Versailles for Monday morning.

Kirkstall Bridge was rebuilt in 1912. Photographs on the Leodis website of the bridge construction show the Hollybush building much as it is today. At some stage prior to this the road in front of Hollybush was raised to go over the railway, and we believe at this time the top floor was added to leave a street frontage of a two-storey house. This may have contributed to the present structural issues we are working to resolve.

1940-1979

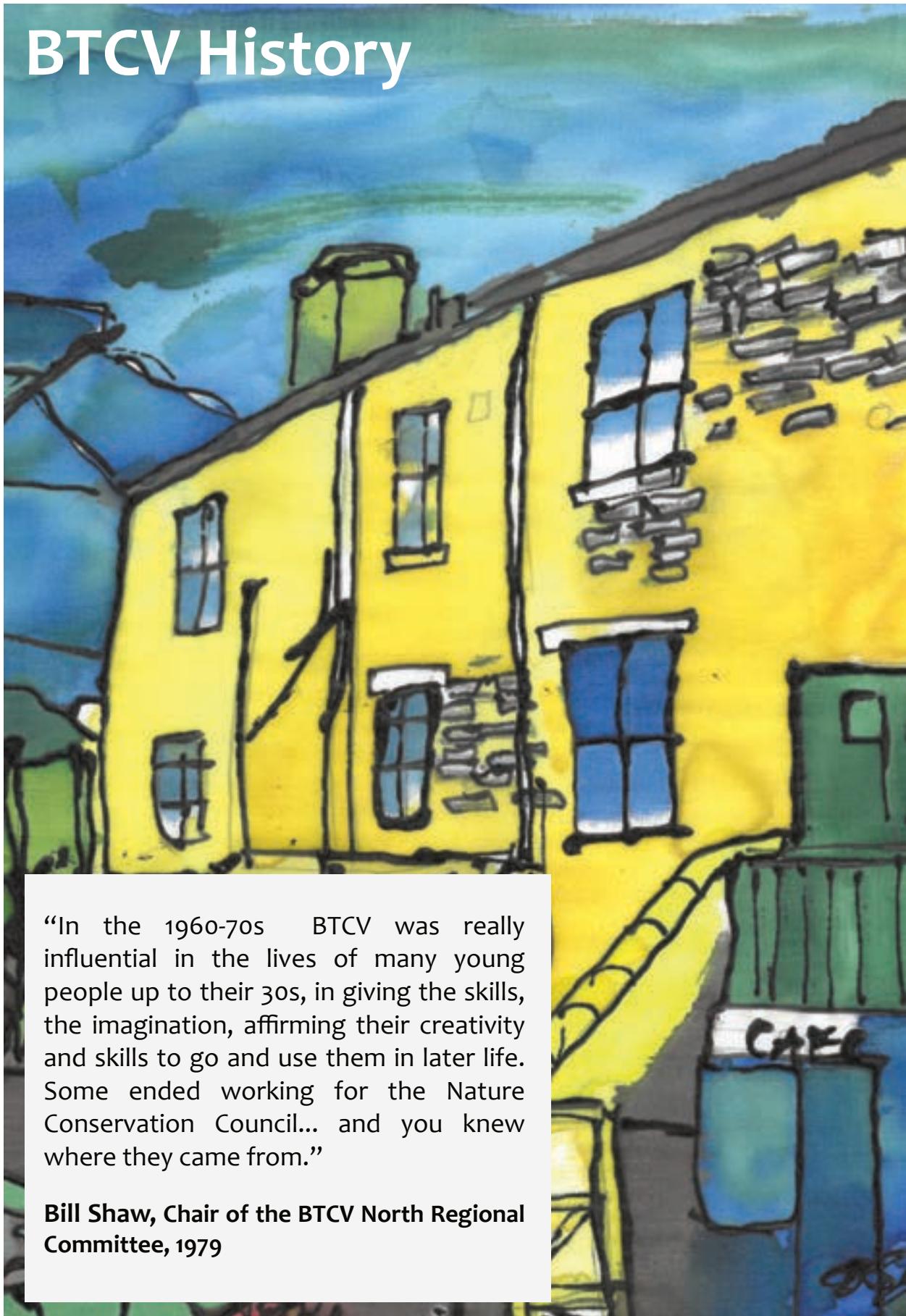
Hollybush House passed from the Whitwell family to the Briggs family and was used as a Methodist meeting room, a home for canal lock keepers and the barn as a car garage (hence the deep pit). Alan Gordon, a recent woodwork volunteer, recalls working at the farm in the late 1940s and helping with the horses.

In the 1970s Leeds City Council purchased the site for a proposed roundabout, one of a long series of road schemes for the area that have never got beyond a concept drawing. The council also own the farmland, and this was leased to Bill Simpson, of Hollybush Farm Produce. Bill ran a successful market garden, both at Hollybush and latterly on his other holding behind Burley Mills. Bill passed away in his late 80s in 2017 and in 2019 Kirkstall Valley Farm, part of the Kirkstall Valley Development Trust, was awarded a lease for a community farm. The land by Hollybush is currently used for the contract growing of cattle fodder.



A 1783 map showing the detail of the area around Hollybush, and a view of the bridge in the 1930s, photograph by kind permission of Leeds Libraries, www.leodis.net

BTCV History



"In the 1960-70s BTCV was really influential in the lives of many young people up to their 30s, in giving the skills, the imagination, affirming their creativity and skills to go and use them in later life. Some ended working for the Nature Conservation Council... and you knew where they came from."

Bill Shaw, Chair of the BTCV North Regional Committee, 1979

The back of Hollybush painted by Lacey I at Hollybush Primary School

BTCV to TCV 60 Years Connecting People and Places

It was late February 1959, yet spring was in the air. Enjoying the day on Box Hill, Surrey, botanist David Bellamy was surprised to find a group of young people ripping up plants in a recently declared Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Discovering they were not vandals but volunteers clearing scrub with ‘The Conservation Corps’, he enthusiastically joined in!

2019: another warm February. In fact, the warmest on record. The Conservation Corps, now The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), is celebrating its 60th anniversary. David Bellamy is still with us (a TCV vice-president), but the world has changed. These days unseasonal sunshine is scary.

TCV too has changed over the decades, but it has held firm to one key insight: conservation volunteering is great for people and communities as well as nature. When the Council for Nature founded The Conservation Corps in January 1959 it aimed to give young people some of the perceived benefits of National Service (then newly abolished). What those young volunteers gained – a sense of purpose, personal achievement and sheer fun – delighted and inspired them.

In 1970 the organisation became an independent charity, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), with the Duke of Edinburgh as Patron. Supported by people like Sir David Attenborough, Bill Oddie, Spike Milligan, Cliff Richard and Lulu, it expanded its activities, including a registered membership scheme for 3,000 volunteers. In 1977 it set up a unique ecological park opposite the Tower of London, working with the London Queen’s Silver Jubilee Committee.

Throughout the 1980s, BTCV embraced urban environments and community action in the UK and abroad. Midweek projects gave unemployed and retired people more opportunities to get involved. BTCV established working holidays across Europe and launched the first of two successful Million Tree Campaigns following the Great Storm of 1987. The decade closed with BTCV membership at 10,000, its Natural Break conservation holiday programme the largest of its kind in Britain.

In the 1990s, BTCV pursued its goals for people and society through the government’s New Deal and Millennium Volunteers programme, for which BTCV received the largest first-round funding, leading to over 3,000 volunteering placements in the next decade.

The first BTCV Green Gym, set up in 1998 with ‘social prescribing’ pioneer Dr William Bird of Sonning Common, Berkshire, highlighted the health benefits of conservation volunteering.

The social significance of BTCV’s activities continued to grow in the new millennium. BTCV’s Environments for All encouraged people from under-represented groups to take up environmental conservation.

In 2001, BTCV was one of the UK's largest environmental sector providers of training and support for the unemployed, while over £4 million from the New Opportunities Fund went to 500 community projects in deprived areas through the BTCV-managed People's Places Award Scheme. Sad eyesores near shopping centres became green community assets thanks to BTCV and the Prudential Grass Roots programme. BTCV's significance to the sector was later recognised by five-year strategic funding from the Cabinet Office.

The importance of conservation volunteering for health and well-being is reflected in the flourishing BTCV (now TCV) Green Gyms which celebrated their 20th anniversary in 2018, alongside projects with Mind, Birmingham Health Education Service and Dementia Adventure. TCV also won awards from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Royal Society for Public Health.

TCV also continues to meet the challenges facing the natural world with programmes such as the Greenwich Meantime Nursery, Big Tree Plant for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and I Dig Trees with Ovo Energy. Vital professional skills and knowledge have been nurtured by TCV's Natural Talent and Natural Communities apprenticeships. TCV's Community Network supports around 1,000 local groups, with a dedicated website, competitively-priced insurance, discounts on merchandise, funding information, newsletter and access to grants. Membership (previously £38 annually) is now free to community groups, clubs, schools or local organisations that share TCV's aims. Players of People's Postcode Lottery fund this and other programmes for community green spaces.

2019

In TCV's diamond anniversary year, TCV goes on inspiring people across the UK to volunteer to improve local environments and biodiversity. People from across many communities are actively involved, well beyond the keen young conservers of the 1960s. In parks and community gardens, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, school and hospital grounds, waterways, wetlands and woodlands, they join in and feel good.

Information taken from TCV website 60th Anniversary pages in February 2019. Further information on the work and history of the TCV can be found at www.tcv.org.uk.

The Early Days of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

The Conservation Corps was founded in 1959 by the Council for Nature to provide a force of volunteers to manage the then newly established National Nature Reserves. One-to two week or weekend residential projects proved popular, and people began to ask if they could do projects closer to home and began to form “local” conservation corps.

In 1970 the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) was formed to run the national Conservation Corps and provide support and an umbrella body for the local groups.

The national office was for a while at Regent’s Park Zoo, and regional offices were established in Scotland, the Midlands and, in due course, the North.

Frank Mawby was the first Regional Officer for the North from 1974-78. Here he tells us:

“I gave up my job at the Gas Board and began my conservation career with BTCV in Scotland thanks to Bernard and Hilary Barker who ran the Scottish Office in Doune. After some months there I was offered the role of Regional Officer for the North.

I spent six months at the London Zoo office, sleeping on Andrew Brown’s floor, to learn the ropes before opening up the northern office. Anne Singer, now Andrew’s wife, was the BTCV secretary.”

The north office was at Tong Hall, where BTCV shared space with the Keep Britain Tidy Group (KBT). Mark Andrew at KBT was the driving force and he was on BTCV North Steering Group. At the time every local office had a steering group of volunteers and countryside professionals.

“I remember Tong very well, as I was the first Regional Officer and set up the region. It covered the whole of northern England from Yorkshire and Lancashire northwards and I think we covered Notts and Derbyshire too, and helped quite a lot of local groups.

A chap called Pete Johnson joined me as field officer, and Sally Wray was the secretary. When she left a lady called Liz joined us, I cannot remember her surname.

A lot of time was spent to set up the Rivington project - this was with North West Water in Lancashire, with masses of rhododendron clearance and moorland work around the reservoirs and led to the establishment of Tan Pits Farm, another residential centre like Hollybush originally was. It closed in the late 1990s. I recruited John Hough to run the Rivington project, he was a Durham University student, taught by David Bellamy. Bellamy was on the first ever BTCV task in 1959.

I ran quite a lot of weekend tasks and training courses for task leaders. Whilst I was at Tong Hall the Tong/Cockersdale Countryside project was set up, led by a good friend of mine, Bill Shaw. Bill was later chair of the West Yorkshire Local Committee and helped find Hollybush for BTCV.”



The Front of Tong Hall, photograph by Frank Mawby

BTCV History and the Development of the Northern Network

John Iles was a mechanical engineering graduate trainee with the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) working at Hams Hall Power Station near Birmingham in 1973. Walking around the grounds he saw lots of birds and wildlife and asked how this was managed. He was told it was managed by the national Conservation Corps, and so he joined up and started getting bulletins, mainly listing activities run from London. John went on various projects, including a footpath training weekend in Northumberland, which was a long trip by minibus!

In 1975 John moved to work at Cottam Power Station near Retford and shared a house with Mike Wilde, an old university friend, who was teaching at Mexborough School. Mike decided to offer some outdoor activities to the sixth form, including conservation. John phoned Frank Mawby to see if they could join in a project in the Dearne Valley. Frank was a bit reticent about the idea, but 20 pupils got stuck in and filled two skips in one day. The pupils declined to go canoeing the next week, saying they hadn't finished the job. This led to the creation of the Don and Dearne Action Group, which really took off, and in due course John, who was then working in London, got sick of travelling up every weekend and gave up his job in late 1976 and moved north.

"The Manpower Services Commission (MSC) had just started and with lots of help from George Nash of the Tyne-Tees Conservation Volunteers I was able to create a job to run the Don and Dearne Action Group (DADAG) and interview myself without really ever signing on! At one point DADAG were running three projects every weekend. The office was a tiny former butcher's shop by Doncaster market. In the back room, task tools hung on the old meat racks.

One day a man from the MSC walked through the front door and asked, "How many people could you possibly take?" We thought 10 or 12 for South Yorkshire, but he said, "No, you're a national organisation, what could you do?"

This led to the MSC helping them set up a National Community Programme agency with 250 people, which subsequently led to buying an old school on Balby Road in

Doncaster to house the team. In Yorkshire and Humberside there were MSC teams in Doncaster, Leeds, Hull, Grimsby and Northallerton with smaller units in Calderdale, York and Scunthorpe. There was one supervisor for every 10 people employed. The average wage at one point had to be less than £60 per week, so some roles had to be very part-time to keep the averages down. John also set up teams in Gateshead, Belfast and so on. Balby Road became the Conservation Volunteers' HQ in the 2000s before the move to the purpose-built HQ, Sedum House, next to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Potteric Carr Reserve.

“Another key element that led to the development of Hollybush in Leeds and an important part of this equation is Mike Kirby, the Regional Officer from the Countryside Commission at the time. He was very pro volunteering, and could see the need for infrastructure to support that: tools, minibuses, training and all the rest. At that time the Countryside Commission could give 75% grants under section 9 of the Local Government Act 1974”

Other key policy developments also supported the decision to take on Hollybush.

The Countryside Commission looked at the urban fringe and the impact on farmers with land close to populations. Tong was one of their first urban fringe projects. Bill Shaw saw that this was about getting people involved and so wanted to set up Tong Conservation Volunteers.

In 1974 new metropolitan authorities in South and West Yorkshire were created. By 1976-77 they had big ideas about programmes they wanted to deliver. South Yorkshire had an Environment Department led by John Armitage. BTCV had a good relationship with him and he was very ambitious. John wanted to get the people of South Yorkshire involved in the future of their environment.

In 1978 Mike Wilde became regional officer and the regional office moved to Doncaster with John Iles as Administrator. Mike Wilde spoke to contacts in West Yorkshire, explained what BTCV was doing in South Yorkshire and asked them if they wanted the same.

“I took a 50% cut in salary but it was a job. It was amazing times, with wonderful people coming through the door. Mike was the visionary and I could write the bid applications and watch the cash. It was like riding a tiger.

It was Mike Kirkby who mentioned Hollybush Farm, as he was in touch with Leeds City Council, Terry Exley and John Tinker, the Head of Parks. Leeds didn't know what to do with the building, but John Armitage and Mike saw its potential. Mike liked what I had already done at the shop, which was community based, and the volunteering was in your face.”

The Urban Wildlife Movement, which Chris Baines was a proponent of, was taking off. Several strands came together at once; the government wanted people off the dole and the agency had funding and was willing to support urban action. Mike Wilde and John Iles' focus was on helping people in the locality.

“Once Mike Kirkby persuaded Leeds that we were an OK bunch to take on Hollybush Farm, the next battle was very much with the BTCV council and the forces of conservatism. We wanted a really radical agenda of unemployed, youngsters and school kids restoring this old listed building. Graham, the fundraiser at headquarters, loved what Hollybush did, the urban kids, mucky places, low overheads, he could easily explain this to charitable trusts.

The Countryside Agency were banking us to the hilt, but sometimes Mike Kirkby would say that a request for support was above his paygrade and to go and see the assistant director, John Davidson. I basically chased him (JD) around the country and got to know his PA, who would tell me which hotel to go and invite myself to dinner at, so I could make my requests.

I don't know where the early people came from, but my hesitation was as we knocked through that door in 1979, we'd have to secure the site. Hence getting the old caravan for volunteers to stop in, so there could be a presence on site 24/7. I have massive respect for those people. We put big banners up in effect saying “occupied”.

The idea with all of it was, that ultimately we'd do ourselves out of a job, perhaps apart from some skills training, there would be thousands of little groups all caring for their greenspaces. It was using the environment as a tool to get engagement in community."

Eventually when the government set up Groundwork North West in 1982 with John Davidson at the helm, John Iles was seconded to be his deputy.

Taken from an interview with John Iles, edited by John Preston



A group of BTCV staff ready for action in 1975, photograph provided by Frank Mawby

Bill Shaw

Bill Shaw was Project Manager for Tong Calverley Urban Fringe project 1976-81 for Leeds and Bradford councils, the West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council and the Countryside Commission, who put up 50% funding. Bill was living on Leeds Bradford Road and was chair of the BTCV North Regional Committee. Bill had previously spent two and half years as training officer for BTCV in Scotland.

“One day I got a phone call from John Iles, the Regional Officer, asking me to meet him at a place called Hollybush Farm. I scratched my head thinking, a farm in Leeds, that can’t be quite right. He (John) said it was a Leeds City Council building and there was a possibility that we could rent it cheaply to create a centre, a conservation centre, which would give us a local focus.

We arranged a meeting, and I was quite amazed to find it was an old-fashioned farmhouse, beautiful stone buildings, outbuildings, main farm, barn, everything, it was in a strange situation between a railway and a canal, houses all around, Kirkstall Abbey nearby. It was all boarded up and John and I decided although we could see the outside, we needed to see inside if we were going to take this on, at £1 a year peppercorn rent, if it was going to take a lot of money, we had no big pot of money, there was no Heritage Lottery then. So, we pulled some boards off and got a door open, and it was just amazing inside, it was rough. John explained that Leeds City Council had planned to put Parks and Gardens staff in the house and have the rest as a depot, it would have quite been good as that. They had got it part renovated and then it got burgled for all the copper pipes and everything got ripped to pieces. They did it again and the plunderers came back, and at this point the council staff who potentially were going in it said they wouldn’t feel safe and can’t bring up a family in those circumstances. So, the council were left with a building they didn’t know what to do with, possibly thought it was a wheeze to give it to the BTCV for a pound a year: and we took it on and turned it into something useful.”

John Iles brought a caravan up from Barnsley to be the initial accommodation at Hollybush. John says now what a gamble it was in hindsight to take over a site that was ‘owned’ by the locals and put strangers in.

At first there were no windows, just apertures. Mr Binks provided the windows and it became more habitable. Later there were toilets. If people didn’t like it, they would just move on. Robert (Sykes) built the bunks for the big room, which was used for residential groups.

“The way it worked was that we (BTCV) had volunteers living in the house, it was quite substantial as I remember it, quite a considerable number of people were willing to come and live there and do voluntary work, they were quite fired up by it and quite different to young people of today. People in their teens, twenties and maybe even thirties living communally, in pretty primitive conditions, and getting stuck in to create this place. The early days were difficult, the plunderers lived locally, and some were kids, and kept breaking in. It had to be organised that there was always someone on site. Some were from the National residential programme, a lot of people came and went, a few stayed long term. The opportunities were terrific, just the space, the buildings for storage for making and mending.”

There were a lot of volunteers in the first few months, but four stayed and left as couples: Andy and Lesley Iredale, and Robert Sykes and Shirley Hyde. Their memories of that time are also in this book.

Excerpts from an interview with Bill Shaw by Giles Cooper

An Accidental Leader

Giles Cooper had worked in farming prior to 1979 and so was interested in the land. He worked at Hollybush during the restoration of the building and early projects phase.

“I was on a trip to Israel, and came across a countryside warden in the Jordan Valley, who had a truck and pistol to manage scrubland by controlling the amount it was eaten down by the Bedouins’ livestock. The area was just so beautiful, and I thought, I must do something like this, but not with a truck and a pistol! Back in the UK I must have seen an advert in the newspaper, or somewhere, that conservation volunteers were needed at Hollybush and found my way to Hollybush. They needed someone, apart from anything else, to guard the site from the local kids. They (the kids) were really put out, they had used it as a play area , they’d set fire to it a couple of times, it was their place and for us (BTCV) to take it from them was a big distress; they did really resist quite hard. They could go there from home and do whatever they liked. Leeds City Council were desperate to get someone to look after it, they were worried it would fall down (the buildings had been categorised as Grade II listed in 1976) and be a huge liability to them.”

Of all the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP, became Youth Training Scheme after the 1981 riots) workers, no-one was very disposed to organising and running things. Apart from Bridget, who could run a team, people were more interested in getting on with doing what they liked to do. West Yorkshire County Council were offering money, so needed someone they could rely on to be there and move things on.

“On the day of the interviews, John Iles and the other interviewers arrived but didn’t have anyone to transport people from the station. I was asked to take the van to pick them up and chat to them to see what I thought of them. I must have met four to five people, who were all really nice. John wanted Dave Thompson to be the Field Officer, but at his age he just wanted to adventure and go off to India, so he wouldn’t want to stay at ‘boring’ Hollybush.”

Dave turned down the Field Officer job, to John’s distress. Bill Shaw suggested Giles and the job was offered although he never actually applied for it.

“There were lots of bits of the job that I wasn’t good at, but Bill Shaw would come and help or guide me.”

Bill gave Giles a lot of work at Tong which was useful as you always need a plan B when organising how to deploy large groups of people.

“Dave Thompson ran residential tasks, for his pleasure as much as anything else, he was very good at it and extremely charismatic. He developed a large following of people who would follow him from task to task all through the summer, he picked people up from the station and it just grew and grew, and he could get a lot of work done, he was extremely reliable.

The South Yorkshire office in Doncaster had a good team of people, so anyone who was spare was directed up to Hollybush to fill the gaps. Jed was one of those. Dave Purdon, Andy and Lesley took tasks out, Pete Barfoot ran stuff in North Yorkshire but used Hollybush as a base before there was a North Yorkshire office, and there were local groups in Wakefield and Huddersfield who borrowed tools sometimes. These groups existed separate from BTCV.”

Giles organised tasks in the Dales, Calderdale and Leeds, including the towpath where cinders were spread as they were extremely cheap.

“There was disagreement in those days about allowing cycles along the towpath, on at least one occasion the canal warden pushed someone in as he rode past, it wasn’t a nice atmosphere.”

There were about 25 people on the MSC programmes. Andy didn’t have a team, as he didn’t want one, he just wanted to do things in the garden. He, Shirley and Lesley did a lot of cooking for residential and the residents.

“The opening day, when West Yorkshire County Council councillors came and we wanted to impress them, Shirley cooked for them all. West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council paid my salary, so they wanted to get lots of work out of us.”

“John (Iles) was getting more involved with senior figures from other organisations. He went to the Houses of Parliament regularly to lobby people about how we needed to be doing things and what BTCV could do. John Iles was even more active and influential than those from HQ. Potentially it was important stuff, but it never really got the backing or funding required. This wasn’t a bad thing, as BTCV were very lean and hungry and got more done than if it had been over-funded. There was high unemployment at the time, which is why the government ran Youth Opportunities schemes. BTCV was thinking about these people and mass unemployment and how all those who would lose their jobs would be occupied. It’s interesting that I went off into mental health nursing, as the two are combined as if people can be doing something therapeutic out in nature that would be good.

The building STEP (Special Temporary Employment Programme) team was Robert plus five, the tree nursery were YOPS about the same number, it was all John Iles’ idea, a means to have revenue to run the place, there were very few regulations, and no-one got seriously hurt. Most of them were unemployed because they were unemployable, but most of them got stuck in, and some got a lot out of it.

Mike (Kirkby) from Countryside Commission taught me to never apply for anything (funding) until it had been verbally agreed. This was such a useful thing afterwards when I went to the Health Service. Each time I bid for funds in the NHS, I agreed something with them, then wrote the letter, and they knew it was coming. Using this method, I got a whole load of bikes so mental health patients could go out on bike rides.

There were tensions, but that is to be expected between people, given our personalities and age. We had no idea on controlling ego but got a lot done and with huge enthusiasm, for example, we restored the building from 1979-1981.

I remember when Robert needed to let off steam there was a whole load of old plates and he used to Frisbee them up against the barn wall!”

Along with Robert Sykes, Giles set up the dark room at Hollybush. Photographs were essential for publicity boards and the travelling exhibition van. He also went out to talk to community groups, Women's Institutes and other 'gathering' places.

"We used to have an old blue Luton van with a big roll-down door to do the stand at the Great Yorkshire Show and in other places."

Giles went from Hollybush to learn about documentary photography, having been inspired by other people's photos. By this point the Conservation Volunteers were becoming more sophisticated in the way they worked, on the verge of becoming corporate, and too corporate for Giles. Giles described his office skills as 'negative'.

Excerpts from an interview with Giles Cooper, by John Preston



Work underway at Stanley Marsh, with Patrick and Ian on the left. Photograph from the Hollybush Archive



The wall at Newmillerdam, photograph by Nigel Pepper



Tong Hall Pond in spring 1974, photograph by Frank Mawby

Restoration



"In the late 70s, I used to sleep out as part of a gang in the derelict barn that is now used as your learning space. We used to appropriate barrels of beer and take them away nearby. We'd hit it with a stick and then drink foamy beer out of old glass milk bottles."

Anonymous postcard submission, May 2019

Banner on the caravan 1979, silk painting by Taila from Hollybush Primary School

That Isn't How it's Supposed to be Done

My initial interest in going to Hollybush was to learn to use a chainsaw properly. I was working in forestry on a private estate and basically that was always what I wanted to do, but I was having to use a chainsaw that I was utterly terrified of. Quite frankly I'm terrified of machinery and technology, I'm still not comfortable with it. To work in forestry you have to use at least a chainsaw. I met a guy who worked on the estate with a job creation scheme who told me about the BTCV and that they ran chainsaw courses. I got in touch and found that they ran lots of other courses, so I signed up for a load, and the first one was at Hetchell Wood just outside Leeds. Someone was using a chainsaw on that first project to take stumps down. I was horrified, almost taking your ankle off isn't how it is supposed to be done, but they said "We've just done a course."

I turned up at Leeds railway station for the start of the course and the first thing they did was take us to Hollybush Farm, which they had just taken on two weeks before. They said they were looking for long-term volunteers, and I thought, that sounds interesting so I went back, handed in my notice and a month later was a long-term volunteer (LTV) at Hollybush, and I met the first and the only other volunteer there, who was Giles, and then Robert and then Shirley. I met Lesley, who later, happily became my wife, on the first task, but it wasn't until the autumn that she came as an LTV.

Tan Pits (another BTCV site) was much more developed, many more people coming and going, with three 12-person bunkhouses for three parallel projects and established 'mature' situations. Hollybush was just beginning, it was a bare landscape where pioneers could do their own things. At Tan Pits you had to fit in, we were trying to find ourselves, we did and still do our own thing, I don't fit into established ways of doing things, Giles neither and nor does Robert. There was no (established) structure, so we could find ourselves but achieve something as a group, that flexibility and freedom to find our niches. I'm not sure if anyone had a global idea of what we were doing.

There were spells when I was on my own 'running the show', like a running feed station. When I was on my own, it (the renovation) took a rest till the next person came along, when we'd start running again. We were all involved in protecting a germinating seed from the locals.

Basically it was their den and playground; we had to prevent them from nicking the stuff and setting it on fire again. That side was fascinating, it comes across with an incredible innocence. Once, a whole gang turned up, I wasn't very nervous, I invited them in and made tea and talked the heads off them. Hollybush was luxury to me, I had a massive room to myself, with a mattress in the centre of the floor, with my stuff strewn around. I showed them round, and they saw my money just on the floor by the mattress "Is that yours? What if someone nicks it?" they asked. "Then I won't have it any more." I replied. They just gawped at me, they could do anything they liked, and I couldn't stop them, but I wasn't bothered. The only thing I can relate it to, is that the North American Indians would not hurt a 'lunatic' with a wagon train. The lads thought I was mad with magical powers, and the money was still there when they left.

Anyway, I went to Hollybush and got stuck into the tree nursery and the vegetable garden. At first there was no-one to tell me what to do. John Iles from Doncaster was organising another chainsaw course, he was very good with engines and machines, but not that confident with the actual chopping the tree down, and I demonstrated some knowledge about that during the Hetchell Wood task, so he said "Would you like to come along and help with the second part felling trees to give some tips on felling?" So he (John Iles) threw me in at the deep end to teach the felling, there was no structured training in house. The next time, John asked me to run the whole thing, so I got the Agricultural Training Board syllabus and read up a bit. After that I ran all the courses in Yorkshire and was even lent to the Newcastle office to run a course. I left Hollybush to run my own business, but still got called up to run courses which led to running courses for Tony Newby in the 1990s when there was lots of woodland work. Tony wanted to make things more structured and you could actually fail one of Tony's courses, which I quite liked the idea of, before you let someone use a chainsaw. I enjoyed working with Tony, got on well with him.

At one point I became the tools officer and was going to deliver tools (to other BTCV offices) around the country, as there wouldn't be a conference for a while. It was me and Lesley off from Leeds to Scotland, to Cornwall or Devon, to London and back to Leeds, we'd never done anything like that in our lives.

Through the business I decided that I needed training in machinery maintenance and so went to the local agricultural college on day release, and then they asked me to run a chainsaw course for them.

Around that time the government brought in the ‘Blue Book’ scheme, to get everyone up to the same standard, and had invited private instructors to an assessment. When I first heard of it, I thought I’d never be up to it, but my darling wife persuaded me to at least try! So, Lesley drove me to Dalby Forest where I met the Forestry Commission guy, and he put me through as a guinea pig on the draft Blue Book. I did everything to guide, bar length, and he was happy with that, so he said do one and a half, and then two, and finally windthrow. He said he had never ever come across anyone from the private sector who not only passed everything, but who was up to the Forestry Commission standard for chainsaw instructors. This was all due to Hollybush and the confidence it gave me to progress along that path; encouraged by John Iles, Ian Henderson, Tony Newby and all the trainees to develop without being put in a straitjacket.

Moving to Hollybush was a culture clash, but then I discovered that nature is everywhere. I find it hard to cope with society and every now and then I’ll go off and become one of those people you see wandering around, my doctor has a polite term for it, ‘gentleman of the road’. You’ll be in the middle of Sheffield or Leeds and if someone pops out of a shrubbery having a kip, it’s probably me.

At Hollybush we always tried to be very welcoming, even if we didn’t know who people were or what they wanted. Hollybush gave me an opportunity to be somewhere to grow up, many people do that at university but I wasn’t that calibre – I didn’t have that opportunity, to have to live off my own wits and resources, to learn how to do things for myself. When I got there, I couldn’t organise cooking an egg, when I left, I’d found a way to cook for twenty people, of looking after and organising equipment. I’d learnt an awful lot about tree nurseries, how to plan a vegetable garden, it was a starting point and I’m still crap at it! It was a journey of incredible discovery of the reality of the world, not what they teach you in school. I am still on that journey.

I think that happened to a lot of other people, not just about planting a few trees but people realising the interconnected nature of the world, which is a living breathing thing, all interconnected. The opportunity that Hollybush gave to experiment and to work without guidelines, to try things rather than relying on book learning or a master plan, you don’t have to follow the book, because everywhere is different.

Another lesson I learnt with BTCV is I've always been a nervous anxious person, and frankly I was not happy outside my own little village, but when we all went to Hetchell Wood, suddenly I was the one who was comfortable and everyone was behaving very strangely, they just weren't comfortable, and I realised that it wasn't anything to do with me, it is the combination of the person and environment: if they are comfortable in an environment they are capable and if they aren't comfortable they won't be capable. In a woodland I'm comfortable, and they weren't. You've got to try and find the environment that suits your abilities, which is what I've tried to do. I've come back to the village.

The centre of my life is Commondale, the village: the land, not the houses and people. It's where I grew up, where I learned the fundamentals of what I understand about the world, which wasn't from the people, but from the land and the trees, the water and everything. To start a life we had to come back, which meant becoming self-employed in woodland work. My world grew from there, with the opportunity to travel all over the UK doing lots of different things based around trees, nurseries, saw milling, chainsaws, working with horse loggers, all connected to people in the village like a spider's web. Tons and tons of stubborn determination - I'm going to do this.

I feel like back then was the golden age of Hollybush, as it provided chances for people who didn't go to university to go and find their own feet and start moving forward. You had to learn by doing, with other people who were also learning. I learnt lots from Bob and Shirley. Bob would just sit down and look at a problem, then come up with a step-by-step way to solve it. Lots of people coming in bring something, all learning from each other, developing ourselves and our abilities without any real structure, but working towards a goal: Hollybush Farm.

Andy Iredale, BTCV volunteer and founder volunteer at Hollybush



Hollybush front garden in 1979, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive



Hollybush front courtyard in 1979, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive



Hollybush seen from the garden in 1979, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive



The infamous caravan on site during restoration, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive. In 1981 the caravan was moved to Meanwood Urban Farm as one of their first buildings

Out in the World

I was working in an architects' office, but I loved being outside – someone there talked about the world being a bigger place and that I should go and explore.

I heard about BTCV and I went on initial task in winter. It was freezing cold, I was ill, I hated it and it was rubbish, but I'd booked three or four, so I went on the next one. On that I met Andy, and he opened the world of working woodlands for me.

I worked on old buildings and the idea of moving into an old building that was being done up fascinated me, the idea of the building's journey and the journey of the people involved. I went on a few more projects, visited Tan Pits but didn't click with it, I went back to Hollybush, liked it and asked Giles if I could stay on as a long-term volunteer.

Hollybush gave me the confidence to be out in the world. I came from a close-knit small family, I didn't socialise much, and heading off to halfway up the country was quite a big thing. I learnt to cater for large numbers of people, learnt organisational things, task skills, we led some tasks together down in Wimbledon, and even just navigating round the country, I hadn't done that before. I didn't even really cook very well at home. Giles got me learning to drive the minibus and taking people places. I'd never driven anything that big or been responsible for all those lives. I was developing basic skills in navigation, map reading, arriving on time! We had no Google maps then. Since then I've driven for youth groups and done cooking for church groups for four to five days with the skills I learnt at Hollybush.

It was a completely different environment to what I was used to, the area where Hollybush was, with rough kids around the place, nothing like that where I came from. It was a house with no glass in the windows, just breeze blocks when Andy moved in or just double-glazed plastic, banging in the wind. I'd volunteer to wash up just to get my hands warm, it was so cold, standing on a stone floor which was collapsing. My sister joked "you're going to do the washing upppppp" as you fall through the floor. Learning about a different world was great, as now it doesn't faze you when you go to different places.

Lesley Iredale, BTCV volunteer and founder volunteer at Hollybush

A Place to Live

It wasn't my choice to be on the building team, I just wanted a place to live. I'd finished university and knew I wasn't going to go home, and I needed somewhere to live before I got a job, and there were no jobs in 1979. I just turned up, having rung Robert Evans of Leeds Conservation Volunteers, and he said "There is this going on, as we (LCV) only go out at weekends." So I came and had a look, and as I walked down the drive someone said "Can you gut a rabbit?" I think Pete Barfoot had come down with some rabbits he'd been shooting. I'd done zoology at uni so I said, "I'll have a go".

I enjoyed the voluntary section, I enjoyed getting out; when do you get to do drystone walling, hedging, some of those skills we are using now? I still love going past trees that I planted, we've been back to Oakwell Hall.

I remember 'those girls' several delinquent 15-year-olds from near Newcastle who came on a residential team, not what you would expect on a conservation project. They wouldn't eat my food and I even got them meat, normal food with less beans, and they still didn't eat it! I used to do all the cooking. After skinning the rabbit that first day, they'd asked me to cook something, and then they said, "You can definitely stay". I used to 'knock-off' at 4 o'clock and do the cooking.

What... (Robert)... got out of Hollybush, was the ability to attempt almost anything, not particularly brilliantly, such as plastering. We had no money, so you bought the stuff and worked out how to do it, experimented, there was no internet in those days, we got a lot of crap advice.

I went back in 2014 and saw what became of the plans that were drawn up for the Oak Climax Woodland. There were several landscape architects on the team; Bridget was one. There was an ecologist from the Midlands (Chris Baines) who wanted to get away from the municipal version of public open space, trees, ponds and nature areas.

Shirley Hyde, early Hollybush volunteer

A Derelict House

I first went (to Hollybush) in early 1979. It was a derelict house with crap and rubbish everywhere. We just larked about, moved pallets out of the barn with Huddersfield Conservation Volunteers and burnt them. John Iles was there, and it was the first time I met him, I think.

I took on the building work by default; there was no-one else there to do it. It was a case of “We need to do this”, so we had a go, like building a new barn door. Made it up on the spot, made up the quantities. I’d made a pencil case in woodwork at school, so what more did I need?

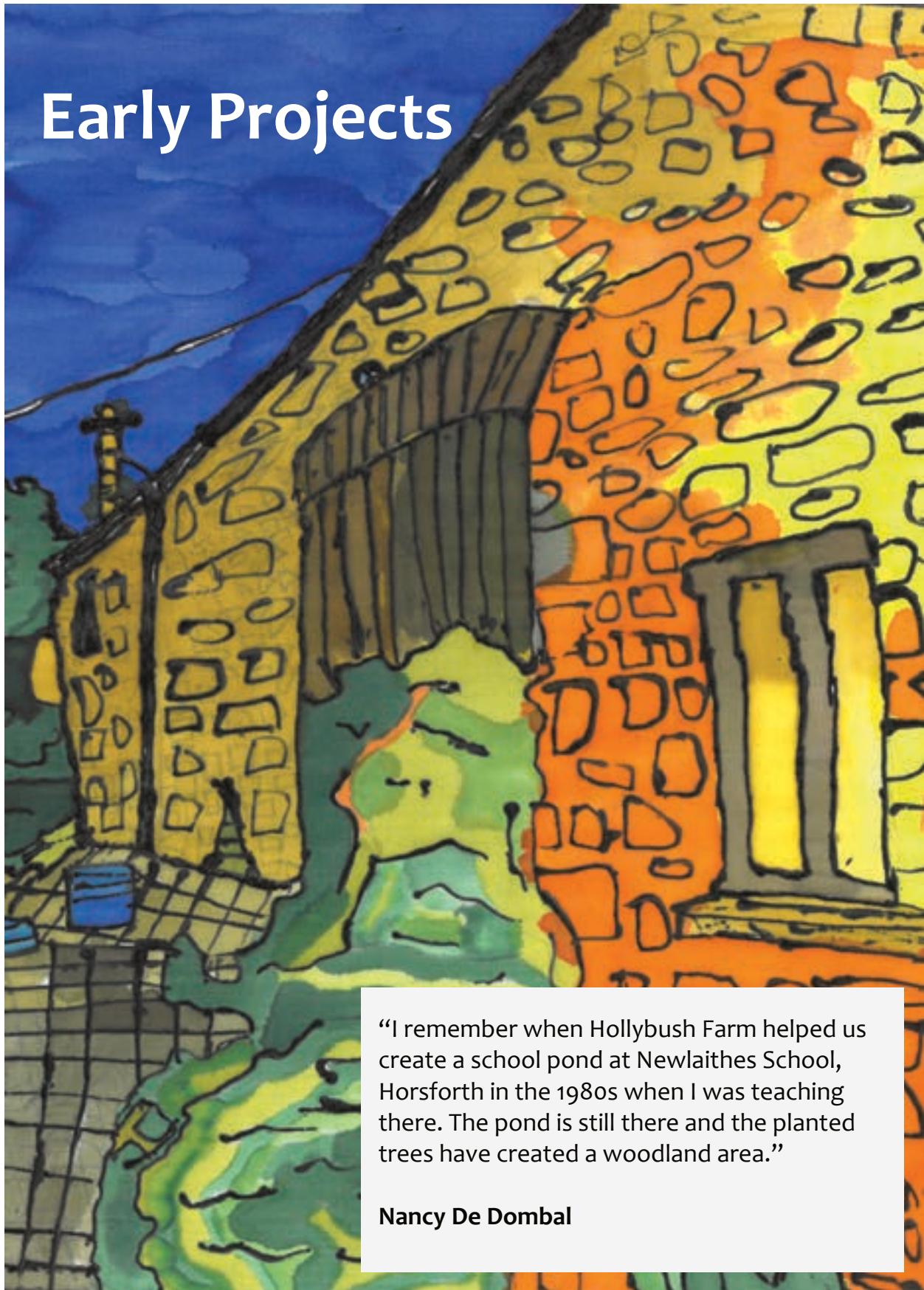
We filled the barn walls with liquid cement as all the hearting in the middle had gone; it was John Iles’ idea to grout them and then we pointed all the walls.

I can’t remember how we lived, we must have stunk to high heaven, it was always warm and there were no washing facilities really. John Iles came up and showed someone how to plumb a toilet in. Someone plumbed the toilet into the hot water, it could have been me. You got a nice hot flush, what more do you want? We got a bathroom upstairs, we built it out of pallets. We built the mega triple bunks; we built the row of three toilets just outside the kitchen. I built the doors for those toilets.

I did a year of volunteering and two years of STEP but stopped living at Hollybush in 1981. I came back in 1984 to help finish the internals of the outside building when Linda was manager. I remember it was summer and I started work at 6am, then they’d all come in yawning at 9am, and I’d done three hours work.

Robert Sykes, renovation volunteer at Hollybush

Early Projects



"I remember when Hollybush Farm helped us create a school pond at Newlaithes School, Horsforth in the 1980s when I was teaching there. The pond is still there and the planted trees have created a woodland area."

Nancy De Dombal

The barn and front courtyard, silk painting by Sean at Hollybush Primary School

What are you Doing with yourself?

I was out of work in 1981. When I went to the Job centre for an interview, the man said, “You haven’t got much on your CV have you? If I had all that spare time I’d go out and do something. What are you doing with yourself in your spare time?” There was an embarrassed silence, and I left vowing that by the time I saw him again I’d be doing lots; enrolled in pottery, computers and learning to drive, vaguely aware of voluntary work.

I can’t remember how I ended up with the information, but I had three phone numbers with three names. The first on the list was Stephen Lees, and simply because he answered the phone I ended up at BTCV. I got the information in April or May 1982 and acted on it later, so in July, I think, July 4th, I went on task with the Hollyvols, at Pig Lane in Tong, with Mick Lister, Andy Rawlins, Virginia Moulton and some others, clearing the side of an old cart track.

Mick Lister was a terrible snorer. Andy Rawlins slept in a full chainsaw helmet because he was next to Mick on a residential to Malham, or Mick would wake up surrounded by boots that had been thrown at him.

I remember when I started, I had not appreciated it was only the second task they had done. Steve was a stickler, I had put a fence post in and thought I had chocked it, but Steve came along and kicked it, and of course it moved so I had to take it out and do it again, basically you upped your game. Joining BTCV was like ‘finding my tribe’. One day driving up to Hetchell Woods, the van suddenly drew to a halt. I wondered why and then several people jumped out of the van, books in hand, to identify a flower. I had the sudden revelation that there were people in the world nerdier than me.

One great boost to my confidence was realising that after only a few weeks, I was seen as the experienced volunteer and was being asked how to do things by other people. Steve persuaded me to do leadership training and got me to take charge of a group. I then realised that I could do it.

Steve also encouraged me to socialise a bit more – he asked why I was rushing off every night, was it to a really important or interesting activity. I realised that I was not really running off to anything special, but was simply feeling anxious around lots of new people, but when I realised I could choose to stay and that these people

wanted me to join them that was also a huge confidence boost.

Bob (Robert) who did all the carpentry at Hollybush, went to Kiplin to do the woodwork in the apple loft. Patrick was one of the team who went up too, he spent a freezing winter living up there, setting up Circuits of Working Holidays. Patrick eventually worked as a charge hand for the council tree nursery.

I came back to Leeds from Kiplin and the Job centre kept asking me to apply for things. They gave me a job advert and I had to go to the interview; I was offered the job, and £10 extra per week because they found out I had led things, but it was awful. I had only led volunteers and not older unemployed men who really did not want to be there. I got involved in the Sunday group at Hollybush and weekend residential and that kept me going. I went off and worked for myself for a bit as a gardener, and was starting to realise I was never going to be very successful as I was not good at charging people lots of money, when Bridget (Robinson) came to see me.

Steve Jesson, who had run the tree nursery and garden at Hollybush had left (to work on a country estate garden), and Bridget said, “You are going to apply for the job, aren’t you?” Things in the nursery grew gradually, with people asking for other types of plants, and I realising we could grow and sell wildflowers, then pond plants. Gradually a small implementation team grew out of me offering advice and design suggestions to schools, and eventually the schools team was born.

Ian Downham came to do a training course at Hollybush, not long after he started at Wirksworth as a volunteer officer. Ian had experience of working in the horticulture industry and before the day was out had switched allegiance, coming to Hollybush as a volunteer to help me set up the wildflower growing systems in the first polytunnel in the garden.

I once featured in a BBC magazine ‘my day’. When Stuart Harris, who eventually got my job, joined us as a minimum wage trainee it turned out he had read the article and thought “That would be my dream job someday”.

Patrick Crowley, Volunteer, VO, Field Officer, Tree Nursery/Wildlife Garden and Schools Project Officer 1991-2001, Oakwell Hall Ranger 2001-2017, Volunteer Coordinator Batley & Spen, Kirklees Council



The Meadow, silk painting by Peter at Hollybush Primary School



Hollybush from the Garden, silk painting by Ebony at Hollybush Primary School

A Poster in the Library

I started in 1984. Good old days. There was a poster in the library that said “Come to Hollybush”. I started to do a countryside skills course, then task, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I volunteered all I could while I was at school. When I finished my O-levels, I led a Lake District circuit with Patrick, staying in village halls. There was no TV in those days, the Live Aid concert coincided with the day off one week, so a volunteer who was an electrician found an old telly under the stage in the village hall and some of the volunteers stayed in to watch it. Patrick, others and I went for a walk, realising later what we had missed. I went on to lead a circuit at Ullapool later, and BTCV helped me make my first friend at university, Katie, when I saw her BTCV badge during freshers' week.

Emma Crowley, volunteer, Leader, Groundwork Dearne Valley, Oakwell Hall Ranger and now Kirklees Museums



Vans in Hollybush yard in 1986, photograph by Nigel Pepper

First Day

It was Tuesday the 14th of August 1984.

“PLEASE RING THE BELL, said the small typewritten sign on the large, dark green front door. I did and hesitated, wondering whether to stay or go, when the door opened. “Is this where you come to volunteer?” I asked, rather timidly.

“Oh... you’ve come to be a Hollyvol, have you?” I almost turned around and walked straight out again. This was said in a lilting, ‘jolly hockeysticks’ way by a tall, confident woman with short cut, dark hair. Her name was Bridget Robinson, as I found out later, but first and very luckily she carried straight on with “Come in, I’ll introduce you to Michelle, she’s getting the tools ready.” I went in and found myself in an entrance hall. There was a polished wooden banister leading up the stairs on the left and a short passage straight ahead went through a door to the rear of the building.

I followed Bridget through that door and down some steep steps into what looked like a deep, dark dungeon, the cellar. It was crammed full of tools of all shapes, sizes and descriptions. The first glance showed me a few I was familiar with, spades, forks, rakes and sledgehammers, and lots more that I wasn’t.

I didn’t look at the tools for more than a couple of seconds because in the centre of the floor was a girl with long blonde hair and bright blue eyes. “Michelle, this is Ian, he’s a new volunteer, look after him, will you?” With that, Bridget turned and disappeared up the steps, leaving me alone with Michelle.

I was incredibly shy and fast beginning to wonder what to say when another girl came in, this time from the yard outside, through an entrance on the same level. “Emma, this is Ian, he’s a new volunteer.” Emma looked to be about fifteen years old. They were both bright, intelligent, cheerful and seemed extremely confident. The next ten or fifteen minutes were a blur as I helped to load tools, cups, kettles and other paraphernalia into a blue Transit minibus. With no time to think, we were off.

Six of us altogether, although I wasn’t introduced to the others yet. “What are we going to be doing today?” I finally plucked up courage to ask, as the Transit headed north, away from Leeds. “Bracken bashing”, someone offered. “Bracken bashing, what’s that?” my obvious reply.

This was their cue to give me a mini lecture which, I would come to realise, was standard form for all newcomers.

Bracken, it seems, is an invasive plant in woodland and on some moors. It is very successful due to the fact that it spreads by underground runners, or rhizomes as they are called. It also contains poisonous alkaloids, so very few creatures eat it, which is the way many other wild plants are kept in check. This success in itself is not so bad, but by growing in large patches it prevents other wildflowers from growing and so reduces habitat diversity. It can be controlled by spraying “But we try not to use chemicals whenever possible. They can be harmful to the environment and are not suitable for volunteers to use.” It sounded reasonable to me and I had the impression that these were thinking, caring people, not the kind I was used to meeting every day.

Before long we were leaving the built-up urbanity of north Leeds and heading for Ilkley Moor. I knew the area fairly well but had no idea of the location of our task site for the day. We were soon there: Meadowcroft Farm in the hollow between Ilkley and Baildon moors. We opened a field gate and drove through.

“We will be working in the wood over there.” I looked but all I could see were the very tops of a few trees. I thought we would park where we were, but no ... our driver carried on to the edge of a steep slope and seemed like he would keep on going right over the edge, but luckily he stopped before my heart did.

Up until now I had been chatting merrily with Emma and Michelle. After breaking the ice with the bracken bashing lecture, they had very easily got me to open up about myself and I had found them to be easy, refreshing and very nice to talk to. It was a bit of a shock when a sudden voice of command intruded into my thoughts.

“Right... everybody out and get the tools unloaded. We’re going to have the Tools Talk.” This was from the person who had been sitting next to the driver and who I had somehow managed not to notice until now. We all certainly noticed him from then on! “My name is Mark Slater and I am your field officer.” He introduced himself while we were busy taking out sharp edged, dangerous looking implements on long wooden handles. “I will be leading the task for today.”

Field officer! Leading task? It all began to sound a bit military and I wondered what would be expected of me. I looked at the two girls, our driver and a young lad of about fourteen and thought it wouldn't be anything too severe... I hoped!

"OK, gather round," Mark said. "This is a first aid kit. Does anyone here have experience of first aid?" I looked around; noone put their hand up. Slowly, reluctantly, I put up my own. The previous year I had done the Red Cross one-week course and the three-year certificate obtained from that was still valid. When I had explained this... "Right everyone, if you have an accident, go to Ian." "Oh no!", I thought, "what will I do if somebody does?" I had never had to use the knowledge gained on the course and was not at all confident. I didn't say so though and just hoped 'it' would never happen.

"Emma, will you do the slasher?" Mark asked. This surprised me, that a 15-year-old girl was going to demonstrate such a dangerous looking tool to the rest of us. She picked one up from the neat row laid safely on the ground. "This is a slasher," Emma said as she slowly swung it in an arc in front of us at arms' length. "When you are using it, you should be at least this distance plus another tool length away from the next person, so you don't do anything nasty like cutting off someone's leg... or head!" This last said slowly and deliberately for emphasis. One look at the tool told us that she was not dramatising for the sake of it! "You swing it like this, keeping one hand with a firm grip on the end and sliding the other along the shaft to meet it. Keep the blade edge pointing slightly up so that it doesn't dig into the ground and try not to hit any rocks or wire fences... or each other! Any questions?" she asked after a couple of slow-motion demonstrations, which we all followed easily.

I was impressed, though feeling a little bit inadequate. Here was I at 26 with a fair bit of work experience behind me but without the knowledge of this 15-year-old.

Others who I was to meet over the coming months would give the same impression for quite a while.

"Choose your weapons! Are we all ready? Right, let's go!" Mark was in the lead as we crossed a boggy patch of field and entered the wood.

It was beautiful. A stream bubbled and cascaded down a boulder strewn mini-ravine. In the shade it was cool and damp and a pleasant break from the hot August sun on

the field we had left behind. The midges were a pleasure to watch as they danced in the shafts of sunlight, but I was to have a closer, less pleasant acquaintance with them very soon! We walked along a few feet above the stream, dodging trees and boulders and crossing tumbled dry-stone walls.

"This is it," said Mark, "all the bracken between the wall over there on the left and the stream." I looked - there was acres of the stuff; it seemed to go on for miles! A second, more careful look showed me that it was not as bad as I thought. It was a strip about 20 yards wide and 100 yards long. The slope, boulders and trees made it appear much more daunting. "Spread out and away we go."

The first five minutes were great fun. Hacking and slashing we tore into the bracken, great swathes of which were head high. "This is easy," I thought, "we'll have it done in no time." How wrong can you be? Before very long I was lathered in sweat and the midges were biting furiously. I spent more time waving them away than I did on the bracken.

I could see that the others were having a similar good time. Bravely we battled on, the crushed and broken stems engulfing us in the pungent aroma of bracken. I was exhilarated. Despite the heat and midges I was having a great time... letting out pent-up energies and frustrations which had been building up over the past months of inactivity. What a fabulous way to let yourself go. It couldn't last long though, this initial burst. Soon, I was labouring for breath and my mouth was getting very dry from the bracken dust thrown up all around. The others were still hacking away, showing no signs of stopping. I felt that I had to keep up, though I badly needed a rest.

I carried on, not daring to stop, for fear of what I don't know! It wasn't long before this 'fun' began to seem like torture, but I still did not stop.

"Let's take a break," shouted Mark through the trees. He sent the young lad to fetch some orange juice and water from the mini-bus. I was relieved that he didn't send me; all I wanted to do was collapse! One of the girls went to help. The orange juice arrived and I was glad to see that the others were just as much in need of it as myself. Mark rose to get back to the bashing. "Have a rest and a drink when you need one," came drifting back as he disappeared through the trees. I immediately felt better - the pressure was off and I set about the bracken with a vengeance.

At lunchtime, Mark got out a wildflower book to look up a flower that was growing in the damp ground near the stream. It was identified as Ragged Robin, named from its deeply cut petals which made them look like the frayed edge of a sack. I felt as though I was among superiors who lived in a different world from me; one where people were interested in the wider world and were ‘doing things’.

When we were back at the Conservation Centre, Hollybush Farm in Kirkstall, Mark asked if anyone liked beer. “I do,” I said without delay. “There’s five gallons of home brew in the cellar, help yourselves.” No time was lost in doing exactly that and I was hooked. I would definitely be back tomorrow, and I was.

On the evening of my third day, a social trip to Hebden Bridge had been planned but the driver had to cry off at the last minute. “Can anybody drive?” I could and was conscripted on the spot. This severely constrained my drinking that evening but sealed my fate at Hollybush for several years after.

Two long term volunteers lived in at Hollybush in those days, along with three cats – Piddles, Shits and Puke! Puke had died shortly before I started. After I had been volunteering for three months, Patrick (the prog rock fan) and Russell (the keen birdwatcher), who had been my instructors and mentors, had come to the end of their six months term. I took over from them, along with Andy Nisbet, and became the longest staying resident, being allowed to stay for a year.

Many happy times and adventures were ahead and my experiences at Hollybush Conservation Centre had a huge impact on my life, introducing me to many new friends, boosting my skills and confidence tremendously and eventually leading to my employment as a Field Officer, which I was very proud to achieve.

Following that, I had several self-employment periods as a conservation landscaper, conservation skills instructor and green woodworking demonstrator at various country shows. I lived and worked in Greece for a year, where I got my full bus driving licence. After returning to Leeds, I have been a mini coach driver for 20 years. Nothing to do with conservation directly, but it has allowed me to visit many places in this country which I could never have hoped to see otherwise and led to a couple of trips driving minibuses in Europe.

Ian Wallace, Volunteer, long term Volunteer and Field Officer 1984-1989



Hollybush back door and steps, silk painting by Korenza at Hollybush Primary School

Being Outside

I joined Hollybush in September 2012 because I wanted to be outside more. My first volunteer project was at Inkwell with the amazing Sarah Learoyd, who taught me well. My time at Hollybush has included employment as a Green Gym project officer, a sessional project officer, and a volunteer and I was also persuaded to join the Friends of Hollybush committee. Once the power of Hollybush has worked its magic it is hard to leave!

Pauline Pickett, Hollybush volunteer 2001-present

A Most Unladylike Career

I quite liked the idea of working outside, but conservation didn't really exist as a career then, and at my all-girls school I remember being told, that girls couldn't do 'that sort of thing'. But when at St Andrews University studying English, I found the conservation group and took to doing it at weekends, where I met my partner John.

John and I moved to Leeds in 1986 where I began an MA. He started volunteering at Hollybush, so I started doing the same while I was a student, leading weekend residencies. I just liked doing the conservation work, so wanted to keep doing it. When I started volunteering there was still a lot of training around, so it was great to pick up lots of skills. English was completely irrelevant, so getting the chance to learn conservation was a fantastic opportunity.

I remember going on a course about freshwater habitats including ponds. We also had great training for running practical groups and leadership training. We were doing that aged around 21, which was really good. We took people from Leeds to North Yorkshire to do practical jobs on farms like laying hedges and planting trees. The idea was that the work needed doing and that lots of people in Leeds wanted to do it. It could be anywhere from Harrogate to the Yorkshire coast. We slept on village hall floors and cooked on portable gas burners after two days of working outside. Lots of different people went on them, the people were the nicest thing about it. People would come quite a few times during the year. It was very cheap, the budget for food per person was five pounds so it was very affordable, and the landowners would cover the costs of the accommodation.

You were in charge of 12 people and you'd help them to do everything. We'd meet them at the station with all the tools, sleeping bags and a big box of food of course. You learned how to deal with all sorts of odd situations. We carried a biscuit tin that had everything we found out we'd need for when things went wrong, fuses, money for the electricity meter, it was our emergency fixing box. There were still quite tatty village halls then, and BTCV would always use the cheaper ones.

For three weeks running I had to call out the RAC to see to one of the minibuses we used. I ended up getting the same RAC man and in the end, he showed me how to fix the wiring so I could do it myself without having to call him out again.

It wasn't just conservation skills you learned; it was life skills. All the work we were doing was work you could do with people, not machines, as the places we worked, you couldn't get the machines to.

I left Hollybush when I got my first job in Doncaster. It gave you the skills to get a job and a massive amount of responsibility, which was just brilliant. We didn't just lead our residential projects but put the programme together, did the marketing, interviews. You did as much as a paid member of staff. I was volunteering there full time while I was signing on with the job centre and looking for jobs. The job centre had 3 million people to deal with so weren't bothered about checking in with those that were doing something.

Jessica Duffy, Hollybush volunteer 1986-1987, then Training Officer on the Community Programme in Doncaster for BTCV. She then worked in the Central Training Unit before returning to Hollybush as a VO until starting in Wakefield for BTCV in 1990



Creating dams at Pen-y-gent summit in 1992, photograph from the Hollybush archive

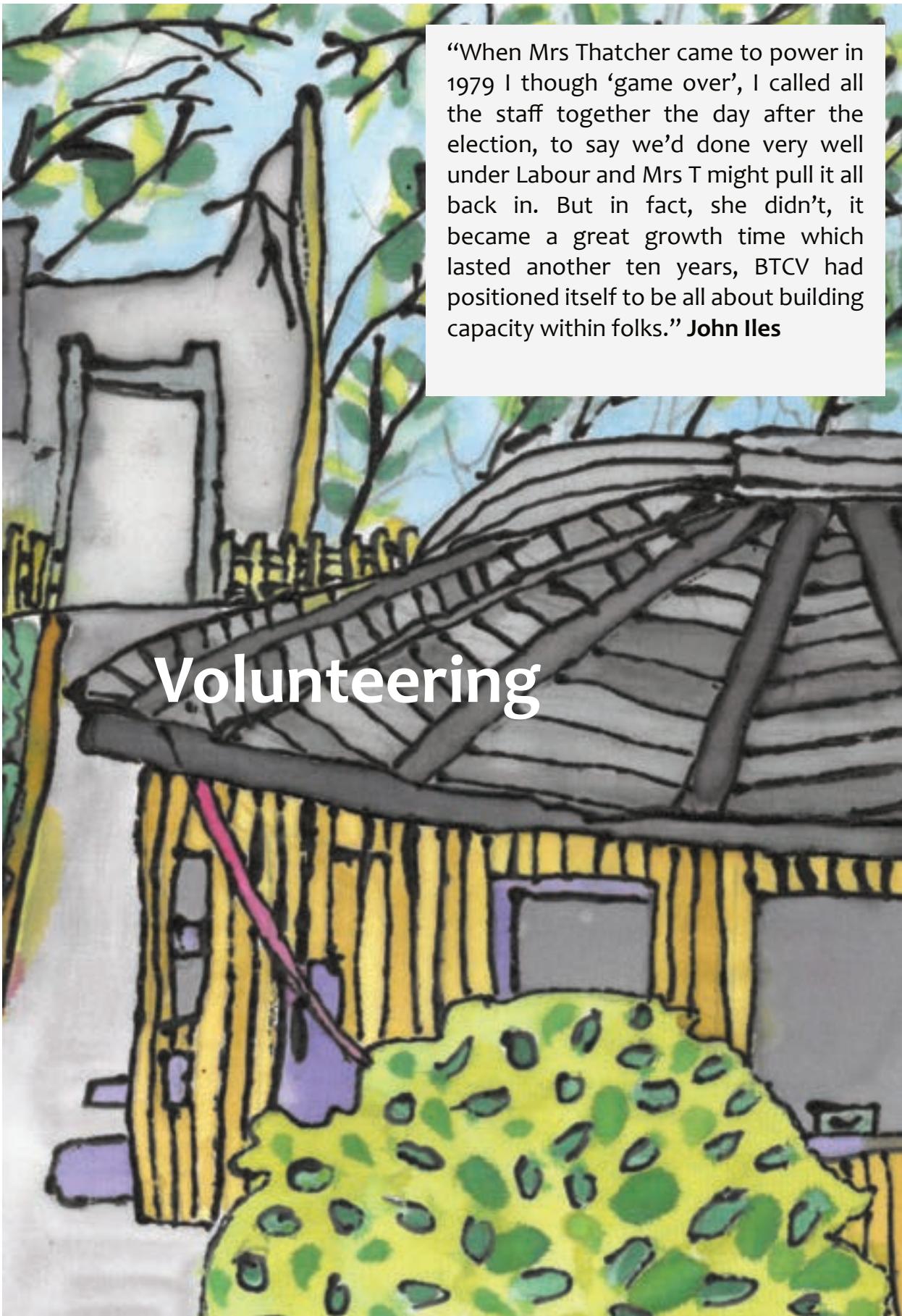
The Magic of TCV

My fond memory of Hollybush was the fantastic welcome from all concerned and the trust put in anyone prepared to have a go. When I first steered my ropey old Mark 2 Escort into the car park I remember fantastic characters like Kathy Noble, Bridget Robinson, Jed Bultitude, John Preston and Jessica Duffy steering me back in a worthwhile direction. They even trusted me with a minibus full of potentially lethal tools and possibly more lethal volunteers. Were they MAD? But what was magic was that it wasn't just about the environment.

I remember a tap on the front door one wet Tuesday evening from a young woman accompanied by a thin, tall, pale, and wan looking young man who hadn't been as fortunate as me. He had been diverted down the wrong track by the sort of drugs you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. He looked ill, shy, withdrawn and lost. We asked them in out of the rain and made them a cuppa. She asked if he could join the midweek volunteer group and we said yes – of course. There was an incredible belief amongst us all that we could help this man or at least stop him descending ever further into despair and hopelessness. There was no question of turning him away. I think he stayed involved at Hollybush for quite some time and got himself back on track. That was the magic of TCV and Hollybush – the people, the trust, the utter belief that when it came to the environment we were not just talking but doing something fundamentally worthwhile for the environment and people – and all this in the dark days of Thatcherism long before the notion of a 25-year environment plan.

Hollybush was a sanctuary for me too. In my case it made me think twice about future career choices. I'll always have fond memories of my time there, I wonder, are there still kingfishers flying up the Leeds Liverpool canal on clear cold mornings? Happy days! Thank you TCV and Happy Birthday Hollybush – long may you all continue making a difference for wildlife and people.

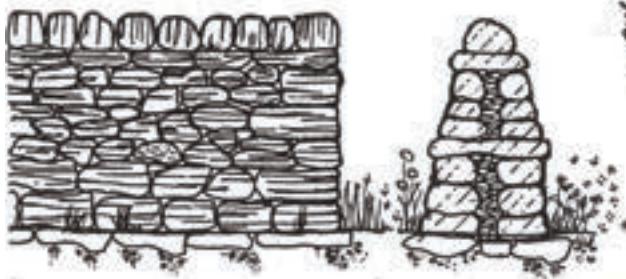
Ian Fullilove, Policy Planner at Peak District National Park Authority and Hollybush Volunteer about 1988



“When Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979 I thought ‘game over’, I called all the staff together the day after the election, to say we’d done very well under Labour and Mrs T might pull it all back in. But in fact, she didn’t, it became a great growth time which lasted another ten years, BTCV had positioned itself to be all about building capacity within folks.” **John Iles**

The Roundhouse, silk painting by Armarnie at Hollybush Primary School

**British Trust for
Conservation Volunteers
West Yorkshire**



Dry Stone Walling Competition

Adel Woods
Sat 19th May - Sun 20th May

Adel Woods. Alwoodley. North Leeds - Ref Map 1:50,000. Leeds. Grid Ref 285405



10.30 am - 4.30 pm EACH DAY

A handmade poster for a Hollybush drystone walling competition 1979 - 1984

The Bodger's Hut

I first saw the Conservation Volunteers from Hollybush when they were doing Kirkstall Festival and I think I've been with them about seven years now. I just got chatting with them there. I can't recall what they said to me, I think I just had a brief chat with them, but I saw the things that they were doing which interested me, which was mainly on the woodworking side and I just picked up all the flyers about the other aspects of it and I think that was the main thing that interested me, you know, the gardening element, not necessarily on the conservation side.

I was interested in woodwork and that was the main thing that I came along for, but I got involved in the gardening to start with, and that's the main thing that I've been involved with ever since, helping with the gardening group and also with the wildlife walking group which I do on a Monday. I drive the minibus, which is another thing that they've managed to do for me while I've been here, get me driving minibuses and qualified and so forth. I support the Project Officer, sort of like a volunteer officer, or key volunteer, or whatever you want to call it. So I just sort of help setting things up and supervising some of the volunteers, you know, make sure they're all safe and show them how to do things and stuff like that.

I was a little bit nervous the first day, which I appreciate a lot of the volunteers when it's their first time coming to us you know, I know how I felt so I'm very understanding of that aspect of it and I try and support them as much as I can. So yeah, I will say the first day I was a little bit on edge, but such friendly people, I soon was put at my ease and I enjoyed it. I think my first day I just really started off with the gardening group and learning the ropes so to speak, I knew a little bit about gardening, I'm not a qualified gardener, but it's something I've enjoyed, quite a big part of my life, so I didn't hit the ground running so to speak, because you have to do things their way, but the first day it was alright, I enjoyed it, I don't think I'd have stayed this long if I didn't enjoy coming here you know.

On that particular day there was another group doing 'balsam bashing' and they were wanting volunteers to go and do the balsam bashing just down by the river there. There was only me and one other person that went so I thought well yeah, I'm enjoying this. It's all part of conservation, balsam bashing, it's such an invasive plant. We pull up the plants before they mature and set seed, so you get them as early as you

can just to prevent them being so invasive. You get them mainly by waterways, but you can get them anywhere – I saw some, quite a bit when we were on a walk last Monday. So it can get anywhere, you know it's airborne seeds, it's just going to land. It sort of narrows your river banks and everything like that.

I think one of the things I really enjoyed doing (at Hollybush), which is still here, is the 'Bodger's Hut'. I was there right at the start of that when we went and felled the trees and floated them down the canal, and then we had to strip all the bark off. It's such a rustic thing, and very basic woodwork, but it's stood the test of time and it's still standing, looking just as good as when we first put it up. I prefer to do that, see an end result. You know, when I start doing that. Same as any sort of job I've done, I always like to see an end result you know.

There's quite a few things that I've learnt over the years here, they've put me through me MIDAS to drive the minibus I've also had first aid training, safeguarding skills, leadership skills. I've built my confidence up, because I'm a totally different person than I was when I came here seven years ago, you know. I was very nervous when I came here, it's changed me for the better. Like anybody I'll have off days but I think I've really benefitted from a lot of the things they've taught me here. Yes definitely, it's certainly helped me in my personal life. If I could take anything away from here, I think it's how they're so accepting of everybody, they don't judge and they're always willing to help in whatever way they can and I'd like to think that's something that I'd do for other people when I leave here.

Ralph Witty, Volunteer Officer at Hollybush since 2012



Rosie and David Preston helping to peel logs for the Bodger's Hut, photograph from the Preston family



Dismantling a dry stone wall, Southerndale Scars, July 1982, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive, photographer unknown

I loved the hedge laying, but one time the person who directed us was running late. We went out with a map of the area to be laid but could not work out the hedge to lay. The one we decided on was a privet. I had never heard of laying a privet, but we started. After half the privet had been laid, the regular chap turned up and said it was the native one up the road. I found the area a couple of years later. The privet looked really good as well as the native.

I was on Income Support and the Jobcentre said I could not volunteer, so I stopped. Later I got gardening and countryside management qualifications and started work in gardening.

Anon, via postcard

Hollyvols

I was a regular volunteer, a ‘Hollyvol’, at Hollybush, BTCV as it was then, on and off for a couple of years 1986-1988 and I can remember some of the great projects we did because I can still go and visit the sites and it gives me heart to see that constructions I had a hand in building are still there and in use today. For example: the bird watching place hidden in the undergrowth at Woodlesford Lock and the steps and handrail we installed on one of the paths through the woods near Roundhay Park; I remember making living willow sculptures at Temple Newsam; copious amounts of hedge laying where, of course, we wielded the Yorkshire billhook like professionals; dry stone walling; laying footpaths; planting new hedges and of course rhodi (rhododendron) bashing and burning.

I began volunteering after being made redundant, I was an HGV mechanic and had pretty reasonable practical skills, I also had a class 1 HGV licence, but still had to go out with one of the supervisors to show them that I could drive a van with a trailer on before they let me loose on the roads with theirs. The volunteers were a happy bunch and often went for a refreshing drink at the Bridge afterwards. It wasn’t as big as it is now back in the ‘80s, there was no café, it was flasks and snap boxes for us.

I remember spending a week at Hollybush building staging for Patrick so that the plants they sold could be displayed, and climbing into the big water tank to fit the tap and installing it beside the steps. The staging has long gone, replaced by seating for the café, but it’s nice to see the water butt is still there. I also rehung the entrance gate, my initials were still in the cement, that too will soon be gone as new gates are to be fitted. We installed a bench in an area at the back of Hollybush as a memorial to Bob Dixon who sadly died during my time there, his family came down to see us fit the bench. Bob and I often worked together on projects and he used to regale me with his stories about his life as a funeral director, he had a real dry sense of humour, many of us missed Bob when he passed.

I stopped going to volunteer due to going full time at Becketts Park to retrain to become a teacher of technology and qualified in 1989, spending my first three years in a school in Norfolk and working in various high schools in Leeds. I also spent three years out in Papua New Guinea, finishing my career with the Pupil Referral Service.

I've always had an interest in conservation and tried, where the National Curriculum allowed, to give students projects in that field, bird boxes, bat boxes, bee hotels, planting trees etc and have taken that stance now I'm retired at my allotment with a wildflower meadow, pond and hedge planting and a variety of bee, insect and bird accommodations and feeding stations.

I'm still doing voluntary work with several organisations and I do pop in now and again as I cycle the canal towpath and call into the café for a brew and a toastie. I look back at the time I spent there with some satisfaction, the names and faces fade over time but other things stay with you and I often smile when I pass the place. It's wonderful that it has expanded and grown into the organisation it is now and the ethos hasn't changed and I'm sure it will continue to grow.

Peter Clarke, Hollybush Volunteer, 1980-1990s



A public treeplanting day, on the edge of Temple Newsam Estate early 1990s for Tree Week, Skelton Grange Power station in the background, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive, photographer unknown

Only Praise, Only Praise for Hollybush

It was a really good project funded by the Home Office, we worked with people seeking asylum who had just come to Leeds. We worked with people who were staying at a place called Hillside, on the Leeds Bradford Road quite near Hollybush, doing orientation walks around town, they had just come to Leeds and didn't know anything. But we were also doing countryside walks and conservation activities. We had some young people, called the Explorers Club, unaccompanied minors 16 to 18, and then we had adults obviously from all different countries. At celebration events we brought food from all different countries, got together at Hollybush and had parties and stuff. I think there was something really good about Hollybush in that they are really open to lots of activities. So it created freedom, I was quite free to make it up as I went along which was good and we had lots of volunteers who helped.

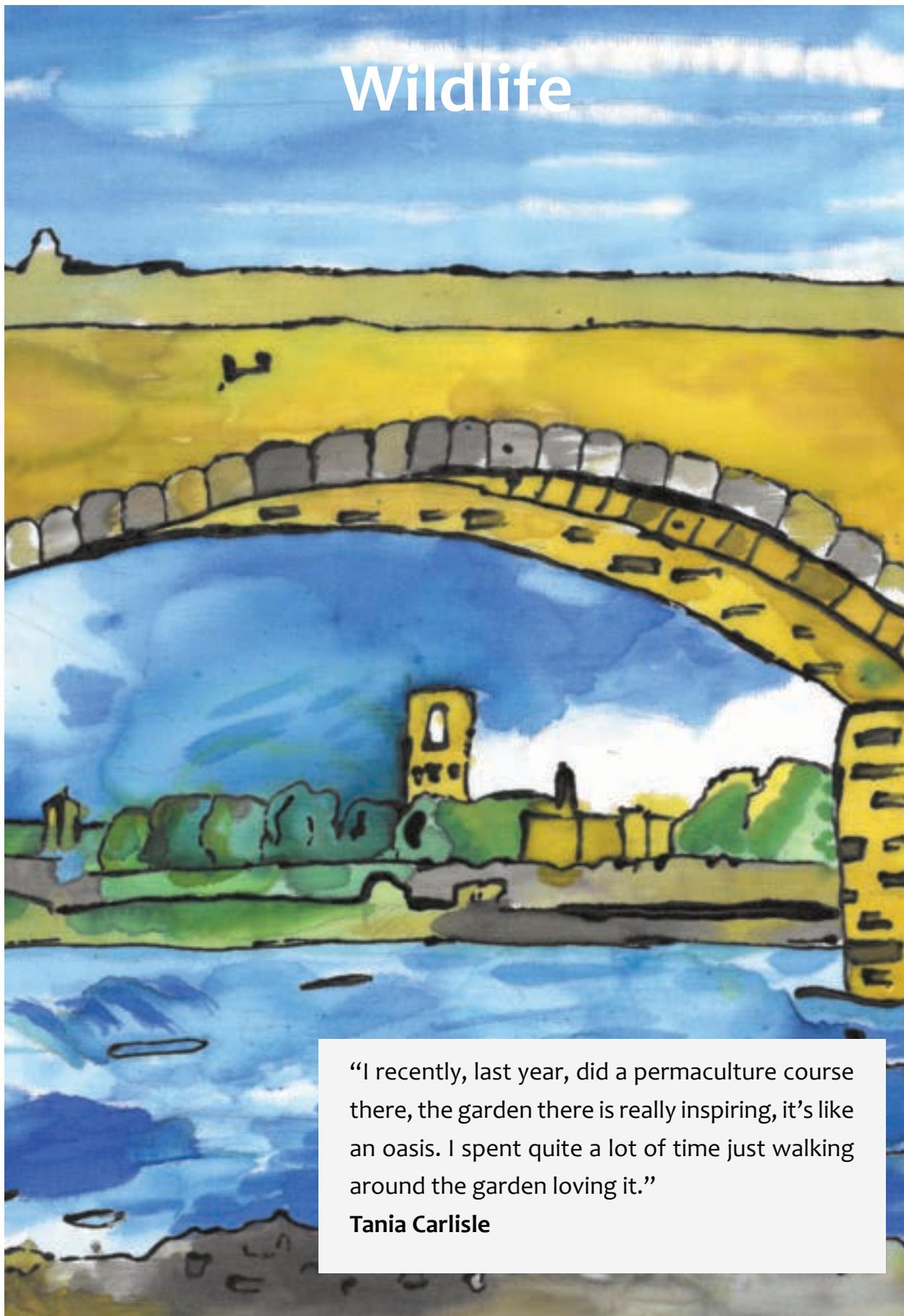
We ran an allotment in Harehills and that was the main conservation stuff. People had sometimes experienced quite a lot of trauma and didn't want to do lots of manual work, they just wanted to go somewhere, walk and talk, that was most appropriate, that was what we did. It was almost like an entry into Hollybush as some people got involved in the regular activities. With the Explorers Club we did the Countryside Code; a lot of it was about practising English.

Some of the young people went on a BTCV trip to Devon, doing a lot of conservation activities. We supported them to do that. That was 16 to 18-year-olds who would not have gone on holiday otherwise, who were in foster care or mainly in accommodation, and didn't have parents with them. There were two Iranians, two girls from Africa and two others. It was a really good experience for them; they wouldn't have had that experience otherwise, that was really good.

It only lasted for one year at Hollybush and the government didn't fund it again even though we did really well. Because my project was on the edge, I was never quite sure what everyone else was doing, they all looked very technical and very competent and I was always in awe of what they did.

Tania Carlisle (Salvesen) Project Officer 2005-2007

Wildlife



“I recently, last year, did a permaculture course there, the garden there is really inspiring, it’s like an oasis. I spent quite a lot of time just walking around the garden loving it.”

Tania Carlisle

The abbey through the Old Stone Bridge pre-1912, silk painting by Glorinda

Frogs, Frogs, Frogs

I worked at Hollybush from 1987 until my retirement in 2001. Initially, I was training manager for the area and later nationally but still, to my delight, being able to be based in Leeds and not have to transfer to Wallingford.

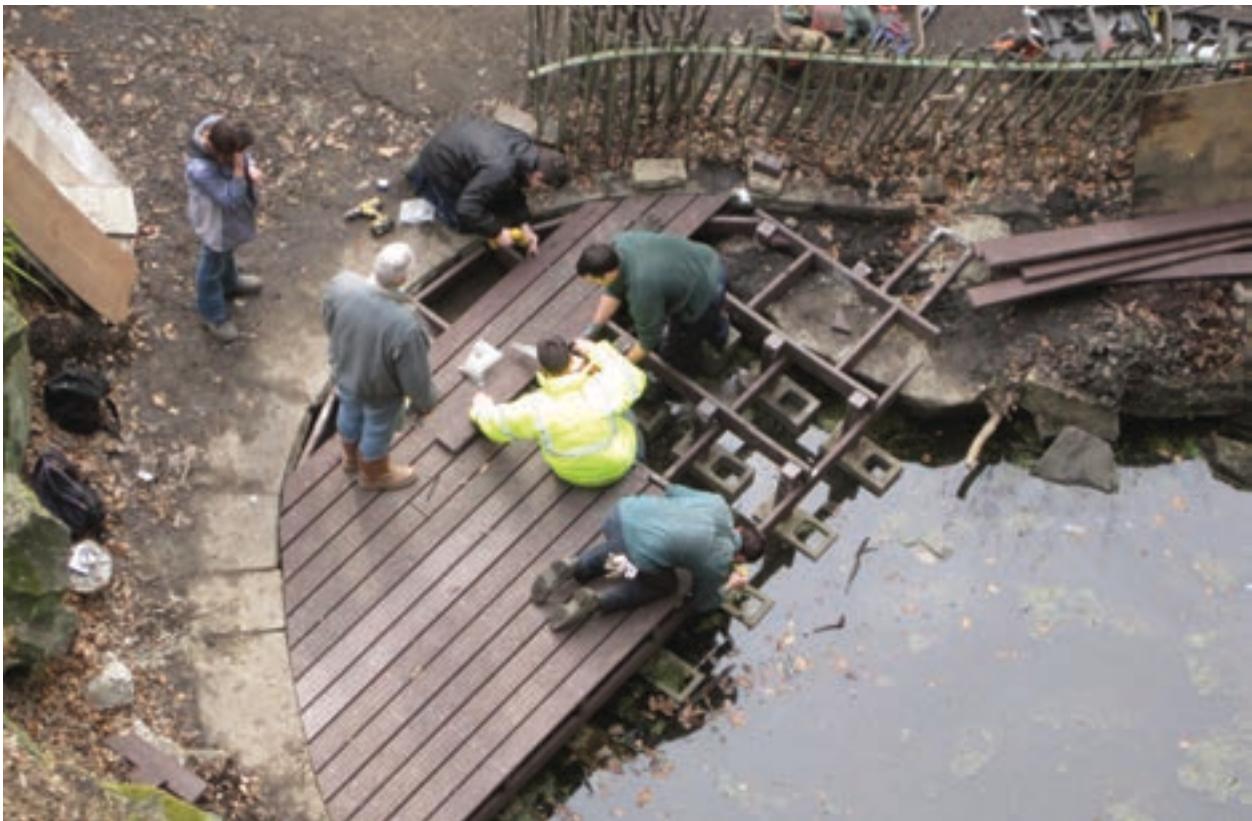
I still remember my first day with BTCV – the delight of being back in the voluntary sector where the friendliness and enthusiasm of everyone was so inspiring. I felt very much a part of it as well as, at the same time, feeling a bit out of things because of my age. Not that anyone else commented on it, but I was glad I had sons about the same age as many of the volunteers – they could keep me in touch with young views!

As well as the work which I thoroughly enjoyed I remember the delight of wandering into the garden, cup of coffee in hand, when it was time for a break. One day in particular sticks in my mind – I walked down to the pond and couldn't see a drop of water. It was a warm sunny day and the pond was absolutely full of frogs, all with their heads stuck out of the water, eyes looking in the same direction. I've never seen so many frogs together at one time – before or since.

Kathy Noble, Training Manager, 1987-2001



Frogspawn at Hollybush, photograph by Toby Roberts



Dipping platform in Beaumont Park, photograph taken from the Hollybush Archive, photographer unknown



Planting in the gardens provides a haven for wildlife in the middle of the city, photograph by John Preston

Wildlife Gardening

I moved to Leeds in 1995 to be a VO in the wildlife gardening project led by Patrick Crowley. Hollybush seemed to me a wonderful place: an old stone farmhouse in the city, an urban oasis of trees and wildflowers. There were people there who knew skills I longed to learn – hedge laying, tree planting and wildflower meadow management. I intended to stay up to a year but stopped being a VO after about four months for health reasons.

I continued to volunteer intermittently, and it was very important for me even when I could not do very much, to maintain contact with people. In the mid-1990s the project sold potted herbs and wildflowers, trees and hedging plants, direct to the public as well as to schools. Plants were arranged on tables in the courtyard where the seating for the cafe now is. It was always very windy there and I often had to pick them up off the floor. The area was roughly surfaced with bricks and cobbles. The wildflowers self-seeded into the gaps between them and we had a delightful collection of ‘weeds’; my favourites were the cowslips.

Beyond the polytunnels was the Nature Garden, a demonstration area showing various habitats and the work of which the task groups were capable – dry stone walling, fencing, various stiles and paths. There was a big pond and a mini pond, trees and wildflower meadows. Our idea was to make habitats to attract wildlife into the garden. Being alongside the canal helped – the two polytunnels were full of newts and toads which lived under the trays of wildflowers we grew for sale. There was an annual wildflower area we called ‘the farmer’s nightmare’ because it contained cornfield weeds: poppies, daisies, cornflowers, corn cockles, corn marigolds, nectar-rich flowers all but lost from the countryside.

Hollybush was a leader promoting the idea of such plantings to benefit bees and other insects, which are now, in 2019, often seen on the edges of parks, hospital and university grounds as well in gardens. Patrick was extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about all aspects of nature gardening and I learnt a lot from listening to him talking to customers.

Hollybush was a lot shabbier and more homemade looking in the mid-90s than it is now. All the work on the site had been done by volunteers. The building that is now

the classroom was divided into two rooms. One was Patrick's office, where sometimes at the end of the day, I would see Patrick's overalls and wellingtons left in the middle of the floor looking as if he had just dematerialised while wearing them. He had a knack of leaving them just so when he went home.

The room next door was a common room for the volunteers, furnished with scruffy armchairs and a sink and a kettle where we made endless cups of tea, and I and the other volunteers talked instead of working. On the wall someone had printed out:

The Volunteer's Lament

We the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We've done so much with so little for so long that we now feel able to do anything with nothing.

The was another sign which I also liked. Bright yellow with a cartoon of a bumble bee, it said, "Sorry about the mess. These practical works to improve your countryside will be completed as soon as possible."

There was a counter near the door with an old till and on Sundays we opened to the public as a shop: "A one-stop shop for all your wildlife gardening needs." We sold potted herbs, wildflowers, trees and shrubs, compost and woodchip. Larger, one-off items such as pond liner could be ordered. We also gave information and advice about wildlife gardening and Patrick was very knowledgeable and generous with his time to whoever came in.

The customers were lovely people who wanted to make their gardens wildlife friendly, although there were occasional complaints. One lady said we'd sold her 'that plant', pointing at Herb Robert, flourishing under a hedge, and now she couldn't get rid of it!

In summer we sold pond plants, and in winter bare rooted trees and native hedging plants . These arrived by the hundred in large sacks in December, just as the weather turned cold and wet. Heeling them in into trenches alongside the polytunnels was exhausting work. Then, in spring, so as not to waste unsold stock, the remainder was planted out in rows to grow on until the following winter when it had to be lifted again.

The project also did tasks in school grounds, such as making ponds, wildlife areas,

paths and wooden seats and structures. I wasn't really involved with these tasks, I think because it soon became obvious that I wasn't fit enough. But I saw photos of some of the finished work and it was very good. We also did woven willow – I enjoyed a training day in the wildlife garden when a group of us learned how to do a living willow dome. I've loved willow ever since.

There were several interesting characters helping at Hollybush when I first arrived, and they made more of an impression on me than others I met later on. A retired teacher named Ross Radcliffe used to take school parties around the garden. He loved folktales of witches, fairies and tree spirits. His skill as a raconteur kept the children spellbound. Ross had a good heart and strong opinions (and occasionally liked a good moan). A volunteer drew a wonderful cartoon of him as a tiny figure in the garden, leaning on a toadstool, dwarfed by a frog grinning over his shoulder, and labelled it "curmudgeonly old gnome". Ross's wife, Kveta, used to come in and help on open days and bring homemade cakes. She was Czech (they'd met in the African desert during World War II) and Ross never tired of telling us that he'd married her because he thought "cheque" meant she was rich.

Other volunteers who were around at that time included Bob A (Bob Allen) who was a doctor of physics. And Bob B (Bob Broadhurst) who did a lot of practical work in the garden. Bob B often slept unofficially at Hollybush, as he had problems with his neighbours at his council flat. He eventually moved to the Buddhist centre in Todmorden, to help in the garden there, whilst telling everyone he had no intention of becoming a Buddhist. (Editor: Or giving up drinking beer!)

When I first arrived, two VOs , Stuart and Joanne, were living at Hollybush, which still had some residential facilities. Farmer Bill, the farmer who worked the land in the valley, used to drop in frequently to collect his mail, which got accidentally delivered to us. He used to help himself to our tea and biscuits, and grumble a lot, which nobody minded, reasoning that anyone who could be out at 5 am doing thankless work, such as cutting cauliflowers, had earned it.

Countryside weekends, practical tasks, left from Hollybush on a Friday night. I went on one led by Ian W and Bob A, where I helped to organise the communal cooking (although leadership of any kind, really is not my thing). Bob and Ian were both very

skilled on the practical side, and all went well until late on Sunday afternoon when we couldn't get a gate post in firmly enough. Even though we'd dug a deep hole and packed it well with stones and earth, it kept wobbling. Ian said, "tamp it to buggery". The whole group all beat the soil around the post as hard as we could – and hoped for the best.

Some of the weekends were part of my training as a VO. I loved the hedge-laying, even though the hawthorns were as big as trees and the thick trunks broke off when I tried to lay them sideways. I think that weekend was the first time I met the Wakefield office project officer, Jessica Duffy. She was sitting on the floor of the village hall where we were staying, dismantling and cleaning a chainsaw. I was very impressed!

Pat Browne Hollybush VO, 1995 and periodic volunteer to present



An information sign for the public, used during the 1990s

Hollybush
Conservation
Volunteers



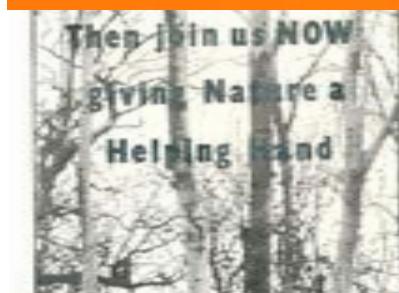
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COMPETITION**
**14th/15th March
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Ouseburn Green

(Adjacent to M62 between Wakefield
and Leeds)

Organised by:



FWAG



Summer Tasks



1982

Residential projects organised for
National Conservation Volunteers

ARE YOU A
Natural
VOLUNTEER



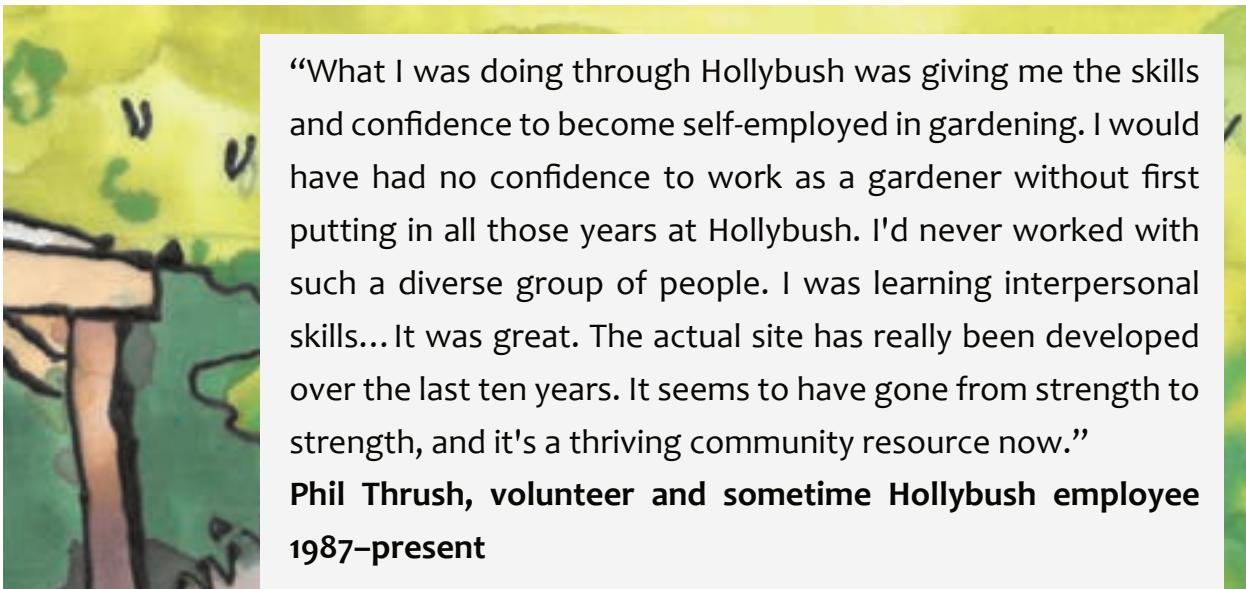
HOLLYBUSH
Conservation Volunteers



NATIONAL TREE WEEK

COME & JOIN US

Leaflets from the 1980s, many loaned by Ian Wallace. The logo changed spring 1988



“What I was doing through Hollybush was giving me the skills and confidence to become self-employed in gardening. I would have had no confidence to work as a gardener without first putting in all those years at Hollybush. I'd never worked with such a diverse group of people. I was learning interpersonal skills... It was great. The actual site has really been developed over the last ten years. It seems to have gone from strength to strength, and it's a thriving community resource now.”

**Phil Thrush, volunteer and sometime Hollybush employee
1987–present**

The Millennium and Beyond

Entrance to the Leeds Bradford Road Tunnel, silk painting by Kayla at Hollybush Primary School

Schools Team

I started with Hollybush in 2004 as the Assistant Schools Project Officer. I was incredibly lucky at the time as I was in a job I didn't particularly enjoy after leaving university and came out with the schools group on a volunteer day. It was here that I heard about the new assistant position they were about to create on the schools group. It was also the first time I met my soon to be mentor Stuart Harris (Schools Project Officer) and experienced the amazing feeling that Hollybush creates.

I applied for the job and was successful and spent the next couple of years learning the ropes under Stuart. These were some of the fondest memories I have of my working life. I met friends for life and also met my future wife through the group (we met installing mushroom seats in a school in Halifax through my then VO Anna Pickles - so romantic!). I always thought it was amazing how welcoming Hollybush was to anyone from all ages, abilities and background. I think this, more than anything, is what makes Hollybush such a special place and has meant it is so special to so many people.

I also spent a summer on secondment to the North Yorkshire office running their summer holiday schedule. This involved running weeklong practical groups in specific locations around North Yorkshire for groups of up to 12 people. Accommodation was basic for the group, at best! But we cooked and ate together and worked on various projects. Again, this was a brilliant experience for me and I really grew in confidence over this time.

On my return to Hollybush after the summer I was lucky enough to be successful in applying for and getting the Senior Field Project Officer role. I worked in this role for three years, completing a number of large projects. There are three that really stick in my mind now. A large viewing platform we built at Oakwell Hall. This was the last project I worked on for BTCV. It was a nice technical project and we managed to get a really good finished product. A large pathing project we installed at Honley woods near Huddersfield. It went on forever and by the end everyone was sick of wheelbarrowing gravel around! A fencing project in Huddersfield. It was over a really cold winter and we were working on the hills around Huddersfield. It was FREEZING! We had all sorts of problems and in the end, John Preston came out with me to save my bacon and show me the proper way to fence - my hero!

I also had the opportunity to help with delivering some training for practical holiday leaders in Iceland. I spent about a week in Iceland doing some training of practical leaders who would be running practical holidays for international students. The whole week was an awesome experience and still gives me my standout life experience of sitting in a natural warm spring hot tub on the edge of a mountain looking out over a glacier as the sun was setting with a cold beer in hand. It doesn't get much better than that.

The social side of Hollybush was also a big thing. I remember brilliant barn dances, karaoke nights, fires in the garden and lots and lots of stupid games. I also remember that I spent most of my salary and more nights than I should have in the Bridge Inn and the West End. They were special times.

I did a lot through Hollybush and learnt the skills that set me up for the career that was to come, but more than anything it was the people I worked with that made it so special. I remember working with and learning from Stuart Harris, as well as having to clean up after him; he is a slob! Jenny, Richard, Ben, Phil, Doug, Susan, Sarah and all my VOs who helped me run the various projects throughout the years. The volunteers themselves, too numerous to mention, who all brought something special. But the person who deserves the biggest mention and often goes unnoticed is John Preston. To do what he has done for so long is unbelievable. He gave me a chance and I thank him for it. Now that I've moved on from Hollybush I understand, and am in awe of, the commitment and dedication he has given.

Dan Barker, Hollybush Project Officer and now Facilities Manager for the Wildlife and Wetland Trust

Always a Brew and a Biscuit

I'd been a VO for a short time at a BTCV office in East London when I was at university and loved it. When I came back to Leeds a couple of years after university knowing I wanted to pursue a career in the environment but not knowing where to start I rediscovered BTCV and applied to be a VO at Hollybush.

Summer 2003, the weather was glorious, I was part of Stuart's schools team and was having a fantastic time learning new skills such as bricklaying, expounding the virtues of a 'shoveholer' to my dubious family and making new lifelong friends. I was totally hooked. Hollybush offered me the perfect blend of practical environmental work, a shedload of laughs and a place that I felt 100% at home.

The people who came to Hollybush were quirky, caring, passionate, young, old and from hugely diverse backgrounds. It was working with this huge mix that I truly loved, I realised that I was good at the people stuff and that maybe this was where my future career lay. In January 2004 I was lucky enough to get a part-time administration position at Hollybush, and by 2005 I had created myself a new role of Placement Coordinator as the work at Hollybush grew, and with it the numbers of volunteers that needed recruiting, managing and supporting.

The job was great but challenging at times as we butted heads with old school conservationists at BTCV whilst trying to win support for what we were doing at Hollybush: trying to offer environmental opportunities for anyone that wanted a go in an inclusive and accessible fashion.

Ten years after leaving Hollybush I find myself working as a Senior Project Officer for the Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Myplace project. Myplace is like a properly funded Hollybush and I absolutely love it. As well as showing me where my career path would go, Hollybush gave me the best friends I could ask for and, like so many others, I met my husband there, Phil Riddell.

Over my years at Hollybush we had some amazingly fun times. Every now and then we would come up with an excuse for a day trip and we would all clamber into the minibuses and head off for a mad adventure! We went walking in the Dales, we took a trip to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, had a picnic down by the river in Addingham, went to Kirkstall Abbey, went to Robin Hood's Bay.

There was always a brew and a biscuit, sometimes an ice cream, we played frisbee all the time! If it was someone's last task, there was the very important question of "best task, worst task?" And if it were one of Stu's VOs leaving, they were always his favourite!

Jenny Riddell, VO and administrator at Hollybush 2003-2009



*Volunteers and staff celebrate after completing the Three Peaks Challenge in 2006,
photograph by Dan Watson*

Tea, Biscuits and FUN!!!

I started at Hollybush in around 2000 as a minimum wage placement to bridge the Schools group and Hollyvols groups. I only considered it as a fill-in job when I started, as I wanted to return to wilder parts of Scotland to work, and to be honest BTCV job descriptions were pretty dry back then. Little did I know that I would fall in love with Hollybush and working with such a great variety of people and end up staying for nine years.

I loved the variety of projects and the amazing characters that came out on task. After six months, my contract came to an end and John Preston asked me if I wanted to stay. "Of course I do, but I need more money," I replied. His response was priceless! "OK, justify yourself then," he said. With that, he pretty much allowed me to write my own job description, which involved delivering training, sharing some of Patrick's schools and venturing into Bradford for work, and I became an Assistant Project Officer. When Patrick left, I took over as Schools PO and added corporate team events to my repertoire.

During my time, I worked with some great people; Patrick was a great inspiration to me and always had time to answer questions. Big Dan was my first minimum wage assistant and he was great fun to work with. Phil and little Dougie were next generation and when I left, I knew I was leaving the project in safe hands. Phil was quite problematic at the start, getting into trailer altercations with teachers and famously driving a minibus with a wheelbarrow on the roofrack under a low bridge in Ilkley and getting it stuck. Jenny was an absolute legend and started as a VO. She went on to become the administrator and had a huge influence at Hollybush. She really pushed the social scene with regular karaoke nights, bonfire dos, talent night and Christmas parties.

However, the real stars were the volunteers. Who would have thought such a wide variety of people, backgrounds and skills would be able to work together so well? The fact that none of them were paid was always one of my main inspirations. We couldn't pay them, but we could give them tea and biscuits, experience and above all, FUN! There were so many great volunteers, but I particularly remember John Taplin, David Marshall and his private toolbox, Brian who loved nothing more than to slap me hard on the a**e at any moment and Nicky Berry who simply loved hot tea.

From a personal point of view, working at BTCV gave me so many opportunities to try different things out from after dinner speeches at Otley Golf Club, for a fee of course, to the weekly presentations for Gateway to Work that John somehow persuaded me to do. This involved trying to convince large groups of unemployed people to work using props such as cuddly toys and spades; they were the toughest audience ever.

It's reassuring to know that Hollybush is still thriving and adapting to the times. I regularly tell people about TCV and volunteering in general and the benefits to be had. After leaving Hollybush, I realised a part of my life was missing. I missed that fun element of being with likeminded people and generally acting like a child, which can be hard to find when you are self-employed. I have now found that again through volunteering with adults with learning difficulties in my spare time and joining an improv group.

Stuart Harris, Hollybush Staff Member about 2000-2009

Hiking in the Midnight Sun

I first heard about Hollybush when volunteering with the University of Leeds Conservation Volunteers, doing joint practical task days with Richard and Jenny around 2005. Little did I know it would be the start of a decade-long love affair. Shortly after finishing university I returned to start as a VO, joining a crew of like-minded people who wanted to be outside, learn about conservation, get some much-needed skills and have a ruddy good time.

Soon after, the BTCV international department advertised for a European Voluntary Service placement to Iceland to work with the Iceland Conservation Volunteers, spending time building trails in small teams deployed all over the remote, rugged but beautiful wilderness of the Icelandic National Parks. Luckily my application was successful, including a telephone interview whilst in bed(!), and I spent the summer grafting, building steps in dormant volcanic craters, swimming in thermal hot springs and hiking in the midnight sun.

In the autumn I returned to continue developing skills and experience with the Schools Team, working with Stuart and Phil building wildlife gardens, hundreds of raised beds and seating areas across West Yorkshire. It was during this winter I really felt like Hollybush was going to play a big part in my life. The atmosphere was brilliant, everyone was welcome, no one was judged, endless football was played at lunch time, the Friday Fab Four won hearts and minds, and everyone went home with a smile on their face, often via the Bridge Inn or West End pub.

After another summer leading teams in Iceland it was the autumn of 2008 when my efforts were rewarded and I was lucky enough to gain my first 'proper job' as the Schools Assistant Project Officer, wow! It was an exciting time for the team with national awards in London, new staff coming on board, epic pool competition wins, and a real buzz around the centre. There were battles over making the brew kits; who would remember the milk? How many people would turn up? Who would sit in the front of the minibus? How much gravel would come and at what time? Which awful CD was jammed in the van radio? These were all delightful challenges to overcome on any given task day.

After a few years, times moved on and I became Project Officer, Senior Project Officer and then Team Leader, helping deliver some amazing projects including walling residential trips on the Pennine Moors, dozens of tree planting schemes, epic footpath improvements, including the Meanwood Valley Trail and the flagship Hirst Wood Nature Reserve. This couldn't have been done without the help of a practical dreamteam of Col and Andy, a stream of dedicated VOs and hundreds of awesome volunteers. It was with a heavy heart, a lifetime of memories and friends, and the best leaving cake in history that I finally departed Hollybush in 2016 for pastures new.

Dougie Watson, Hollybush VO and Staff Member 2005-2016



Vans in Hollybush yard, silk painting by Lacey E at Hollybush Primary School

Memories of Hollybush

I was washed ashore at Hollybush as a student on the NVQ course in the Spring of 2007 and somehow ended up staying for eight years teaching the course I first arrived to take. Without doubt these were the happiest working days of my life. The culture, the atmosphere and the mood was always unconventional. It was an emotional place to be, full of extraordinary people. There was no normal day. New volunteers and students would arrive to find that Hollybush was a place that judged no one, was not shocked, offended or fazed by any of the issues that had disenfranchised them from mainstream society. The staff were compassionate and deeply committed to changing lives.

Those years teaching on site were a great adventure. The volunteers were such a diverse group of skills and life experience and they created their own culture of work and recreation. I remember a ferret being produced on the way to site, a large dog stowed at the back one day, stopping at the roadside so a student could buy a new mantelpiece. There were rules but they were our rules and as long as the work was done on time and people enjoyed learning there was no need for anything conventional to happen.

The kitchen in a morning was always a special place to be as volunteers rolled in one after another and scanned the white boards for which van was going where. Some tasks were a hard sell, the landfill sites, litter picking at Halton Moor, tree planting a windswept hillside in the pouring rain. Once we were loaded up and off to site it didn't seem to matter where we went or what we did. Task days were full of laughter and great company.

We managed to get access to some great nature reserves through Hollybush and regularly worked on Otley Chevin, Townclose Hills, Oakwell Hall and at Temple Newsam and Kirkstall Valley. The students seemed to appreciate the value of the work we did and as a rule were deeply committed to environmental management and improving local habitats. We built footpaths, gates and stiles, fences, walls and leaky dams, we coppiced, willow spilled, thinned, felled and planted. We laid some excellent hedges along the way.

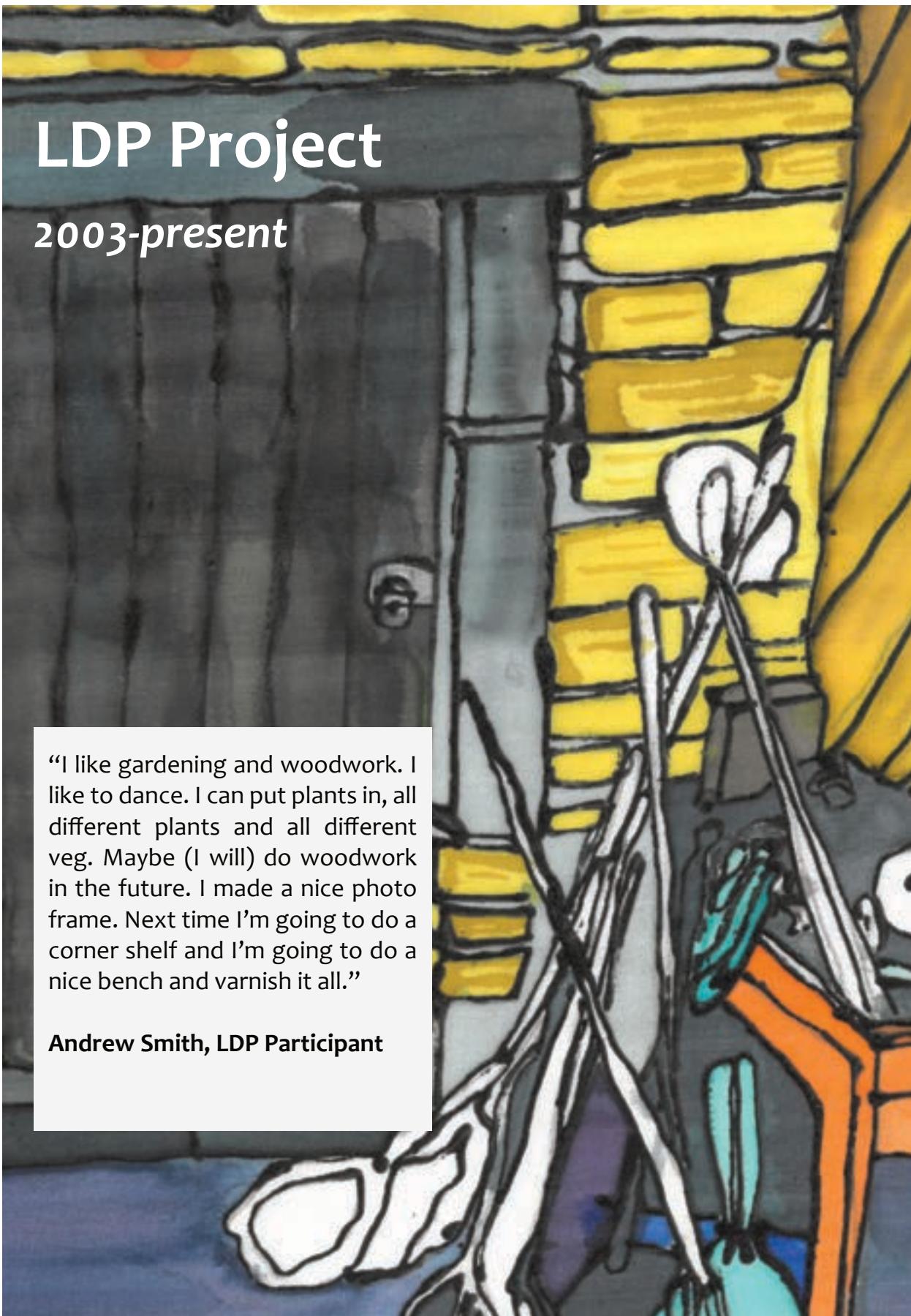
It was always the winter work that went down best, the woodland management that seemed to inspire. In the course of eight years as many as 150 students completed the Diplomas in Environmental Conservation at Hollybush. Some have worked within the sector, many still do in one way or another.

Those days still linger at the back of my mind. I happen upon old students and Hollybush volunteers all over Leeds and drive past work sites, hedges laid and trees planted a dozen years ago and more and I remember.

Craig Spencer, Diploma Trainer and Hollyvols 2007-2015



Hollybush frontage, silk painting by Chelsey at Hollybush Primary School



Shed and Tools, silk painting by Lucy at Hollybush Primary School

Meeting a Need

In response to more volunteers, with significant levels of learning disability, asking to go on task. We began to look at running different types of projects that could better support their needs. John visited other projects working with adults with learning disability around Leeds and further afield. In 2003 BTCV Enterprises, the trading arm that worked with unemployed people on government schemes offered a stream of Further Education funding that came via Broxtowe (later Castle) College in Nottingham. So, the Hollybush Project was founded, and for seven years group members worked on several entry level and pre-entry qualifications each year. In 2010 the funding came to an end, but fortunately lobbying by parents and others resulted in the scheme being funded by Leeds City Council Adult Social Care.

It's Hard to Say Goodbye

I began my employment with the Hollybush Learning Disability Project in the Summer of 2006 and decided to take early retirement in March 2019 after many wonderful years with this group of amazing people.

Over this period of time I have learned so much. Supporting individuals with complex needs is inspiring, rewarding, and many times challenging, a good sense of humour is required at all times! But I wouldn't change the last thirteen years for anything.

My colleagues – to name a few, Caroline, Rosie, Jayne and Emma - have been a joy to work alongside, and of course not forgetting the brilliant volunteers, far too many over the years to mention, all bringing their unique talents to support the Learning Disability Project.

The Learning Disability Project is one of a kind in TCV, offering many different activities which can be enjoyed by people with a wide variety of support needs, building on their skills and providing a safe and welcoming environment.

I hope this project continues for many more years; it's hard to say goodbye, and I am now a volunteer one day a week.

Gill Fallas Project Officer 2006–2019 and Hollybush Volunteer 2019 onward

Sowing Seeds

I began volunteering for the Learning Disability Project in April 2007. It was known as the Horticulture Project then and in conjunction with Castle College Nottingham delivered National Open College Network (NOCN) qualifications (horticulture, literacy and numeracy) for adult learners with learning disabilities. I knew from day one that I was going to enjoy helping with this project and the combination of supporting the learners, the welcoming, non-judgemental approach of Hollybush and being in the garden was wonderful. In January 2008 I became a member of staff taking a learning support assistant role.

The project has changed and developed a lot from 2007 up until when I left in August 2019. The collaboration with Castle College came to an end in 2010 and funding was secured with Leeds City Council. This change meant staff had more choice in the activities offered, so as well as gardening and craft activities, the installation of a kitchen in the classroom allowed for more food growing and cooking opportunities.

Hollybush began to offer woodwork sessions which our members could take part in and they could also help in the onsite café with baking and washing up. We began to focus some activities around two big Hollybush events, the summer plant sale and the Christmas Fair. The group worked hard preparing; sowing seeds, watering, pricking out and making many lovely craft items and cards for Christmas. The standard of items produced is very high and they were always proud of their work.

Some of the most fun activities we ran included regular walks to Kirkstall Abbey for picnics and to tend raised beds, Christmas parties, with very competitive musical chairs, barbecues in the garden, sports day and garden games, plus the chance to spend time in a lovely garden with veg beds, poly tunnel, ponds and seating areas.

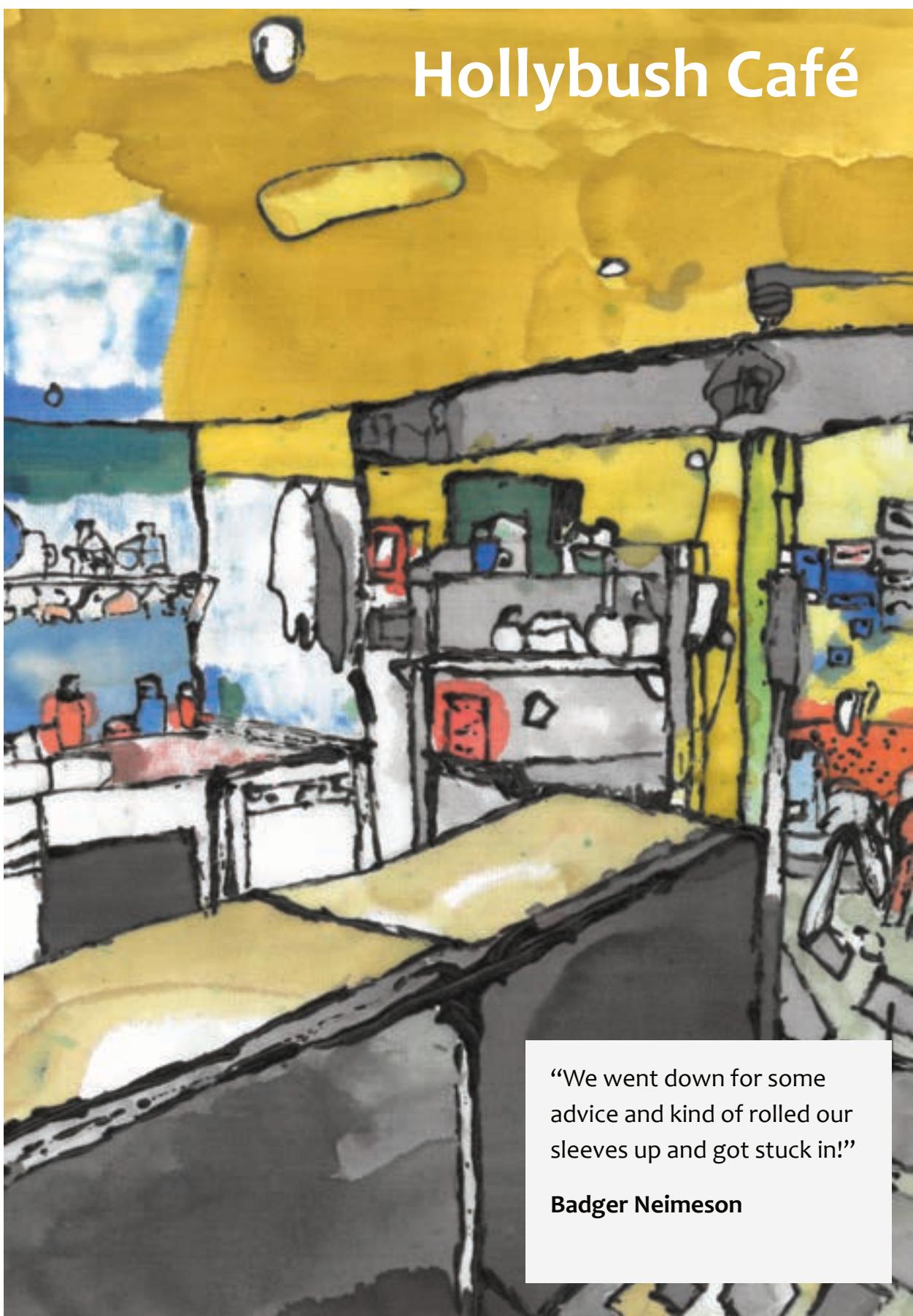
I was part of a brilliant, close, supportive team and made some great friends who I still meet up with. Although group members changed and moved on to new activities, many of the group stayed the same and I knew them for the whole 12 years I was at Hollybush. We were also lucky to have some excellent regular volunteers who made such a huge difference to the project. I decided to leave in August 2019 for a role elsewhere, but I learnt so much in my time at Hollybush, spent time outside every day and met lots of really great people.

Rosie Clarke, Hollybush Volunteer, then Project Officer 2007-2019



Woodwork projects, planting vegetable beds in the abbey grounds and sales at the Christmas Fair 2014. Photographs from the Hollybush Archive

Hollybush Café



“We went down for some advice and kind of rolled our sleeves up and got stuck in!”

Badger Neimeson

The Café Counter, silk painting by Archie at Hollybush Primary School

The café at Hollybush started in about 2012, and the development of Hollybush as a much more outward facing hub dates from then. Here are two key stories in the life of the Hollybush Café .

Sheila's story

My name is Sheila Pintar and I first came to Hollybush six years ago. I worked for the Probation Service for 20 years and then I retired from there. I went to the NHS as a clerk and then re-trained as a medical secretary; I worked in loads of different departments and hospitals. The last place I worked was dermatology; it was always busy and got stressful, so I left.

I'd finished working and I stayed at home for a while; I got a bit fed up and I think I wanted to do some voluntary work, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I went to the volunteers' office in town; the lady said there's somewhere quite near where you live, it's called Hollybush. I said I'd be interested because I'd passed here a lot and never knew what they did, hadn't got a clue. So she said, "They're opening a café and they're wanting somebody to work there." I said, "I've never done any of that kind of work, I've always worked in an office." So she said, "Do you want go down and see what you think?"

So I did, and Jessica was here; she had a chat with me and said would you like to come in next Tuesday, we're just starting this café, so I did. There was a young man who worked in the café who made soup. Jessica got the ball rolling and we just did tea and cake; Jessica did a lot of baking and she taught me a lot. I went on food hygiene courses.

I started getting to know a few people and I said I wanted to help in the Learning Disability Project (LDP); so I worked there for quite a while on Tuesdays, and on Wednesdays I was in the café with Pat, who became the café manager. Then I was taken ill and was off for quite a while. I didn't go back to LDP; I worked for two days in the café and people from LDP started coming to help in the café; we usually do some baking or washing up; others do woodwork or gardening.

I did the beginners' woodwork course and the next course because somebody told me about it, and I thought I'd quite like to do that. I'd never done anything like that before but I found it really interesting and I enjoyed it. I had a lot of help and Tom explained

everything and so did Maggie and Russell who helped Tom then. I made a bench which I still have at home on the balcony; it's been out in all weathers. On the second course I made a bedside cabinet; there was a young lad who did the course with me and we used to compare our cabinets. I came away knowing how to line things up, how to use a saw, how to measure and the names of the tools; I managed not to saw my finger off!

I also did a weaving course with Gemma and found it difficult. I did the course with Tina who used to work in the café; we learnt to do felting. I would like to do another course with Gemma but it's just fitting it in.

I sometimes help out at events, but I like to be at home at weekends. I did the plant sale this year and I've done the art trail. I quite like doing the plant sale because we had a few helpers and that makes it easier because then you can have a break.

Hollybush is very handy for me and I thought to myself I don't want to do office work because I've done that all my working life; I wanted a complete change. I thought, I'll give it a whirl. I seem to have got used to it. I get on very well with Pat and I like the customers; you meet lots of different people. I didn't think I'd be here as long as I have been, but time flies. The café has built up more; the food has more of a variety since Pat's come. There's not anything else really different since I came except Tom has made shelves for the spices in the kitchen; and we made the café itself better by putting tablecloths on the tables and getting nicer chairs; it looks brighter now.

Sheila Pintar, Hollybush Volunteer since 2013



A postcard advertising the cafe in 2013

Biscuits, Tea, Coffee and Volunteers

I worked in Wakefield and then Kirklees for BTCV and then I came back to Hollybush after I'd had my first child in 2006, managing a Heritage Lottery funded training project at Oakwell Hall, then after my second maternity leave, back as a job share BTCV National Training Officer in the freezing cold top office. It was epically cold. People used to swear it was haunted it was so cold, but it could have been because it had two outside stone walls. Lisa and I did management training, recruitment training, leadership and how to manage volunteers. It involved going all over the country.

I think my volunteering and training has had a lifelong impact on me because I'm still involved in volunteer management now, at Leeds Older People's Forum. Travelling to other sites was good as it allowed me to see how other offices did things. Us training officers probably knew more about the organisation than the managing directors, as people just told us stuff when we went to train them. It was interesting to make links between projects and get them to talk to each other if they were doing similar things.

That came to an end with the big round of austerity redundancies, BTCV had the brand review and became The Conservation Volunteers and wanted to make the larger offices like Hollybush into hubs to get more of the community involved. We thought we could do that by opening up a cafe. We started off by thinking that the Learning Disability team could have a little hatch to do teas and coffees, but it seemed too complicated, so we started looking at the old laundry and junk room as a little kitchen and John got a grant to convert it.

The old volunteer room became the indoor seating for the cafe to begin with, we worked around the volunteers, opening 10am-2pm after they'd had their tea. But it got a bit complicated, so they got moved into a gazebo for the summer and John started raising money for the roundhouse. It took longer than we hoped, and the garden volunteers had to survive outside or in the barn for a couple of years.

TCV had a grant to employ someone for three months to get the cafe up and running, so I did that and stayed on for nearly three years overseeing the café, events and helping with publicity. When we started, the café was staffed by volunteers and me. We had some good volunteers like Rob Griffiths who was an ex-chef. We served simple things like cake and soup and in the summer we did salads, scones, hummus and pitta

bread. The signature thing was that we grew salad in the polytunnel for about nine months of the year and served that in the café, also fruit upside down cake.

We used the fundraising events in the cafe to engage with local people. It's amazing that there's a constant stream of people coming to these events who had no idea what Hollybush was.

I think a lot of the schools work we did had a good impact on the community. They went out to local schools and told them how to make wildlife gardens but lots of children also came to our wildlife garden. At events we get people coming up saying, "I remember coming here when I was seven," which is really nice. It's just another little way of influencing people and getting them to change how they think about things.

I think the volunteers are different now. When I started it was mostly young people looking for work due to the economic climate in the 1980s. Now there's a much more diverse spread of people of different ages and backgrounds involved. People 30 years ago came to learn about the environment because they saw a career in it, but now they come for other reasons and go away with more information about the environment

To me, Hollybush means lots of nice memories of nice people and good friends. There was a very good group of us who helped to run the fairy trail and Halloween trail. We had a stressful but great time running high energy children's events. Halloween has become quite scary so we thought it would be nice to do more traditional activities like apple bobbing which didn't make the children cry! The kids really like being in the dark. Little children don't get to go outside and play in the dark much.

It's always very friendly, people will always have a chat and give you a cup of tea, it runs on tea. When it was called BTCV we used to say it stood for battered transits, cars and vans or biscuits, tea and coffee volunteers. It's still definitely that, even though when they changed the name to TCV we lost the biscuits! You can get people to do a world of work for a good biscuit.

Jessica Duffy, many roles from 1986 to 2016 now Learning Facilitator Time to Shine, Leeds Older People's Forum and occasional event volunteer

The Volunteer Inclusion Support Project 2011-15

This was a Big Lottery funded project, encouraging and supporting people from a wide range of backgrounds to take part in conservation activities. Four years of secure funding was brilliant and provided the foundation for more development thankfully, as new volunteers kept arriving needing activities to do. They included the short courses and satellite Green Gyms.

Sarah Kinsey Learoyd provided administrative support and monitoring for the project, the garden groups were run by Sulafa Abushal and, later, Katie Parkes, Jess Kandola was the Volunteer Coordinator at the centre of things. Sarah recalled in conversation with her mum Jayne (who is now a Hollybush PO)...

“It was a great team. VISP built on the Friends of Hollybush’s Wednesday gardening group, lots of people came for therapeutic reasons: to improve physical or mental health, to improve health in life after retirement and the group included a wide range of people, including people with learning disabilities, students, people seeking work etc. Monitoring was an important part of the project from the start and this made it possible to track participants’ journeys with TCV Hollybush, beginning, perhaps, with one activity per week with support, to beginning to help at the group, perhaps making drinks, becoming confident enough to encourage others and be invited to become VOs and undertake greater responsibilities, training, qualifications and sometimes employment. Some of those VOs are still with TCV now.

I went on to run the Inkwell Green Gym alongside the admin role. Initially funded through People’s Health Trust and later Public Health, this twice-weekly group was a partnership with Leeds Mind in the garden of the old Shoulder of Mutton Pub and was predominantly about supporting people’s mental health. Much of its success was the huge variety of people that the group attracted and the amazing peer support that happened as a result. Once again, many people gradually gained confidence to progress. The garden, a huge space, became a real oasis, with raised beds, greenhouses, wildflower areas, a willow structure, and was close to the hearts of so many people. Meals were shared and community activities, such as Mayday and

bonfire night, were enjoyed.

Participants from the Green Gym and VISP groups, along with staff and other volunteers, were inspired to raise money for Hollybush's Roundhouse project through two Three Peaks Challenges. People were inspired to (literally) step well outside their comfort zones, do lots of practice walks, collect sponsorship and ultimately undertake the massive challenge of the 26-mile Yorkshire Three Peaks walk, and go camping. Volunteer co-ordinator Jess Kandola did an incredible job of organising training walks, making sure people had the right equipment, food, tents, sleeping bags, and were supported throughout the marathon distance walk, the mammoth climbs, the biblical downpours and the onslaught of midges. The success of these ventures led to the development of regular walking groups at Hollybush and many people have and are still enjoying the physical and mental health benefits of walking, plus the peer support, and of course, cake!"

Sarah Kinsey Learoyd, Volunteer Inclusion Support Project Administrator



The Bike Shed Frame detail, silk painting by Kiara at Hollybush Primary

Walking Projects

Late in the 1990s (B)TCV was invited to discuss making a funding bid to the “new” Countryside Agency and BHF Lottery funded Healthy Walking programme. With support from the late Bernadette Murphy (B)TCV became the lead body. Starting in West and North West Leeds, the programme gradually expanded with different funding bodies to cover most of the city. After about ten years, funding ended, but it was perhaps our first targeted foray into what is now called “reducing social isolation” with most participants being over sixty. Some original groups are still running, and some of the early leaders, including Richard Smith (now of the West Leeds Walkers group), are still doing their stuff every week, assisted by more recent ex-TCV recruits.

“I joined BTCV Hollybush in April 2007 as a project assistant on the Healthy Walking Project. All the groups that Hollybush supported had local people at the helm as volunteer walk leaders. Most of these volunteers were older, retired people, usually with a wealth of local knowledge and experience, and enthusiastic about the joys of walking. Prospective volunteers responded to adverts placed in local press. BTCV provided regular walk leader training – a day’s course in the training room at Hollybush, usually to a mixed bag of people wanting to get involved in their local groups, and professionals wanting to set up walking groups as part of their role.

Following the training which covered things such as the benefits of walking, how to do a risk assessment and how to keep people coming back to your walks. Volunteers were supported by the project with setting up groups, help with publicity and printing of walk programmes, paperwork and monitoring, and regular volunteer events.

I remember my first walk leader training day. I sat next to Lyn from Horsforth, we got chatting and she told me she wanted to set up a new local walking group. I went on to support Lyn in setting up the group and I was there on the first walk - around 12 people on a walk around Hall Park, followed by coffee at a local café. The group went from strength to strength and is still going strong 13 years later, with Lyn leading weekly walks for the people of Horsforth.”

Sarah Prescott Walking Officer 2007-9, now at Age Friendly Leeds

Green Gym

I spent 12 months working as a Green Gym Project Officer in the South Leeds area after 17 years youth and education work in the same location. Looking back, I was a little battered and shellshocked myself after being made redundant from a job I had done for so many years, but this was an amazing experience for me, I met some of the best people I have ever come across in my life, kind, caring , passionate and giving, when some themselves had little.

I worked with people from all walks of life who arrived as individuals with their own worries and troubles who very soon formed friendships and supported each other. Some of these friendships still carry on today.

Two years on from this project ending for me I still receive messages, good wishes and reference requests from past volunteers and some I still meet for a coffee. Only the other day I bumped into one of the Syrian refugees I worked with, he came over, shook my hand and introduced me to his wife and children; it made my day.

I remember working on an allotment in Beeston and the other plot holders looking on unsure when the refugees joined the group, they soon changed their attitudes when they saw for themselves differently to what they read in the papers. The plot holders used to joke with me saying all they could hear on a Tuesday was me and the group laughing, that was because we were having such a good time.

Being together as a group working outdoors gave the groups a bond and a sense of belonging to something good. TCV gave me the confidence to move on with my life and realise I could do anything I wanted to do.

Sharon Bottomley Green Gym Project Officer for South Leeds 2016-2017



The Bridge Inn, silk painting by Faye at Hollybush Primary School



Boat and Bridges, silk painting by Tia at Hollybush Primary School

Short Courses



"I came into Hollybush, we had a quick chat about my past and where I'd like to go in the future, which I was a bit lost with where I wanted to go, and I started working with a gentleman called Eric on bushcrafting, and he asked me if I'd like to be his VO. He explained what a VO does and what a VO is and I've been here for four years, and I think I'd like to continue, for another four years at least."

Donovan Parker

The School Entrance, silk painting by Jenny at Hollybush Primary School

In 2012 BTCV were fortunate to be awarded a contract to start delivering short courses in woodwork, bushcraft and the John Muir Award. This enabled the woodwork training area, originally set up in 2011, to be used much more extensively and also provided activity for the many new volunteers from the Volunteer Inclusion and Support Project. This in part came through a meeting with someone who knew BTCV from the New Deal Environmental Task Force in the late 1990s and also had an allotment near John's.

Over the next seven years the number of courses grew, with the practical team, gardening and latterly Gemma's basket weaving joining the list on offer. Eric did the promotion and administration in the early years. Later, Hannah, Frances and Becs did most of the dreaded Maytas learning management system computer entry. It has been a fantastic opportunity that has enabled TCV to reach many new people and in some cases really help them put their lives back on track. In 2018-2019 over three hundred different people attended courses.

*“My time at Hollybush involved a lot of firsts. I had so many lovely experiences there that I won’t forget. It would be hard to list them all, but a few highlights can’t be left out. Whittling around the campfire and making a spatula out of green wood whilst chatting to colleagues and participants. Weaving my own basket out of willow on a staff course. Joining the practical team for a day out doing conservation work. Helping out at events like the Big Green Weekend and other pop-ups around Leeds. All were enjoyable in their own ways and I loved chatting to people about what happens at Hollybush. I was fortunate enough to see how people developed by doing courses and other activities. Being a small part of their journey was a real privilege that I won’t forget. Those who work and volunteer at Hollybush are incredible people. Thank you for letting me be part of the team when I was there.” **Becs Hatfield, Hollybush***

Nobody Left Behind

I came to Hollybush about eight years ago as a volunteer, there were no courses then. The woodwork workshop was very basic, with people just making things without much training. I did the Environmental Conservation Diploma Level 1, the next year I did my teacher training and got through that and started running the courses. My working background is as a time-served carpenter; it's fantastic for me and fantastic for Hollybush. I'd never done any teaching before coming here. That was all new to me. When I was on building sites, I would always train the apprentices; I think I was good at that. It's been a vast learning curve really, but I'm a very patient person and I think I'm a good carpenter, and just the fact that the courses have been successful must mean I'm doing something right.

In the beginning we only ran three courses a year, but it was so popular we expanded it and now the Basic Woodwork is eight courses a year. There's also a Further Woodwork course and a Production Woodwork course, where we make things for the site. And we've also started this year running a ten-week Design course. I also run a Learning Disabilities Project twice a week; this year we've started a Wood Squad project for over fifties. So it's fairly busy really! I actually started working at Hollybush two days a week; that's increased over the years and just today I've found out I'll be doing five days, so that's fantastic and I love it.

When I first came, the guys in the workshop allowed me to work with them. People of all ages come on the courses. When I came to my interview I wanted to get more women involved and more people from minorities; I was told this was unlikely to happen, but I've proved that it is possible and on some courses we've had nine different nationalities; that's absolutely fantastic. Most courses are 50/50 men and women, and different ages as well. When I pick people, I try to pick people of different ages and different backgrounds, so they are meeting people of different origins and different ages and it makes it interesting for me as well. Anybody can come on the Basic course and we've had people from massively different backgrounds; we've had blind people, deaf people and some using wheelchairs. I like it being busy and we can manage the risks involved. After the first course I generally have the final say on who joins the next one, because if I feel somebody can't do it it's not fair on them; they get left behind.

The courses make a massive difference to people; it's about giving people confidence and control and passion to be able to do things they didn't think they could do. I took my daughter to nursery the other day and practically half the women there, I've taught them, and they still remember and say they loved the course. Some take it further, and we've had five women go on to building college who'd never done any building before and they are doing their apprenticeships now.

We always love the Christmas Fair. We push to make that really good; it's good fun and always well attended. I don't do as many events now because I work at the weekends, but I try to get down and see things. I came down to the Art Trail; I thought that was great this year.

Hollybush has got a lot more diverse over the years, with a lot more going on and a lot more talented people in their own fields. We've got a lot of courses: bushcraft, natural crafts, and woodwork, which has expanded from three courses a year to about 22. A lot of it is to do with John pushing to do these exciting things; my job here is totally down to John and his passion to push things forward. You just have to look at the site and how different it is now; we've got the roundhouse, which is fantastic, and my new shed, and the woodwork shop is fully kitted out now. It's very vibrant and there's the café which draws people in and everything supports everything else; people come to the café and see the woodwork or come to woodwork and see the café. I think Hollybush has got a lot more recognised outside of here.

I absolutely adore my job. Coming from a building site to coming to work here with so many nice people and so many exciting things happening, is completely different. I've been through some bad times over the years and everybody has supported me, staff and volunteers as well. I feel very privileged to work here. Everyone I know envies me my job and wishes they had something similar near them. I look forward to coming to work; I leap out of bed.

Tom Lister, Volunteer 2011 - 2013 and Woodwork Tutor 2013-present

Survival at Hollybush

I was Project Officer for the Adult Community Learning Service (ACLS) training project at TCV Hollybush from 2012 to 2018. I started as a Volunteer Officer 18 months before I became a PO. I was a Ray Mears fan and I remember going to ‘work’ in walking boots and thinking, ‘yeah!’ I remember my first Practical Team task was clearing cattails (*Typha*) at Rodley Nature Reserve, you can eat those!

When the ACLS project started there were just Tom and myself as tutors. We had a residential course too. One trip a term, to Hardcastle Crags and Ox Close Woods. I will never forget those! John Preston was my line manager and he didn’t micro-manage me at all, far from it, he gave me loads of stuff that stretched me and left me to it. I learnt loads, I also worked way over my hours, but who didn’t?!

I remember Basic Bushcraft being ‘Ofsteded’. On week 1, the inspector didn’t know we were off site so they stayed at Hollybush. On week 2, the inspector couldn’t find us in the wood. On week 3 he found us and gave us a great report! Chris Ensor had dropped in for a few sessions a few weeks before; he gave me a few pointers and really upped my game.

I remember Damion who had loved all the woodland courses and wanted to be a VO. He had problems; he ‘ate’ only caffeine drinks; didn’t sleep and took a cocktail of medications. He slept and ate properly in the woods though when I took him with another volunteer. He died (his system couldn’t take it) at his computer one night. Possibly the best thing about Hollybush I remember is the minibus of volunteers, some in their best, some in TCV clothing, some in jeans, and all there out of respect for the person they knew, Damion, at his funeral up north. This wasn’t the first time Hollybush paid its respects for a volunteer officer. There was Mark a couple of years before, two minibuses went to his funeral in Liverpool.

Hollybush is unique in my experience. It blends conservation and social work. The people who work for it are just out of this world, compassionate, capable, idealistic, wonderful people. Forty years old? A tribute to the building, to the volunteers, the staff and the leaders who have been responsible for it. Long live TCV Hollybush!

Eric Yaffrey Project Officer 2012-2018



Drop in for lunch!

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Countryside ● Gardening ● Café
Woodwork ● Supporting people
with disabilities



The Conservation Volunteers, Hollybush
Broad Lane, Kirkstall, Leeds LS5 3BP



Leaflets for various courses and events at Hollybush from between 2015 and 2019,
courtesy of John Preston and the Hollybush Archive

Familiar Faces

I was made aware of Hollybush in November last year, by a charity called Engage; they signposted me here and brought me down to show me and asked me if I was interested. At the time I wasn't doing a right lot. I had social anxiety and other issues, so I wasn't really open to it at first.

I like the joinery; I did basic joinery before, but I've learnt a lot while I've been here and it's also taught me to be more creative and let my ideas go a bit; I'm more skilled and I can take on more of a challenge. I've got a lot out of helping and teaching and assisting with the different groups and classes. I just enjoy passing on what I've learnt, and other people pass their knowledge back to me.

Me and Tom get on really well and I get on with all the other VOs; it's quite a big social circle in this place and everyone's choosing to be here, so it creates quite a good atmosphere. It's different to most places I've been before, but I've never done any other volunteering; it's my first time doing anything like this; I'd definitely recommend it. The people on the courses are a mixed bunch with all sorts of skill levels. The most surprising thing I found was the variety of people from different backgrounds: some professional people, some who are struggling in life like I was myself, and some who have spare time and want to fill it productively.

Being focused here at Hollybush helps me with my mental health, but I do that in my own life too; I fish and I cycle to keep my mind busy. As long as I've got my mind on a task then I don't feel pressures and problems as much, which really helps here because there's always something to do. I can finish one job and there's probably ten others to do in that week, but the good thing is there's no pressure; if I want five minutes or I need a break I can do that, whereas in a paid job you don't always have those chances to take five. I would feel under pressure while recovering. When I first started, any pressure was extreme to me, whereas now I've got familiar faces round me and I'm a bit more relaxed in myself. Now I don't let things get to me quite as much.

Tom is very hands on with the volunteers, he'll keep a really good eye on you, but he'll also let you have that leeway to express yourself and do things your way as long as you're safe. He's good at the support side of it, so if he sees you're needing help, he often sees it before you know.

I've got to know the other VOs and we're all quite close now. I help out with the plant sales and the Christmas Fair. Because I do three days here, I tend not to get involved with the weekend activities because that's when I have my social life with my friends.

We've just done the Woodwork Design course, and we've made some really good things. We had a gentleman who's had a stroke and can only use half his body and he made a dog bed, bird box and a windmill with a bit of assistance; we helped him as much as he needed. That's what I mean about people with different skills and abilities; they all make their way through the courses and make nice stuff. The gentleman who'd had a stroke gave me and Tom a card saying thank you, and things like that make you realise he's really enjoyed it as he's gone out of his way to tell us.

On the Basic Woodwork course everyone does the same thing, because that's where we're learning how other people learn; and then on the third one you start to put your own little twist on it. On the new Design course, you can make what you want, as long as it's not going to fill the barn.

For now, I want to carry on. I'm starting to look for part-time work initially. I've been out of work for about seven years. I've done various jobs, but never really found a direction. My joinery skills are now tenfold what they were, but I've also started exploring and enjoying the support side of it and I get a lot out of that. It makes me feel good, the fact that you're helping somebody do something that they potentially couldn't do, or wouldn't be safe to do on their own. You become sort of friends with them as well. I'd like to find a role where I could take people out on practical days.

I speak to all of the people at the LDP. They all know my name and they all come and have a good chat; I have a real good laugh with them. I've helped out with different groups, the Gardening Group, LDP and the Task Group.

Ian Denbigh, VO in the woodwork workshop since 2018 and now employed

Memories of Hollybush

Maggie and I had been friends for a few years prior to discovering Hollybush. I remember Maggie ringing me in a highly excited state to tell me about an amazing place she'd just happened to be passing and had decided to investigate. We arranged to meet for a coffee in the cafe a few days later. We quickly got chatting to some friendly volunteers and before we knew it, we'd signed up to do a short course in woodwork which led to us getting to know the staff and other volunteers. We then went on to do a bushcraft course and started going out on task with other volunteers to a variety of locations on the Hollybush vans. We enjoyed some wonderful days at various sites taking part in a multitude of conservation projects.

The adventure really gathered momentum in 2014 when Maggie and I were encouraged to enrol on the Environmental Conservation Diploma. The group was diverse and consisted of students with a variety of skills and life experiences. Each student brought something special to the mix. No two days were ever the same and every day was memorable. We were privileged to have an incredibly knowledgeable trainer, Craig, who supported and guided us through the course with commitment, patience and endless encouragement.

Over the two years, we covered a wide variety of conservation units including coppicing, footpath laying, managing vegetation, improving ponds and wetlands, hedgelaying, surveying, constructing and repairing riverbanks and stone walls. We carried out practical assessments on site and covered written work and theory in the classroom at Hollybush.

In terms of personal development, we acquired educational, intellectual, social and practical skills. We all grew tremendously as individuals and as a group. I feel that everyone surpassed their own expectations. We succeeded in achieving Level 1 and 2.

This amazing experience and the people involved will always hold a special place in our memories and our hearts as we both agree, they really were two of the best years of our lives so far. Discovering Hollybush literally changed my life for the better. We have both continued to be involved with Hollybush and can't imagine that will ever change.

Kate Cumming and Maggie Free, course participants and Hollybush volunteers

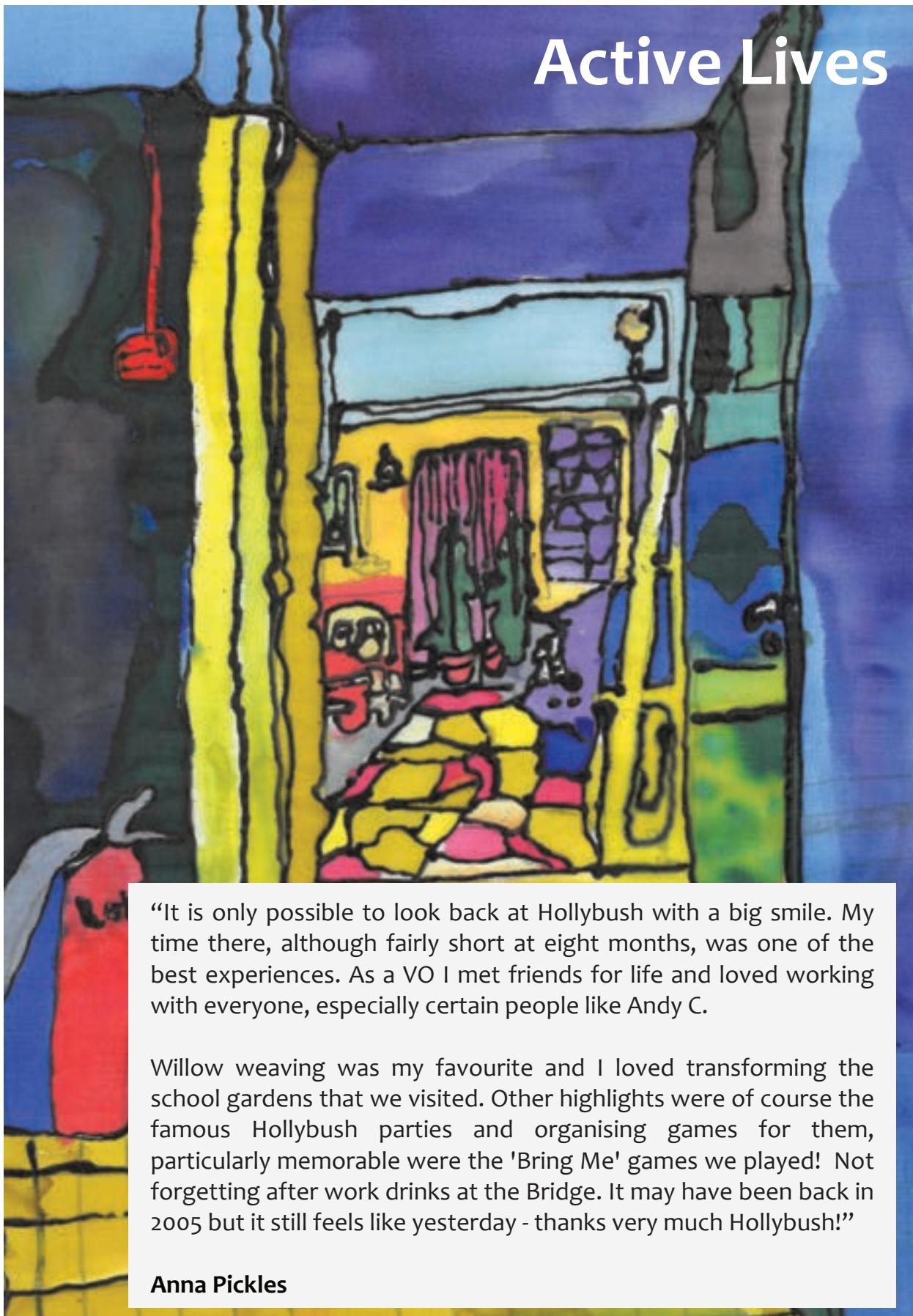


Roadworks on the bridge, silk painting by Scarlett at Hollybush Primary School



The Old Café Shelter, silk painting by Takara at Hollybush Primary School

Active Lives



"It is only possible to look back at Hollybush with a big smile. My time there, although fairly short at eight months, was one of the best experiences. As a VO I met friends for life and loved working with everyone, especially certain people like Andy C.

Willow weaving was my favourite and I loved transforming the school gardens that we visited. Other highlights were of course the famous Hollybush parties and organising games for them, particularly memorable were the 'Bring Me' games we played! Not forgetting after work drinks at the Bridge. It may have been back in 2005 but it still feels like yesterday - thanks very much Hollybush!"

Anna Pickles

View across the courtyard, silk painting by Alisha at Hollybush Primary School

Walking on the Wild Side

I'm a project officer at Hollybush and I've been employed here for four and a half years. I came to Hollybush because I got a job here teaching the gardening course, I started off doing the courses two mornings a week, and then in the afternoons I was running a gardening club as well.

The first day on site, for my interview, I remember worrying where to park! I remember the building seemed very, very different. I remember having a tour of the garden and I remember sitting in the café, which seemed really cosy, and having a cup of tea. There was a lot of stuff going on and it seemed like a very vibrant, full of people kind of place.

I think personally the project that is sticking out for me, is the wildlife walks. Which was something I instigated because of my ecology background, and it was based on the fact that we needed to run some more groups and we didn't have a day in the garden to do it in, so let's do a walk!

Fundamentally it's walking but with a focus on the environment, so we go to particular areas around Leeds which I've done lots of research into, which have interesting nature, so lots of woodland, but also wetland areas, areas with ponds, areas with canals, areas with rivers, and although the wildlife is the main focus, it's almost like that's the backdrop. I don't often get a chance to talk very much about wildlife, you know. I'll stop and I'll start chatting and I'll point something out and then it's just like a little side thing, because people just enjoy being outside. They enjoy being in that environment and they talk about lots of other stuff. It's almost like the walk itself encloses that group of people.

It's a good excuse to get outside, there is wildlife stuff in there because people are interested in different things and I've tried to do side shoots of little bits of extra training. I went on a course to do lichens, which was a real experience, and ferns as well. So people that are particularly interested in expanding their ID skills have got involved in that. I've got involved with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and non-native and invasive species.

We've had a birder come in, so there are lots of those elements in there, but a lot of

people just like it because we are walking somewhere beautiful, or somewhere peaceful, that we make a lot of noise in. So yeah, I think that's a project that's really stood out for me.

It's a strange thing (Hollybush) because a lot of times people say, "Oh I didn't know you were here," and, even now I have to remind myself as I come along Leeds Bradford Road, and I'm going round on that nasty bend and I think "Oh, that's the garden down there!" and it really is hidden away. It's such a part of 'Old Leeds', you know you see a lot of parts around Leeds where you think, 'Oh right, that used to be a house on its own' and then the city has just kind of swallowed it up. In many ways it's very urban, because a lot of the people that come here live in very, very urban areas, but it's also perched on the edge of open fields, which is one of the benefits of being here, you can walk along the canal and forget you're in the centre of Leeds.

The building itself, because it's old I think, because it's got an old barn, it's got cobbles, it almost creates that little sense of, a little bit of escape, that although you're in an urban area, you're not. You know, you're stood in the garden and you hear the buses going by, but it still can feel like you're in a separate space.

Anne Proud, Tutor and Project Officer at Hollybush since 2014



Volunteer watching deer at Studley Royal about 8am October 2018, photograph by John Preston

It was just right lovely!

I came to Hollybush in the summer of 2011, out of work, a little bit lost and needing something to occupy my time. It was that very same day that I was introduced to the gardening group and persuaded, by Jess and Sulafa, to be a volunteer officer.

In the beginning I wasn't really sure what had happened, but it turned into some of the happiest working years of my life! Working with Sulafa (Oi, you bugger!), Hollybush, like the bindweed that invaded the garden invaded my life in such a happy way, the garden, the staff, and the whole range of volunteers who turn up in all weathers to chat, work and be together outside sharing the Hollybush experience.

It was in this time that I met my now husband, the lovely Andy, whilst we volunteered on the People in Action project. After 18 months as a VO I had a short break away where I went to try out a few other volunteering/working opportunities of Leeds but my heart was at Hollybush, so I was back, this time employed as the Project Officer for the gardening groups.

I loved the diversity of people, the non-judgemental approach that Hollybush has, the support the staff and volunteers had for each other created a truly special place. I got to be outside every day, and there were some rubbish jobs such as turning the compost, weeding the cobbles, cleaning the poly tunnel in the freezing winter, but it didn't really matter what the jobs were, it was the sense of community that Hollybush created that was important. In the summer, sitting and eating lunch around the pond was just so peaceful and beautiful, a little oasis in the hustle and bustle of the city.

The VISP project came to an end and it was time to move on to different things, but Hollybush will always hold special memories for me.

Katie Tiffany nee Parkes Volunteer Officer 2011-2012 Project Officer 2013-2015

Moving On



“Being a VO gave me a little more pride, because I could advise people and guide them. It built my confidence and self-belief. At Hollybush if you’re shy, timid, nervous, whatever you may be feeling, there will always be someone to say good morning. It’s about making people feel happy to try things and broaden their horizons, and if they don’t like one thing they can try another.

Telling people that you believe they can do things gives them a mental boost. There’s always something for you to do. If you don’t like doing one thing, you still won’t be left out.”

Adam Wood, Volunteer Officer

Building the Bodger’s Hut, silk painting by Dylan at Hollybush Primary School

What a Difference a Year Makes...

I was unemployed, and I was looking at doing some gardening. I'd bought a van and I wanted a totally different career. I'd spent 37 years at the end of a printing press and I just wanted to do something a bit different, so I first came here to some gardening courses so I could do more than just cut grass and hedges, so I could do pruning and cuttings and stuff like that. That was in June 2018 and when I was doing the summer gardening course, I saw a leaflet for the wildflower ID course that looked really good, so I did that, trees and birds, and then I started doing mid-week volunteering. Going out into community green spaces, learning practical skills. Then they invited me to be a volunteer officer, and now I'm a volunteer officer, but some days I'm a sessional project officer, I get paid for doing sessions which we couldn't otherwise cover and I've also been given some days to deliver some of the tasks in our 'tidy up at Hollybush' project as well. I've done my first aid, I've done leadership, I've done me MIDAS bus driver thing. So what started as doing a bit of gardening is totally different now.

One project that I particularly enjoyed doing was at Brudenell Primary, because that was the primary school that I went to, albeit a totally different building. It was really nice to go back as an adult and re-landscape what was a hillside at the back of the old school and make it into a woodland area for the kids to enjoy. That was good, there's been so many though and I think when you start seeing them from start to finish, they really are good. My little team that we had for a year, we always photographed everything we did, because we were so proud of what we'd done. Sometimes when you go and look at what is just a field and then you look at what we've done. What it is afterwards, it's really good, I feel really pleased and enjoy that I've made a difference.

The skills you pick up on the way are great. Since the first day I came here, I've done all the practical courses on offer. So I've done footpaths, I've done dry stone walling, I've done fencing, I've done green woodworking, and it's really good picking up the skills. Through my practical task, I've also now got a level 2 diploma in work based environmental conservation. I didn't have to do much for that because I was already doing it really. It was just an idea that I could get a qualification out of it as well.

The day after we did our minibus proficiency test, there were three of us at the time, and as volunteers we came in the very next day, and we were sent out, to lead the group, which was really good.

The trust that they have in us, as volunteers, that we can lead a group, and now I can do sessional, project officer work so it's really nice. When I've had a really good day, and the volunteers have had a really good day. It's just like, it's just, leading is good. It's not at all the sort of thing I expected to be doing, I thought within a year of that, I'd be going round and tidying people's gardens. I didn't think I'd be in charge of the health and well-being of up to ten volunteers. Drive the bus, do the tool talk, and be responsible for the first aid you know. It's a totally different direction that I thought I were going to go, and it's really good.

If I had to leave tomorrow, I'd take away everything I've achieved now, that has set me up for the other volunteering that I do, and the people that I've met through the practical tasks. I know rangers, I've met people from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, I do community gardening at my local community area and I met the community outreach worker there, through Hollybush. I also met people over at Bedford Field which is another Saturday volunteering thing that I do. I've found that within this area if you like, , this genre of work, the people are just so nice, everybody's friendly. People who know me, would say that you wouldn't. If you'd have said, when I came here, that a year later I would be leading a group of volunteers, I would have, no way, no way, I wouldn't have wanted that. But the training and the support that you get here is absolutely brilliant, and they invest the time in you.

Nigel Benson, Volunteer Officer and sessional worker at Hollybush since 2018



Blackpool Bridge at a remote site near Homfirth, replaced by TCV 2019 photograph from the Hollybush Archive

Over the last five years I have been coming to Hollybush. I just love this tiny busy oasis in an urban area. I love how much can be done in a little space. My memories are of my three-year-old boy, running round the garden and then having lovely food in the café.

I live in Otley now and I volunteer at Gallows Hill Nature Reserve and I'm part of Otley Market Garden.

Ewa



The Hollybush Project at YSP, photograph from the Hollybush Archive

Our family were introduced to Hollybush when I was looking into a career in Environmental Education. I picked up a leaflet in the Pudsey Job Centre and called Hollybush looking to volunteer.

As I wanted to work with children I was directed to Skelton Grange where I volunteered and worked as a Green Gym assistant. Hollybush proved perfect for my brother Paul and he has attended the learning (disability) project ever since.

Our family love Hollybush and really appreciate being able to visit. I am now a teacher at Bramley Park Academy, I love my job, but it is stressful. Returning to Hollybush helps balance my life.

Anonymous postcard submission, May 2019

Leaving the Rat Race

I left university and got a graduate job with a computer firm in Horsforth for a couple of years and that basically taught me everything about what I didn't want to do as a job! It was inside, with a cutthroat atmosphere, where everybody was scrabbling to get to the top and earn more money and do better than each other, and I realised I wanted the exact opposite of that for my working life.

In 2012 I decided to quit and find what I actually wanted to do, and I'd always been really interested in being outside and animals. At that time, wildlife was probably something I was interested in, but I didn't really know where to kind of channel that. So I got a job in a café to sustain myself and started looking for volunteer work in environmental type stuff. Hollybush was the first place I came, and it stuck basically. I mean, people still say this, that it's quite hard to find Hollybush, if you don't know about it, but I guess it's just because it's sort of a niche thing that you have to be interested in, to actually find out about it. I started volunteering alongside doing my job, until I got to the point where I thought right, I want to do this full time. I managed to support myself for six months, as a volunteer officer, and came to Hollybush, every single day as a volunteer for six months. I did a few other bits with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and National Trust as well, just to broaden my CV experience, but the people here made it really. I was alongside eight or nine other Volunteer Officers at the time who were all great, we had a really good team going. One of them is now my best mate, who I see every single week. So yes, it was a really formative period for me in terms of my life and how I think and what I now do.

Back then there was only really the practical team that was a thing on site. There wasn't really the gardening group or the woodworking group. So basically it was like coming in, and going out in the minibuses to go and do a practical task with a really diverse bunch of people. That was another reason I wanted to get into volunteering, because I'd been sort of stuck in the student bubble, only having friends of my own age, so it was really refreshing to come here and be able to hang out with loads of different people from loads of different backgrounds. So on my first day we just piled into a minibus a massive range of other different types of people, and off we went. It was the middle of December and we went out to a pond at Rodley Nature Reserve, and the first thing I did was get into waders and wade up to my waist in a mucky pond, with it hailing on the top of me and freezing legs on the bottom of me, but I absolutely loved it!

We were just pulling reeds out for the day and then we came back here and got warmed up and went home, but it was really good. It was a complete antidote to everything I'd been doing at the time. It was great.

Some of the schools projects have been really amazing, there was one at Sharp Lane, which I did as a VO. This school had a bare playing field and we completely transformed it into a food growing and gardening and wildlife oasis for the kids. It was really good to see it start to finish.

We've done some absolutely colossal footpaths in our time as well! Almost up to a kilometre long, over months and months and months of just wheelbarrows and spades. It's amazing what you can do with such minimal tools and lots and lots of people and loads of enthusiasm. They're always really nice projects, just really big footpaths that basically mean that loads more people can get out into the countryside. So that's a really satisfying thing to do, from a small muddy, rocky, 'ankle breaky' track to something that maybe wheelchairs can use or that people of all ages can walk on. Probably my personal favourite, and the one I'm most proud of is some stone pitching that we did in Crag Wood, in Horsforth. So it's basically a really traditional technique of making a footpath, like they used to make cart tracks, by sinking massive rocks that you find, locally to the area that you're working in, into the floor to make a sort of stone pavement. Once you're done and you look at it, it looks like nothing. It looks like someone's put some stones down and great, I can walk on it without getting muddy now, and you don't really think about it. But the actual effort that goes into doing it is unreal. Digging massive holes, moving huge boulders, because they have to be big so then they don't move, and it lasts a long time then. So yeah, you can look at that kind of path and think, and not even think anything of it, you can just walk down it. So every time I walk down that now, or I go for runs around that area as well, it's really, really nice. I feel really proud of it and my volunteers, to be able to walk on that. It looks like it's been there for 300 years, and it looks like it will be there for another 300 years. The tangibility of everything that we do here is great. Just being able to go home, day on day and year on year, and think, yeah, these are the things that I've changed for other people to use, is really satisfying.

I think it's amazing that the public can visit Hollybush and come and see it and learn how to participate in it as well, by looking at the gardens and seeing people growing food and the wildlife ponds and all that kind of stuff. People can just wander in and get

sucked into this world, and, sometimes never leave. For us, actually having a physical space to plan projects from and store materials and a central meeting point for the volunteers at a place that's near a city. We have a lot of volunteers that don't ever really get out into the countryside unless we take them there, so the fact that they can come somewhere that's close to their homes and all the bus routes and get whisked away in a minibus is really important. I think this place as a building and the gardens, it's got a lot of character and history attached to it, which I really like, even down to the poky little boot room and the café that you can't stand up in if you're over six foot tall and stuff like that, I still think it adds to it all. When we do the open days and trails in the garden, it shows it off as a lovely space that we've transformed over forty years.

More than anywhere else, this place has taught me that you can't take things on face value, you can't take people or things at face value and that you should give everything a chance. I suppose that ties into us having a really inclusive culture, but I've met so many people here that I would never normally have met or spoken to, and it's made me a much less judgemental person. In terms of what people who have certain characteristics can achieve, way beyond expectations, maybe of themselves and anybody else, and I think just feeling kind of proud, of what we do.

Michael Bird, Project Officer and Volunteer at Hollybush since 2012



Stonework Detail, silk painting by Bonnie at Hollybush Primary

Hollybush
Refugee Project



Part funded by



Fair Play
Partnership



Leaflets from the 2000s, taken from the Hollybush Archive

Friendship



"Hollybush used to look after a lot of young people at that time. Always remember making friends with a young man from Belfast , brought over to keep him out of the Troubles in Ireland. (He) went on to work all round the world ... so many happy times, camp fires, singing, and the best thing, giving me hope for the future."

Lena Mayne, YTS Housekeeper 1984

Roundhouse and seating in the snow, silk painting by Aisha at Hollybush Primary School

Snowflakes

After my son left school in 2006 he became a Conservation Volunteer at BTCV Hollybush. After completing NVQ Levels 1 and 2 he continued to help on conservation tasks and in the garden. The tasks were always carried out in all weathers. This was excellent preparation for real work situations.

A strong team spirit prevailed. Working with mentors, students and volunteers from varied backgrounds taught him to be tolerant of others. Here was a chance to meet people from far flung countries. I was amazed at my son's enthusiasm for his change of direction. Meeting interesting people all with a mutual liking for the cause of conservation.

I was invited to the famous Hollybush Christmas parties. A chance to meet many of these interesting people. I fondly remember the Solstice Day Party in 2010. Snow had fallen prior to the day of the event. There was a lunar eclipse and temperatures plummeted to -6°C that night.

A big moon peeped at us over frosted rooftops as we approached the old rhubarb farm. Aromatic scents of wood smoke wafted towards us as we arrived. A blazing bonfire illuminated the darkness on this the shortest day of the year. A group of happy party goers encircled the blazing fire under a sheltering sky of twinkling stars, it was buzzing. Lots of introductions later and we entered the annexe that faces the office block and barn. This was the designated dining room and venue for the musical entertainments. A chance for us to meet old friends and mentors. I, being a dedicated mountain vagabond, loved talking to the cook. He'd enrolled as camp cook on Himalayan climbing expeditions. Food was served, and someone's Husky dog made an attempt to steal someone's portion of spaghetti bolognese.

After wining and dining on cuisine to suit all tastes it was time for the music trio to do their act. A girl with an enchanting voice, a guitarist and trumpet player initially suggested a jazzy theme. To everyone's amazement golden oldies were sung with a mix of jazz, pop and finally carols where everyone joined in.

I stepped outside. A silver moon now diminished since our arrival cast an eerie light onto old snow lining Hollybush Farm rooftops. Accumulations of snowflakes cleverly forming a blanket of snow from which ice crystals glittered.

A natural spectacle framed from above by the cold northern sky. I pondered the connection with the snowflakes that had formed the snow pack. Compared them with the Hollybush community. Each snowflake had fallen as an individual, no two alike. Yet together they had created the snow. The characters at Hollybush were all different. Each one like a snowflake. And just being themselves. Together they formed the Hollybush volunteers, friends and mentors.

At Hollybush, friendships were formed and have grown. Some have continued across counties and even countries throughout the past forty years. I left the party thinking to myself how much had been achieved by this amazing organisation throughout almost half a century.

Karl Heinig, Hollybush Friend since 2006



The Barn, silk painting by Safa at Hollybush Primary School



A hand-drawn image of the Barn used in a newsletter in 1984

A Little Bit of Hollybush Magic....

Jill was 28 when we first started working together, she had lived in Horsforth with her mum and dad and younger sister all her life. She was a massive Take That fan and a huge Leeds United fan, she also had cerebral palsy, which meant she was limited in her mobility a bit and her speech.

When I started in my admin role in 2004 Jill was coming in once a fortnight to help Patrick with some basic admin - laminating, shredding etc.

We hit it off straight away, we were the same age and both loved Take That and dancing! Very quickly she increased her volunteering days to twice weekly and for full days. I started giving her new challenges, including getting her a headset so she could answer the telephone and take messages.

Her confidence grew and she became a vital member of the Hollybush support team. She started joining me and my friends at parties at our houses, she had never been on a ‘girly night’, had no other proper friends, isolated by her perceived lack of ability. She came to all the Hollybush parties, particularly loving the karaoke nights and any excuse for a good dance.

By 2006 we had started talking about helping her with travel training, aiming to increase her independence by helping her get the bus from home. Around this time there were plans afoot to create a new reception area in the classroom building. Jill and I talked about her becoming the (hopefully paid) receptionist.

In the summer of 2006 Jill was diagnosed with breast cancer. She celebrated her 30th birthday that August; we threw a party for her at Gareth's house in Bramley.

Jill died in September.

Her funeral was amazing, Hollybush closed for the day and the crematorium in Rawdon was packed with her Hollybush friends. Her favourite song, Angels by Robbie Williams, was played and I gave her a magical Hollybush tribute written by Dan Barker.

We held a celebration of her life at Hollybush a few weeks later, singing karaoke and dancing the night away.

We planted a rose in her honour and the plaque at Hollybush reads "Jill Evans - dancing among the stars".

Memories of Jill – by Jenny Riddell



A hand-drawn image by Mike Craig, a volunteer in early 1990s, depicting the 'Welcome Arms' of Hollybush, used on several leaflets. Taken from the Hollybush Archive

The Long Haul

I found myself here because Jessica, my partner, came to study at Leeds University, and at the time the North Yorkshire BTCV office didn't have a vacancy for an LTV, so someone suggested Hollybush. Jed Bultitude, the Senior Field Officer, wrote back enthusiastically and immediately; I guess applicants with six years prior volunteering experience around school and college didn't apply that often.

My first Hollybush task was to drive for the Hollyvols, for some footpath work at Oakwell Hall Country Park. I drove right up to the site, across what is now woodland.

One of my favourite projects was building the bike shed. I saw a smaller one elsewhere, took the project through all the official permissions, rounded up the cash, sourced all the components and then built it over four or five weekends with any volunteers who I could persuade to lend a hand. Everyone got a huge sense of achievement. I remember my then five-year-old daughter showing people from a permaculture course how to surform rough corners off timber. Best bike shed in Yorkshire, and I get to use it every day I'm in.

If I were to leave Hollybush tomorrow I would take a copy of this booklet with me. Working with the Friends on this project has refreshed many memories and reminded me of some of the important things that the Centre has achieved over four decades. I've also now met some of the 'names' from before I joined in 1986.

By the mid-1990s unemployment was beginning to fall and local authorities were beginning to ask how organisations who received funding were addressing equality of opportunity. One of the first (B)TCV Equality leaflets featured five middle-aged, white, bearded men in glasses and the slogan "We represent an equal cross section of society"; there was more than a passing resemblance to the then Northern director, who was chair of the Equality committee.

In 1992 I went on a short week-long training course at Scope's Churchtown Farm near Bodmin. All about involving people of all abilities, it was partly delivered by people with mobility and sensory impairment. Underpinning this was a "there is a way it can be done" attitude, so the course and all the advisors went up hills, on long wheelchair hikes and a night-time canoe trip to the pub.

Hollybush began to accept a greater range of people on projects (although some reminiscences suggest the door was fairly wide from early on). We also accepted requests to provide opportunities for various groups to run tasks specifically for them, a key one being a Park Lane College Learning Disability course. They always seemed to really enjoy it, even if they struggled to speak and tell us.

From this group we gained someone who was to become a regular volunteer for many years. John Taplin came on the final Park Lane session one July and then, having discovered (B)TCV, thought coming out on tasks three days a week would be a great way to fill his summer college holiday. Challenges were gradually overcome, and BTCV became an important part of John's life, including being a constant with long-term staff contacts as he went through a two-year transition from living in a large residential centre to being in a supported flat. In total John was a volunteer for around 15 years; during this time John was diagnosed as Asperger's, and we learned a lot about working with neurodivergent volunteers.

From this came the adoption of a policy where individuals with 'additional' needs would come for just one day per week, or the numbers on placement would be carefully controlled so that groups remained mixed and no single type of person dominated and the supervision load placed on the leaders (mostly volunteers at this time) could be kept within manageable levels, for the benefit of everyone. Although periodically tested in extremis and questioned from time to time, the paperwork has been tweaked over the years and this approach stands.

Further long-term regular volunteers are mentioned by Stuart Harris, and we can't forget Ed Williams who volunteered on Fridays for ten years and kept us amused and was renowned for being the winner of many a round of musical chairs at Christmas parties, sometimes with just a little well-intentioned 'assistance' from others. At one annual party there was a talent competition and the respect shown to everyone who contributed encapsulated the just incredible. One of our legacies has been the way in which people change their attitudes and perceptions of people 'not like them' and keep this for the rest of their lives, whether in work, volunteering, or just day-to-day life.

Looking back, a key stage was around 2000 when there was a restructuring across BTCV, with nine directors appointed in England to cover both BTCV Charity and BTCV Enterprises. Uniquely Yorkshire's Director, Mark Gibson, was ex-Enterprises. A can do, entrepreneurial spirit was expected, and through further education college links we were able to set up what became the Hollybush Project and run NVQs (vocational courses in conservation skills) which paved the way, with most staff holding teaching qualifications for the short course programme today.

We took on minimum wage trainees and a part-time administrator which developed into the first volunteer coordinator role. At times I described it as surfing ever bigger waves on a disintegrating surfboard.

Over the decades staff, voluntary staff, volunteers and funders have shown huge dedication and commitment to the cause. On many occasions the Hollybush spirit has encouraged many people to go that extra mile for the sake of the 'cause'. There have been difficult times, there have been very sad times and fortunately many good times. The TCV strap line since 2012 has been 'join in have fun', and my rule number one has for decades been 'you will have fun', otherwise why would people come back for more?

Most days there is something unexpected. In my current role as Business Development Manager for the North of England, it is all about spotting opportunities, making connections and presenting the case for how this amazing organisation can deliver great results.

John Preston, Volunteer BTCV 1980-1986, LTV 1986-1987, Community Programme Doncaster 1987-1988, VO 1988-1989, Cookson Training Officer 1989-1991, Leeds PO 1991-1997, County Manager, latterly Operations Leader 1997-2018



John Preston at the Opening of the Roundhouse September 2017 with Cllr Jane Dowson, Lord Mayor and Phil Corrigan, CEO of Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group. Photograph from the Hollybush archive



Detail from a leaded window made by John Preston for the Roundhouse 2017-2019 at Swarthmore College Leeds. Photograph by John Preston

TCV Hollybush in 2019

At the end of 2018 TCV HQ brought the two Leeds centres under the same management team. Caroline Crossley and Lucy Wheeler, who both volunteered at Hollybush and have both been at Skelton Grange Environment Centre since (B)TCV took over its management in 1992, were appointed joint Operations Manager for the combined Leeds team of 27 people, who are four teams.

Practical & Training

The Hollybush Conservation Volunteers (Hollyvols) launched in 1982 run six to seven projects every week of the year. Nature areas, outdoor play and growing plots are created in school grounds, trees are planted, habitats managed and labour-intensive work done at inaccessible locations (for machinery) on behalf of both Leeds and Kirklees Public Rights of Way.

The Short Course Programme funded through the Skills Funding Agencies Adult Education Training strand via Leeds City Council Education and Skills team is in its eighth year.

Hollybush Project and Café

The Learning Disability project provides long-term opportunities for 28 adults with moderate to semi-severe learning disability to attend for two days each week. A varied programme of gardening, craft, cookery, woodwork, walks and café work is provided. A small number of vacancies arise each year. Integral to the Hollybush Project is our Community Café, with typically two group members helping bake, serve, clear tables and wash up at any one time.

Green Gym

In addition to the Monday Wildlife Walking Group and Wednesday Garden Group, there are satellite Green Gyms at Oakwood Hall near Roundhay, BAME Hub in Harehills, Lovell Park near Little London, Lady Pit Lane Allotments in Beeston and Hawthorn GP Surgery in Wortley.

Alongside Green Gym and the other projects, the Time to Shine programme recruits and supports volunteers who are over 50 and runs specific bushcraft, spoon-carving and woodwork sessions.

Skelton Grange

The long-standing structured environmental education visits for school children and holiday playschemes runs for three days most weeks. Helping to maintain our ten-acre site are the year-round Monday Green Gym and the Friday Green Team, with additional input from a fair number of Employee Action days from large local businesses.

For up to date information, please see the website www.tcv.org.uk



Garden Shelter, silk painting by Yao Yao at Hollybush Primary

Acknowledgements

This project could not have been possible without the tireless work of the volunteers that do so much to support Hollybush on a daily basis, and the Friends of Hollybush themselves, in particular those that gave their time to the Hollybush Histories project as interviewers, interviewees, transcribers and editors, website uploaders, exhibition installers and cup of tea makers! They are:

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GOSSIP

PUBLICITY NEWSLETTER, YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE, NUMBER TWO, FEBRUARY 1986.

WELL DONE

Once again BTCV's newsletter has had some great news! Thank you for your contributions. Having received your comment on the draft I'm going to send the task programme guidelines to the regions but this time I'll fine-tune them. After a little exercise, I'd like you to have the attached task programme and "improve" it, following the guidelines. This is the ultimate test to find out how effective they will be. We'll be running a session on the publicity tasks exercise at the publicity workshop in March - so bring along the latest and after and any problems you had along the way.

Welly done!



EVENTS

You should have sorted out which events you're going to this year. Could you send us a copy of English by March 1st? If we've extended the deadline or we can discuss them at the publicity workshop.

WEEKEND

WEEKEND WORKSHOP

10.00 am - 4.00 pm

Weekend Workshops

10.00 am

“We were a band of brothers and sisters, doing some good in Thatcher’s Britain, for an extra tenner a week.”

Richard Shackleton, Volunteer mid 1980s



Entrance to Vehicle Yard, silk painting by Christabel at Hollybush Primary School

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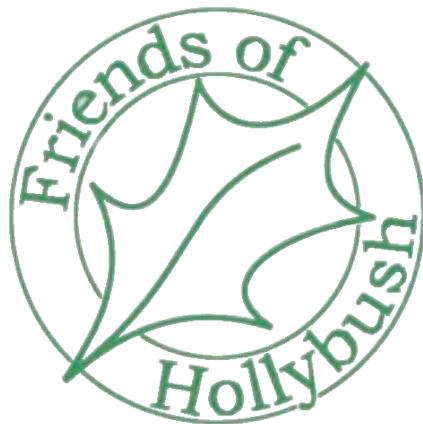
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Greenhouses in the Garden at Hollybush, silk painting by Sean at Hollybush Primary School

Funded and Supported by:



For further information about this project, please contact:
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