

# A Civil War whimsy

Ken Taylor (2022)

In researching the fields on the southern slope of Broom Hill I was reminded by Jonathan Rowe (chair of Brislington Conservation & History Society) of a curious item found in one of them, and he kindly set me on the track of where to read about it (Jones & Chown, 1977, 129).

The tale told by George W Chown (a Brisling born and bred, 1885 - 1973) concerns an oak box unearthed from one of the fields 'enclosed' by the Government's Act of 1778. This field is roughly square and was bounded on the west by School Road and on the north by Broomhill Road, and nowadays St Peter's Methodist Church stands at its southwestern corner. Once opened, the old box was found to contain nails - horseshoe nails.

These nails were dated approximately to the mid-17th century - the time of the English Civil War, and speculation naturally arose about a troop of Parliamentary horse mustered on the hilltop. Perhaps it was August 1646 and all eyes of the New Model Army's cavalymen were turned toward the city of Bristol - seemingly so peaceful in the distance - that their Royalist foe had captured two years earlier...

When we consider the proverb that was ancient already when published a timely few years before the Civil War: "For want of a naile the shoe is lost, for want of a shoe the horse is lost, for want of a horse the rider is lost"(Herbert 1640, 504) the loss of that entire box of horseshoe nails may have vexed that troop's farrier sorely. Notwithstanding that mishap (or perhaps because it never happened) the Parliamentary siege was successful, forcing the Royalists to surrender Bristol a few weeks' later on 10th September.

So many people have stood on that hillside and gazed across the miles, with thoughts and hearts enmeshed in the moment's turmoil... It's profoundly sad to realise that we may be among the very last to share the vistas offered by these green slopes - opening up the broader perspectives that promote mental health and wellbeing.

Should the proposed development of Brislington Meadows go ahead, the long sightlines from these old open fields will forever be blocked by buildings. It seems impossible not to pick up a challenge from history and ask which of the outcomes for these meadows would it be that those long-gone soldiers envisioned for their descendants? Or indeed, that we now choose for ours?

Any news on the whereabouts of that casket or its contents would be very welcome, with a view perhaps to confirming (or otherwise) this now traditional snippet of Brislington lore.

## Bibliography

Herbert, George 1640, Outlandish Proverbs, in anonymous, undated, *The Muses Recreation, Wit Restor'd and Wits Recreations*, New Edition, Vol II, London, in Google Books, Ireland, [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=4TEJAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA481&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=4TEJAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA481&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 23 June 2022).

Jones, F C & W G Chown 1977, *History of Bristol's Suburbs*, Bristol, Reece Winstone.