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President`s Address

When I was approached about taking on this job, I was quite astonished. I am not really and never have been, a “big cheese” person. I am quite aware of the long history of the Society and the grand people who have held this position before, and it was a big challenge. Johanna Jones, our previous President, was most gracious and, over a few lunches and visits, helped me to put myself in the frame to take on, what will be, a few difficult years.

After our departure from Salisbury Gardens we had to find a new home. Chris Ratsey came up with the idea for our current office in Cowes and, so far, with all the hard work of Jackie, Maureen, Lorna, Mike, Anne and Chris and many others, we have been reassembled. Some things have changed, such as the Library, but Helen Jackson has taken on responsibility for the Book Collection and once more members can come on a Thursday to take out books, or reserve books and publications.

A great deal of hard work over the years, by the Thursday team, keeps the wheels turning. Lynda Snaith, thank goodness is still on board, as our admirable programme coordinator, and that means we can continue to offer a rolling programme of events and activities throughout the year.

But, we are not without some pressing problems. Our membership has dropped, probably as a result of the economic climate, lack of public interest and perhaps a need to publicise ourselves.

With the internet, we have access to the very people we need. It does not cost as much as hard publication and the theme is, of course, communication. We can look at the work of other County Societies, and see what they are doing to increase membership and public recognition.

Finally, I know that out there are many people who can help us achieve these goals. We do need some fresh blood in the Thursday team, to shadow those who may decide that they wish to retire. We need ideas about how to contact new members, and what we need to do to attract and retain them. I am sure that you all have some good ideas and I would really welcome talking to you about them.

Meanwhile, in the next three years, I am sure we will have ample opportunities to refresh and maintain our Society.

Best wishes to you all,

Delian Backhouse Fry.
BA Hons. MSc. Archaeology. Dip AD.

Country Notes

A Remarkable Bee Orchid

On June 20, 2011, the grounds maintenance man at Newport Cemetery brought me a Bee Orchid just two inches high, terminated by a solitary flower, growing out of a pine cone. (**Photos** page 15) In dissecting the cone I carefully removed the plant from beneath the woody scales. The plant itself, including the single flower which terminated the aerial stem, was 40mm long. At the base of the stem was a three-branched root, the longest of which was 5mm. Two others were 4mm. There was no tuber and the roots were extending from the base of the aerial stem.

Examination of the flower under microscope, 40 magnification, revealed neither stigma or stamens.

This specimen was shown to members of our Society at a meeting at Norris Castle on June 25, 2011.

The Juniper

There can be no doubt that the Juniper has attempted to colonise our chalk downs, but being intensively sheep grazed, only two very small prostrate specimens were known, from Compton Down. However, specimens of tree proportions have come to my notice.

On a double grave space in Carisbrooke (Mount Joy) Cemetery a headstone informs us that a lady died in March 1940. At each corner a Juniper was planted and now, seventy years later, these plants have grown to tree proportions and formed what appears to be a single specimen, with an overall circumference of twenty metres and a height of between five and six metres.

There are no fruits and as the species is dioecious, that is male and female flowers on separate plants, it suggests cuttings were taken from a male plant.

Junipers can be seen in gardens, but only as shrubs. I doubt if there are other Junipers of tree proportions to be found in the Island.

Actinidia

The name may mean little to most of us, but describe it as the bearer of Kiwi fruit and it will become familiar.

These plants are not uncommon on the Island, but there is a problem. Actinidias are mostly dioecious and unless male and female plants are in close proximity you are likely to be disappointed as far as fruit is concerned, being left with a rampant climber.

Actinidia deliciosa has four cultivars, two of which are sterile, a third may produce fruit on occasions, but a fourth developed in New Zealand, hence the name Kiwi for the fruit, which is self-fertile. Can you trust a supplier to guarantee fruit ?

A sterile specimen can be seen growing on the wall of Marks and Spencer in Newport and a fruiting specimen overhangs a wall in Love Lane, Bembridge.

Bill Shepard

Anglo-Saxon Royal Meeting Places - Conference

This was the rather grandiose title of an Oxford conference in March on that somewhat elusive theme of Anglo-Saxon assembly sites, or ‘moots’ as we have come to know them. Eleven scholars working in this field gathered together to share the fruits of their ongoing research, and the results were very enlightening. The topic took as its base Anglo-Saxon England but was not limited to it, and also ranged over examples from Scotland, Wales and Ireland to Norway, Sweden and Iceland.

Professor Wendy Davies set the scene with a review of assembly sites, disputes and their settlement in court in the Early Middle Ages. Of particular interest was the Thingvellir, Iceland’s oldest traditional meeting-place. *Njal’s Saga* records a dispute-settlement which took place there resulting in violence and necessitating another parliament with yet more severe fighting, followed by a third meeting before a settlement could be made! Here at least legal procedures, fighting and killing were all considered to be quite normal. Elsewhere, assemblies might take place in palaces, churches – irrespective of whether the topic was ecclesiastical or secular, in the open air at special stones (our own Longstone is a case in point), in lords’ houses, or in monasteries. They could range from the very big to the very small, from national parliaments to village disputes about property.

Sarah Semple examined the changing face of scholarship regarding assembly sites, and in particular how Romantic concepts of outdoor moots have captured researchers for a very long time. Ever since its publication in 1880, folklorist George Laurence Gomme’s *Primitive Folk-Moots* has not only held sway over scholars but helped stimulate moot revivals such as the Gorsedd of Bards in Wales. Appealing though this approach may be, Dr Semple argued that archaeological studies of these meeting-places are now at a critical point and a new agenda is emerging. When the current ‘Assembly Project’ began, researchers were looking for the ancient nature of these sites together with the commonalities between them. But what has emerged is the *diversity* of evidence rather than longevity, and some sites were in fact quite shortlived.

Professor Barbara Yorke considered the relationship of Anglo-Saxon kings and assemblies in the 7th century by gathering together evidence from Bede, the Kentish and West Saxon lawcodes, and other sources. She concluded that there were many assemblies at different levels, and different kinds of meeting-places. Where they existed, kings’ assemblies were called general assemblies; the king’s inner circle, or *witan*, might meet at the same time as popular assemblies; and supernatural power often emphasised kingly qualities (**Photo** page 15). Possibly originally one person was appointed leader on a temporary basis, then this was extended. But there was a big jump from leadership to kingship and you needed all the help you could get – assemblies could provide an important tool in this process.

PhD student Levi Roach continued this theme by examining further the meetings of the *witan*, or royal assemblies, between 871-978, usefully defining some of the Saxon terminology and historical sources. Participants at these high-status assemblies were, as one would expect, kings, archbishops and ealdormen (royal officials, later earls or dukes), then including bishops and thegns (aristocratic retainers or noblemen) at the next rung down. Their locations had to be accessible by road or water, were often established by custom, and were frequently symbolic. Lines of communication needed to be established between the royal assemblies and more local gatherings: without modern means of coercion such as law enforcement agencies, medieval kingship relied heavily on the willing consent of the people. Assemblies *enabled* kingship and they made kings strong, not weak, when they worked well.

Dr Frode Iversen of Oslo University compared kingship and state formation in both Saxon and Scandinavian societies between 500 and 1200, focussing on different kinds of royal farms, assembly sites, and the concept of the *Cyninga tun*, ‘King’s town’ or Kingston. In order to maintain control over land and people in mainly rural societies, kings and their followers travelled between a limited number of royal farms, located upon important routeways, creating ‘itinerant kingdoms’ and petty kingdoms (but the Isle of Wight Kingston seems to defy all known rules and remains fairly inscrutable).

Dr Alex Sanmark addressed assembly sites established in the Scottish Highlands and Islands by the Viking settlers, some identifiable in the landscape, others by place-name evidence only. There was a clear preference for island and isthmus locations such as Tingwall in Shetland, where meetings were held on a small island in the lake, connected by a causeway. Such locations would have been seen as liminal places, located between land and sea. Some sites seem to have been located where there were already archaic centres marked by ancient monuments when the Norsemen first arrived.

A particularly graphic lecture titled *Tonsure, Murder and Exile: Kings, Dynasties and Assemblies in Eighth-Century Northumbria* was delivered by David Rollason in a powerful manner which was equal to the subject. Northumbria had a rich seam of murdered, deposed and exiled kings in the 8th century, a period of major dynastic strife and seeming anarchy. Prof Rollason's aim was to show, nevertheless, through a close examination of Anglo-Saxon documents for the period known as the *Northern Annals*, that the political history of this period was not *all* about regicide – assemblies could elect and depose kings, and the Church likewise was evolving strategies for appointing and deposing kings. Despite appearances, the right to rule *was* subject to assemblies, and there were concepts of legality which assemblies represented.

The conference theme was brought into the modern era in an amusing talk delivered in an off-the-cuff style by folklorist Jeremy Harte. He showed that assembly-place culture did not die out with the Middle Ages. Particularly from the 17th century onwards, people chose awkward places, difficult times and unlikely rituals for the business of local government. The tin miners of Devon met at Crockern Tor, a barren hill in the centre of Dartmoor; the men of Berkshire met at Scutchamer Knob, a barrow on a lonely stretch of the Wessex Ridgeway remarkable only for the extent of the view from its summit. The original Norfolk moots included three barrows, two hills, two earthworks, a pit, a valley, a cross, a gallows, two fords and two gates. What comes over time and again is the liminal nature of such assemblies: they stood at thresholds between what were perceived as different kinds of place or maybe different worlds. These of course bring to mind our own local moot sites which made use of ancient monuments: the Longstone at Mottistone, and Gallibury Hump above Calbourne, the latter also used conveniently as an execution site; but there would have been others on the Island, including most likely one in the Bowcombe Valley.

Other papers examined individual assembly sites. One such excavated site at Saltwood in Kent appears to have evolved from a series of four early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries into a huge meeting-place which continued in use from the 7th through to the 12th centuries; normally it is difficult to discern post-burial activity but at Saltwood it is quite clear. Shakenoak in Oxfordshire by contrast provides a stunning example of possible continuity from the Roman period, with villas in the area, followed by mid 5th-century execution burials, and then, it is thought, up to five potential meeting-places from around the 7th century.

The conference concluded with a review of the Anglo-Saxon 'Landscapes of Governance' project based at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, whose aim is to research and compile a gazetteer of all Early Medieval assembly-places in England: at present 830 are known of.

Not only was this an incredibly stimulating and enlightening weekend on a topic about which I previously knew next-to-nothing, but it is very encouraging to know that in these much straitened times there are scholars willing to persevere with such challenging but ultimately vital areas of our archaeological, historical and cultural heritage.

Alan Phillips

Note: It is hoped to organise a follow-up workshop on this topic in the winter – please consult the Archaeology meetings in the new programme.

White-colour Disease of Creeping Thistle

There is a very common rust fungus which affects Creeping Thistle, *Cirsium arvense*. This rust *Puccinia punctiformis*, as well as producing the usual four different spore stages on the leaves, can produce a systemic infection of the plant. "In spring the mycelium permeates the host in every part. The affected plants can be recognised immediately by their pale green colour and spindly appearance; they never flower." – W.B. Grove, 1913 *The British Rust Fungi. Their Biology and Classification*.

This description was included in subsequent texts – Wilson and Henderson, 1966 *British Rust Fungi*; Ellis and Ellis, 1997 *Microfungi on Land Plants*; Preece, 2002 in *British Plant Galls*.

The first record on the Island of *Puccinia punctiformis* was made by Frank Morey from Gatcombe in 1909, the next by Oliver Frazer from Lock's Copse in 1982. Since 1992 I have recorded the spores of this rust from each of our ten 10-km squares.

I recorded "galling" first in 1999 and "a large patch of diseased plants" in 2003.

The plot now thickens. In 2004 Dr John Fletcher in Canterbury, Kent found individual plants of Creeping Thistle which had the tops of their stems completely devoid of chlorophyll. In 2008, Dr Nigel Stringer, one of our Society members, found a similar effect on Creeping Thistle in Burry Point, Wales. He and his colleague Richard Davies had found evidence of rust infection by *Puccinia punctiformis* on many of the plants examined and considered that the rust was the cause of the very conspicuous symptoms. The very next day Nigel received by post an exactly similar specimen found on Anglesey by Dr Richard Shattock (ex UCW Bangor) with the information that the cause of the disease was a bacterium *Pseudomonas syringae* and not the rust.

Zhang *et al.* 2004 published a paper recording the disease in several places in Canada in 2003 and named it "White-coloured Disease of Canadian Thistle". They described the affected plants as exhibiting apical chlorosis, stunted growth, fewer shoots, inhibition of flowering and/or sterility. The team considered that this disease was caused by a variety of the well-known plant pathogen *Pseudomonas syringae*. Amongst other disease effects, other strains of this bacterium cause cankers on our Ash trees and a serious disease of Olives, known as Olive Knot in California. In Canada the thistle pathogen can also infect Sow Thistles, *Sonchus* spp. and Dandelions, *Taraxacum* spp.

Nigel Stringer (*pers. comm.*) has records from Anglesey, Isle of Wight, West Sussex, Pembrokeshire, Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire with new records still coming in. He points out that apparently the disease is so far restricted to coastal areas and is found usually on waste ground and road verges and not so far on actively farmed agricultural land.

He makes two further important points:-

- 1) "It is quite unusual to be in a position where we record the presence of a new pathogen disease so early after it reaches our shores. We are therefore in an ideal position whereby we can monitor the spread of the disease over time".
- 2) "This new disease is not only of scientific interest but has a commercial value as well. Creeping Thistle is a weed of badly managed pastures and its eradication can be time-consuming and costly. It will therefore come as no surprise to learn that this strain of *Pseudomonas* has already been patented with a view to promoting and marketing the organism as a "green" biological control agent against *Cirsium arvense*".

To summarise, the rust *Puccinia punctiformis* can produce four visible spore stages on the leaves and pale green spindly plants by systemic infection. The bacterium *Pseudomonas syringae* produces spindly plants, totally devoid of chlorophyll at their apices and subsequently a ghostly white.

Since May this year I have identified the bacterial disease as being present in six of our ten 10-km square. I would welcome new records of both thistle diseases.

References:

- Zhang, W. *et al.* 2004 A Canadian Strain of *Pseudomonas syringae* causes White-colour Disease of *Cirsium arvense*. *Proceedings of the XI International Symposium on Biological Control of Weeds*. D.T. Biggs

Update on Alien Insects

The Western Conifer Seed Bug *Leptoglossus occidentalis* first appeared in England in 2007 when it was found in Weymouth. In October 2008 it was found in Bonchurch. In October 2009 there were records from Nettlesome, Wroxall and Totland. October 2010 produced records in addition, from Seaview and Shanklin.

Neuroterus saliens is a gall wasp which affects Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris*. The first English records were made in 2006. In October 2009 I found one gall on a tree on the Osborne estate. In November 2009 more galls were found elsewhere at Osborne both on *Quercus cerris* and the Lucombe Oak *Quercus x crenata*. In 2010 I found more galls at three further sites at Osborne, at Wootton Station, Quarr Abbey, in Appley and Puckpool Parks, at Bembridge Ponds and in Northwood Park. Both insects appear to be very successful invaders.

Dr D.T. Biggs

Book review

The book of Newtown; with Porchfield, Locks Green and Shalfleet. Keir Foss. 2004. Published by Halsgrove, Tiverton. Price £19.95. Hardback. ISBN 1 84114 337 5.

The last decade has seen a number of pictorial local histories in which captions and pictures have offered fleeting images of the fast-changing townscapes and landscapes of yester-Wight. For the history of the Island's medieval boroughs we have long relied upon the dry but authoritative accounts set out in volume 5 of the *Victoria County History of Hampshire* (VCH). Published in 1912, this work was reprinted in 1973. To these concise descriptions the Isle of Wight County Press has added welcome popular additions. Published in hardback, these are *Yarmouth* (Cole, 1946-1951); *Newport in Bygone Days* (Eldridge, 1952 & 1982 paperback) and Ron Winter's *Ancient town of Yarmouth* (1981). To these we may add Bill Shepard's *Newport Remembered* (1989) and a helpful *History of Newport Quay and the River Medina* produced by Bill Shepard and Brian Greening in 2008.

So what of the Island's medieval borough/ports of Brading and Newtown? While Brading still awaits its call, Newtown now enters the scene in the hands of Keir Foss. This has been advanced by a discriminating publisher at Halsgrove where an impressive train of 'community histories' has now left the presses. Here is a handsomely presented hardback book comprising 176 pages of Newtown's economic and social history. In the ambit of 15 chapters the author rapidly carries us from the town's first establishment or 'plantation' in the 13th century, to the cottages, occupations and pre-occupations of a very modest gathering of inhabitants assembled in the 'rotten borough' of the 19th century.

For people, properties and past livelihoods, this book is certainly a treasury. Newtown's lost brickworks, its former salt-making industry, its shell-fishing, farming and other rural activities are all well described. Its maritime history retains much of its enigma. The resources of the Isle of Wight County Record Office and the Local History Library have been diligently trawled and there is clearly much that the author has sought and won from lovingly tended family albums. Here is good and intricate local social history carefully pursued and presented just as it should be. There is no skimping of photographs and there are many thoughtfully assembled vignettes of family lives gleaned from the fading knowledge-base of a vanishing generation. With just so many poignant pictures won from that sepia past, it is no surprise that the enthusiasm in this book spills into the adjoining neighbourhoods of Porchfield, Locks Green and Shalfleet.

For those pursuing Isle of Wight natural history and archaeology is there anything more we might ask? While the book certainly majors on Newtown we might still hope to learn rather more of the

borough's remarkable and unusual medieval history. Here is a lacuna that is otherwise compensated by the concise summary provided by Jack and Johanna Jones in their 1989 'Illustrated History' of the Isle of Wight.

With an annual stream of visitors treading the causeway planks and wandering the leafy and 'fossilised' streets, there remain common archaeological features and questions that are still left unexplained. This is a pity, given that the excellent explanatory map and commentary provided more than three decades ago by Vicky and Frank Basford in the *Vectis Report* of 1980 has been long out-of-print.

The dust jacket of the book offers us an evocative view of the fossil street grid yet the illustrations fail to show that membrane of ancient ridge and furrow that the buttercups still trace across the town's historic landscape. Also absent is an allusion to those sentinel trees that were still guarding the ghost outline of forgotten property boundaries before succumbing to the march of Dutch elm disease in the late 1970s.

For this reviewer there are just a few niggles. Chapter 1, entitled 'From capital to capitulation', has a nice alliterative ring yet Newtown's claim to former 'capital' of the Isle of Wight cannot be sustained. A traditional claim for an invasion of Newtown by the Danes in AD 1001 is similarly unsafe, for in the pages of the primary source the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler tells only that *Sweyn's* invading force '*went into the Isle of Wight where they roved about and did as they wont*'. Of Newtown or its creek the *Chronicle* provides no mention and we find no grounds to perceive this site to be a 'town' prior to its entrepreneurial implantation in the mid 13th century. In *VCH* (1912, 265-8) and in Beresford (1988, 445-6 & 641) documented evidence begins in 1255-6 while Keir Foss (p.10) alludes to a possible date as early as 1189. The traditional etymological equation of *Sweyn* with Swainston is certainly appealing yet this does not place people and dwellings on an ill-drained hillock at the mouth of Newtown Creek in the 10th, 11th, or 12th centuries AD.

For every visitor gazing at Newtown's stark town hall, the question inevitably arises as to 'just how big was this lost town and what was its true importance'? The answer is to be found in Maurice Beresford's excellent book on '*New towns of the Middle Ages*' (1988). It is here that Newtown is set alongside Newport, Yarmouth and Lyminster where the Redvers family had been equally busy enticing trade, setting out streets and vending or renting out lucrative new burgage plots.

In the hands of this Norman entrepreneurial family, Newport, Yarmouth and Newtown all developed similar co-axial street plans. Yet Newport's foundation charter of 1177-1184, clearly pre-dates the documented emergence of Newtown. With this pre-emptive event, comes the collapse of any credible claim for Newtown as a former 'capital of Wight'. In later years, however, it is easy to see how that lone and incongruous town hall could evoke nostalgic exaggeration.

For a true perspective on Newtown's former status and prosperity, Maurice Beresford leads us much further afield to the bastide towns of Gascony where parallel 'new towns' were being similarly laid out during and after the 1180s. Initiatives in Normandy follow much the same course. These are seminal events essential to the genesis of Newtown and to fellow coastal developments such as Portsmouth, New Romney and Winchelsea. It is a pity that we do not find this particular account by Beresford, together with the pertinent works by Vicky Basford and Jack and Johanna Jones, in the all-too-short bibliography.

In presenting sound historical research in a popular marketplace, a publisher will always encounter problems concerning conciseness and economy. In this case, when turning to the final pages of the book, this reviewer can only say that the abandonment of an index, in favour of an arid list of subscribers, is a stunning disappointment. We must allow, however, that without the encouragement of the latter this most valuable work may never have reached the press. Despite these criticisms, offered in frank review, here is a very attractive and reasonably priced volume worthy of every good Vectensian bookshelf. We must certainly congratulate author, publisher and subscribers for transforming a labour of love into a pleasure shared.

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David Tomalin

General Meetings

12th March

Amphibians of the IOW

This August Mark Earp will celebrate the thirty-sixth anniversary of The Kitbridge Enterprises Trust, set up in response to The Great Drought of summer 1976, so catastrophic for amphibians. This is how Mark introduced his talk on 'Amphibians of the Isle of Wight' to an audience of some forty members of our Society. Next month we are looking forward to visiting Kitbridge Farm to see the Reserve.

Mark's interest in natural history began in early childhood when he lived in the Netherlands. His grandfather was a Doctor of both Theology and Biology, and Mark caught his enthusiasm for wildlife. When he moved to the Isle of Wight, Mark attended Cowes High School where he met three teachers who were passionate about wildlife: Oliver Frazer, Louis Cox and Mr Colledge. They all helped run the Newtown Camp to encourage schoolchildren to study wildlife, and it was there that Mark's particular interest in amphibians began.

A map of the Isle of Wight in pre-history shows a massive river system that crossed to the Channel from the Solent. The Island was then mainly swamp, inhabited by amphibians that move from water onto land and back again, as part of their annual cycle. The largest newt to be found on the Island three hundred million years ago was a six feet long 'super-newt'.

Nowadays the future is bleak for amphibians: over half of Europe's species face extinction by the year 2050. Climate change, disease and urbanisation are to blame. Mark held up a small hour-glass, set it down in front of him and announced that it took two minutes for all the grains of sand to pass through. In that time two new ponds are created on this planet, but ten are destroyed.

In Britain there are just five indigenous species of amphibian and several new ones, such as the Natterjack Toad, now often referred to as native. Kitbridge Farm is one of the very best areas on the Island for amphibians, for the following reasons: the land has been taken out of agricultural production; it consists of organic, wet grassland; the Kitbridge Stream and Forest Stream, both emanating from Parkhurst Forest, trickle through it; and it has a metapopulation of amphibians. Mark emphasised that it is not just the pond that needs protection, but also the peripheral area to and from which the newts migrate. He showed us on a map of the farm how eleven areas, where amphibians lived, have been destroyed and only five areas remain. Charles Darwin, for whom the Isle of Wight was a valuable source of information in his research, believed in 'the survival of the fittest', but now 'living space' is deemed more crucial. In other words, the survival of a species largely depends on the degree to which the environment in which it lives meets its own particular welfare needs.

Newts face two major threats to their survival. The first is development. Hawthorn Meadows pond, near Kitbridge, has been filled in to make way for the Petticoat Lane housing estate. The developer claimed that they had searched for, but found no newts there, but the Trust found a very large number and the developer was given a caution for destroying the habitat of a protected species. The good news is that the developer then offered to pay for the Newt Reserve. Mark and his team were called out to

Sandown recently where some old hotels were being demolished, to look for newts. They were formerly gentlemen's residences and each had a pond in their garden. The second threat to newts is from thieves and confidence tricksters who masquerade as environmentalists by wearing the T-shirt. Under Schedule 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) newts are afforded protection and it is illegal to remove them from their environment without a licence. Mark cites an example of how attitudes to wildlife have changed over the years. Looking through our Society's records, he came across a report of a talk given by none other than the late Oliver Frazer on newts. And, true to the custom of the time before the Act was introduced and these amphibians were still fairly common, Oliver brought with him some newts to illustrate his talk.

All three species of native British newt live at Kitbridge. The first is the Palmate Newt, the smallest of Britain's three native newts. It is the most prevalent newt on the Isle of Wight, though numbers have fallen dramatically. It is not, however, present in all areas of Britain, maybe due to high acidity in the soil. The second species is the Smooth Newt, the most common British newt, but not nearly as prevalent on the Island as it used to be. It is largely confined to the north side of the Island, owing to the dampness of the clay soil north of the chalk ridge. The male has a distinctive crest and striped head. The third species is the Great Crested Newt, the most threatened of the native newts in Britain. It is now in the top five most threatened species of native wild animal in Britain, and **its** numbers have declined by an amazing 97.3% on the Isle of Wight in recent decades. It is confined to just a few areas: Kitbridge, Parkhurst Forest, the Newtown Rifle Range and Bouldnor. Britain's largest newt, it can reach a length of 16.5 centimetres or more. The rough, warty skin is covered in spots, but Mark assures us that they are beautiful. The male's underside is orange - yellow on the Island - but so, too, is the male Smooth Newt, which can cause confusion.

The two other native species of amphibian are the Common Frog and the Common Toad. The Common Frog population is falling on the mainland, but here on the Island it is doing well. They should be emerging from hibernation by now, though two successive cold winters have delayed their migration to their ponds. Common Toad numbers are declining as they succumb to a disease. Mark is not sure whether or not it has reached the Island.

There are also some alien species of amphibian living in the wild on the Island, introduced by collectors. These include the Alpine Newt, the Japanese Fire-bellied Newt and the Common Tree Frog. Nowadays it is considered unethical to introduce alien species.

Different theories have been put forward to explain how newts migrate to and from their native pond. Do they find their way by the electro-magnetic force of the moon, do they use their powerful sense of smell to identify the distinctive odour of the weed, or do they follow a chemical trail of *dimethyl sulphate*?

An important, self-serving reason for protecting newts is their extraordinary ability to regenerate body parts, both externally and internally. If they lose their tail or suffer internal injuries in a fight or by accident, even if they lose their jaw or an eye, these will grow back again. Scientists would love to copy this gene for human use.

On concluding this fascinating talk and having answered a number of questions, Mark, as representative of the Kitbridge Enterprises Trust, was presented with the Eastern, London and South-eastern Regional Award of 'Community Group of the Year' by Rachel from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Congratulations to Mark and his team! (Photo page 16)

Margaret Nelmes

26th February

The Wight Squirrel Project

My first most memorable encounter with a Red Squirrel was one August Bank Holiday in the early nineteen-nineties, in the Landslip at Luccombe when I happened to join a dozen spectators at the top of a long flight of steps. We were entertained by a young squirrel performing acrobatics on a branch some six feet above our heads. Once in a while it would pause and peer down at us, as if to make sure we were paying attention. Another young squirrel appeared, but quickly withdrew. I had thought that Red Squirrels shy away from people, but this bold performer proved me wrong.

Another time I was walking through the Landslip with my dog when I saw a streak of ginger leave

the ground and launch up the nearest trunk. As I reached the tree, a burst of noise right above my head startled me. A Red Squirrel was jumping up and down on a low branch and scolding me furiously. The branch was within my reach and the outburst made me stop and stare. My dog, who had trotted on ahead, came back to see what the matter was. The squirrel was putting itself in danger. And yet it continued to vent its fury at having been disturbed whilst foraging on the ground.

If you want to know why Red Squirrels behave in these ways, Helen Butler is the person to ask. She has dedicated the past twenty years to their welfare on the Isle of Wight. On 26th February she gave a very interesting illustrated talk to about fifty members of our Society. She told us how the Great Storm of October 1987 felled swathes of trees, depriving squirrels of shelter, food supplies and arboreal corridors that allow them to move safely from one wood to another. This enables young squirrels to disperse in search of their own territory and to breed successfully. If squirrels are stranded in isolated copses, they will inbreed, resulting in genetic weaknesses. After the Great Storm the Island's squirrel population fell dramatically: from about four thousand to only one thousand. Gradually, however, numbers have increased, as squirrels have spread out to populate all areas of woodland. The Island has about three and a half thousand hectares of woodland and so it can house about three thousand five hundred squirrels.

Squirrel numbers fluctuate annually and seasonally, depending on a combination of factors: the availability of food, breeding success, the rise and fall of higher predators, and disease. There has been a steady influx of Buzzards to the Island in the past decade. Buzzards observe where squirrels feed and catch them unawares. They even snatch young from the nest. However, the Isle of Wight has two advantages over the British mainland where Red Squirrels are concerned: the larger, North American Grey Squirrel has not invaded the Island and out-competed the Reds, as it has done across most of England and Wales, infecting them with the squirrel-pox virus that is fatal to Reds but does not affect Greys. And secondly, deer have not colonised our woodland, damaging tree saplings, especially the understory, such as the hazel, on which Red Squirrels depend.

Helen founded The Wight Squirrel Project, a registered charity, in 1993 to raise public awareness of Red Squirrels and their welfare needs and to elicit voluntary help in recording squirrel numbers, identifying local problems and fund-raising. The charity receives no government funding, but relies on donations and profit from the sale of souvenirs. Helen has studied for a degree and written books and information leaflets. She and Richard Grogan, of the Hampshire and Wight Wildlife Trust, have taken a course in squirrel pathogens so that they can conduct their own autopsies to determine the cause of death. They are currently researching whether humans can pass on staphylococcus bacteria from their skin to squirrels when they feed them, as these bacteria have been found in dead squirrels, both here and on Jersey. Helen is asking people not to handle squirrel food, but to use a scoop. They should not feed squirrels by hand, as these animals are wild and taming may put them at risk. But feeding in private gardens helps Red Squirrels to survive, especially good quality nuts and fruit. In fact, most of the reports of Red Squirrel sightings sent to the Trust are from private gardens. Helen is hoping to recruit volunteers to enter records of sightings into the Project's new database. Red Squirrels can vary greatly in colour and this can lead to people mistaking them for Grey Squirrels. Some are even black. There was a scare several years ago over reported sightings of a Grey Squirrel on the Island, but no greys were found. The concern is that we may not notice Greys until they are well established. Then it will be too late.

According to nationwide statistics, the Red Squirrel has disappeared from most of England and Wales and there are only about a hundred and fifty thousand Red Squirrels in the UK. In Anglesey Greys found their way over the Menai Bridge, but they have been trapped out and Red Squirrel numbers have risen, with the help of reintroductions. From now on a close guard must be kept on the bridge. On the Island Greys have been known to hitch a ride on the ferries. They were first introduced into Europe from North America in 1945, spreading from Italy across Europe. *The European Squirrel Initiative* is trying to inform people of the damage caused by Greys, especially in Italy.

There are various ways in which people can help the *Wight Red Squirrel Project* and its sister organisation *The Red Squirrel Trust*. For a minimum of £10 you can adopt a squirrel for a year and receive an adoption pack. You can join The Red Squirrel Trust or its junior section, The Bushy Tail Club. You can ask for a recording form or become a woodland monitor, plant small, squirrel-friendly trees in your garden, such as Hazel, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose and the Wayfaring Tree. Try to plant trees

to form corridor links so that squirrels do not have to cross open ground where they are vulnerable to attack. Remove any hazards to squirrels in your garden. Water troughs, ponds and water butts are death traps if a squirrel falls in and cannot get out. Squirrels can swim, but they need a rope attached to the side of the butt or trough so that they can climb out. Dogs and cats are the biggest hazard in your garden, so do not encourage squirrels in unless you are sure that your pets will not attack them. Rats can kill squirrels and so can rat poison and illegal traps where there are Red Squirrels. Garden netting is a hazard to squirrels and other wildlife that can get caught in it.

If you find an injured squirrel, please phone Helen on 611003. A Red Squirrel rehabilitation unit has set up. Please ring Helen if you find a fresh, dead squirrel whose body is undamaged, which could be useful for a post mortem.

Margaret Nelmes

16th April

A Visit to Kitbridge Farm

Kitbridge Farm has a long and illustrious history. It was part of Isabella de Fortibus's estate and the farmhouse was once a garden lodge built in 1322 of Quarr stone. During the Colonial Wars in the eighteenth century, twenty-four thousand soldiers were encamped on this strip of land between Parkhurst Forest and Newport, two miles long and one mile wide, until 1789 when Albany Barracks was built. In 1740 General James Wolfe wrote of his Headquarters: 'I am possessed of a dismal farmhouse'.

This was Mark Earp's introduction to his tour of the farm, given to thirty-three members of our Society. Last month he gave us a fascinating talk about 'Amphibians of the Isle of Wight'. And last year he talked about the military artefacts that he had found on the farm fields when they were ploughed in the nineteen-eighties and how he had gradually pieced together the forgotten story of the eighteenth century military encampment at Kitbridge. Now he showed us his display of military badges, ammunition, metal helmet decorations and other artefacts.

Mark showed us an unusual pond. It was originally an ice pond, where meat from the abattoir serving the army camp was stored. He dug it out and lined it to accommodate four hundred newts, all native species. The pond is deep, as it needs to be for Great Crested Newts, the largest species, being up to twenty centimetres long. Mats form floating islands to deter ducks and herons. The newts are nocturnal, but can still be active and vulnerable to predation after sunrise. We admired the blaze of gold, marsh marigolds or kingcups, illuminating the pond. All vegetation that is removed from one pond to be transferred to another has to be kept in quarantine for at least a year to prevent the spread of disease to the amphibians living in the new pond. For at least one hundred and fifty years Kitbridge was unimproved pasture and on this land there were ninety-eight ponds. Now there are only fifty-four, built in clusters. Ponds were essential on a dairy farm to serve as drinking troughs and here the clay soil holds water.

Mark led us down a track to a low bridge where he explained how the military had dammed off the river here and constructed a brush-shot mill. The mill race here was by far the longest on the Isle of Wight. Stone remnants of an earlier lepers' hospital, run by St Augustine's Priory in nearby Carisbrooke, have also been found here. Newts love the river. It is slightly gravelly and home to red sticklebacks. In winter the river floods the low-lying land. You can see how much wider it once was. Towards the end of the Tudor period a ferry was pulled along it on a raft. Streams once flowed into it from the forest, but these have been diverted.

Mark pointed out the 'Kissing Oak' where local women coming along Petticoat Lane met soldiers. This land is no longer part of the farm but was sold to the Council and is designated for school playing fields. We came to a huge man-made ditch, a 'catchment pond', behind a new housing estate. Mark explained how every estate of over a hundred houses has to have one to catch rainwater and divert it into rivers rather than the sewage system. This pond has silted up and should be dug deeper. Newts love it because it provides them with a feast of tadpoles and it is a safe haven from herons because they avoid mud.

'Bomb Crater Pond' is one and a half metres deep. As we approached it a frog came leaping across the grass and Mark scooped it up. He told us how new European Union legislation is designed to protect in situ both a collection of ponds and single ponds supporting wildlife, but it is taking time to implement. And although the Island has lost about seventy per cent of its ponds in the past hundred

years, the trend is now being reversed as farmers build reservoirs and ponds for their animals again, faced with a drier climate and ever increasing demand for water. This is one of a group of ponds at different levels. Students from Reading and Southampton Universities carry out surveys of the Kitbridge ponds. Newts don't like change and chemicals. Their numbers are declining due to habitat loss and climate change. Mark said he was concerned about the very dry weather this spring and how the water levels in the ponds were dropping. A female newt can lay three hundred eggs at a time and produce three batches in a season. She glues them to leaves. Yet out of nearly a thousand eggs, she will be lucky if one newt survives to maturity. Predation is massive, grass snakes and herons being among the predators. Then there also are human vandals on bikes and motorbikes who ride through a pond whose water level is low.

Newts live on land as well as in water. They can migrate one kilometre from a pond and then find their way back to breed. There are various theories as to how they navigate. Could it be by the moon? Carisbrooke High School has floodlights on all night. Could it be by magnetism? Or how about by the particular smell of their pond? Do newts leave a scent trail behind as they leave the pond? Newts do have a very good sense of smell and perhaps each pond has its own mix of vegetation and it is that smell that the newt remembers. To monitor the movements of individuals, The University of Leyden and Delft has devised a minute rucksack for a newt to carry a radio transmitter, but there is concern that these might cause the newts to get stuck in the undergrowth.

We returned to the farmhouse and thanked Mark for a very interesting tour. (Photo page 16)

Margaret Nelmes

1st May

Visit to Kew Gardens

We spill out of our coach near Victoria Gate at eleven o'clock and armed with a ticket and information leaflet, set off in pairs and small groups into the three hundred acres of parkland. The weather is sunny and warm, perfect for a day at The Royal Botanic Gardens, and we have six hours to explore the many and varied attractions.

My first priority is Kew's iconic glass 'palaces' and the nearest of these is the Palm House. It recreates a tropical forest, one of the most threatened habitats on Earth. About one in four of the palms here and more than half the cycads are threatened in the wild. The plants are grouped together in geographical areas, except in the centre, where the tallest plants need the extra height afforded by the dome. A spiral staircase leads up to a gallery from which you can view the top of the taller trees and look down on the multi-layered understorey. Up here the air temperature is rising quickly and the humidity is high, but this new perspective is well worth a little discomfort. The largest palm has huge shuttlecock leaves, used in its native South America for thatching houses, making mats, baskets and brooms. It also has edible fruit. The palm house contains many plants of great economic significance, grown for their fruits, timber, spices, fibres, perfumes and medicines. The enchanting sound of water falling into pools and the rich melodious songs of birds, together with the scent of foliage and flowers, stimulate my imagination.

Built in the mid nineteenth century, the Palm House is perhaps the most notable surviving Victorian glass and iron structure in the world. The technology came from shipbuilding and the design, by Decimus Burton, is essentially an upturned hull. The location was chosen so that the building would be reflected in the large formal pond. Standing guard in front of the Palm House are The Queen's Beasts, ten stylised heraldic figures, sculpted from Portland stone.

As I stroll across the lawns towards the Temperate House, a peacock strides nonchalantly beside me, occasionally broadcasting his haunting cry. Although his tail feathers are folded, he looks resplendent in vivid blue and turquoise-green plumage. The Temperate House is the world's largest surviving Victorian glass structure, also designed by Decimus Burton. With four thousand eight hundred square metres of floor space, it is twice the size of the Palm House and was built to house Kew's rapidly expanding collection of semi-hardy plants. Its construction began in 1860, but was not completed until thirty-eight years later. The final cost, three times over the estimate, was the equivalent of eleven million pounds today. Restoration began in the late nineteen-sixties and was completed in 1980.

The planting here is also in geographical zones. The world's largest indoor plant, the Chilean wine palm, takes central position in the dome. At over seventeen metres high, its crown is squashed up against

the roof, and so its days are numbered. It was grown from seed and a replacement is waiting nearby. In the wild, when the crown of leaves is cut off, sap flows from the trunk: up to ninety gallons in several months. This is fermented into palm wine or concentrated into syrup. The nut yields edible oil and the spectacular feathered leaves are used to make baskets. Among the plants on display are some endangered island species to be reintroduced to their native islands. There are also plants of economic importance, including the tea plant, date palm and quinine, a life-saving drug against malaria.

The Evolution House takes us on a fascinating journey through the evolution of plants, from their earliest forms 3.5 billion years ago through three major periods, by attempting to reconstruct the landscapes and atmospheric conditions of those times. In the Silurian period the first life forms were living mats on structures called stromatolites, and these still exist in Australia. The first vascular plants, having veins through which to conduct sap, date from this period. Liverworts still exist in Britain. In the Carboniferous period, 300 million years ago, massive coal swamps were colonised by giant club-mosses up to forty-five metres high and giant horsetails thirty metres tall. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, five to ten times higher than now, fostered rapid plant growth. When eventually these plants were fossilised, vast stores of carbon were locked up, in coal. In the Jurassic period, about 100 million years ago, the ancient club-moss swamps had dried up. It was a time of luxuriant plant growth. Conifers, cycads and other seed plants were widespread in this milder, drier climate.

Now I am impatient to explore the outdoors, and where better to start than the celebrated 'Xstrata Treetop Walkway', designed by the architects of the London Eye. We climb up a metal staircase to an aerial walkway, eighteen metres high and two hundred metres long, to view a fresh canopy of sweet chestnuts, limes and deciduous oaks. The height is dizzying, the views delightful. At times the floor wobbles, reminding us of our precarious position.

As we stroll through the Arboretum of exotic trees, accompanied by the haunting cries of peacocks, we encounter an even more brightly coloured bird: a golden pheasant. On the pretty water-lily pond we watch coots feeding their tiny chicks. Continuing in a westerly direction, we soon reach the river Thames, which borders the gardens. This western corner consists of thirty-seven acres of woodland, known as 'The Queen's Cottage Grounds'. Once a game preserve and ornamental pleasure ground, it was given to Kew by Queen Victoria in 1898 on condition that it remained in its natural state, as a haven for birds. It is now a conservation area. Native species of tree are being planted, the hazel is coppiced and brambles and scrub cleared for wild flowers. Dead wood is left in situ for beetles to colonise and 'loggeries' have been built to encourage stag beetles. Rare snails and hoverflies are also found here. Alien species of plants are being removed to prevent them from overwhelming the bluebells and other native wildflowers. Queen Charlotte Cottage was built as a picnic place in the 'cottage orne' style, a simulated rustic prettiness, fashionable at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Now we head for the lake and the Sackler Crossing, an elegant walkway over the water from which we can view the islands and watch the activity of a variety of geese, ducks and other waterfowl. I am amazed to see a coot sitting on a nest in the middle of the lake. Its mate brings more twigs. On the other side of the lake we come to a Japanese Minka farmhouse, built in Japan in 1900 and donated to Kew in 1993 by the 'Japan Minka Reuse and Recycle Association' as part of the Japan 2001 Festival. The wooden framework was dismantled and shipped to London where Japanese carpenters reinstated the intricate joints that do not require nails. Mud wall panels were assembled by workers on the Globe Theatre and the roof was thatched with Norfolk reeds and wheat straw on a grid of bamboo. Surrounding this house there is a bamboo garden and a rhododendron dell and further on are magnolias and an azalea garden. The colours are magnificent.

We walk towards the northern corner of the Gardens, past the imposing red-brick Kew Palace, built in 1631 for a rich merchant and the oldest building in these grounds. We pass the Orangery, now used as a restaurant, and the Nash Conservatory built in Neo-classical style. My attention is drawn to some fine willow sculptures of seed-heads and fruit, 'celebrating nature with natural materials'. We admire a giant Corsican Pine, brought to Kew as a six-inch seedling from the South of France and planted in 1814, which is said to be the oldest in the country. It has been struck by lightning several times and by a light aircraft in the early 1900s. Finally we come across a grassy area devoted to the growing of British native orchids. Oyster shells have been added to the soil to make it calcareous.

The Princess of Wales Conservatory commemorates Princess Augusta, who married Frederick, Prince of Wales in 1736 and who founded the Gardens. It was opened by another Princess of Wales, Diana, in July 1987. This is the most complex of Kew's public glasshouses, as it covers the whole range of conditions in the tropics, from the dry, scorching heat of the desert to the humid tropical rainforest. The sound of running water relaxes me in the stickiest of climate zones. There are waterfalls and pools with large fish swimming lazily, surrounded by beautiful orchid flowers. The building was designed for the highest possible energy efficiency, together with the lowest possible maintenance. Being sited close to the magnificent Palm House, it had to be an aesthetically pleasing design. It also needed to fit in with its surroundings. 'With its stepped and angled glass construction, without sidewalls and with most of its space below ground, the conservatory is a most effective collector of solar energy', I read in the Souvenir Guide. The boiler room and two huge rainwater storage tanks used for irrigation are situated underground.

Our final visit is to the Alpine House, opened in 2006. It is designed to keep alpine plants dry in the winter and cool in the summer and its distinctive shape, like a fairground wheel, 'allows cool air to be drawn in at the base as warm air escapes through vents in the roof'. It contains a wide variety of delicate flowering plants. A door at the end leads into the rock garden, a ravine created in 1882 to resemble a miniature Pyrenean valley. It has been redesigned to include a central bog and cascade and its planting represents six global regions.

We return to the Victoria Gate via the woodland garden, with its temple set high up on a grassy hillock, and around the large and formal pond. In six hours we have not managed to see everything - that would take twice as long - but we have been captivated by the beauty of these gardens, especially the trees in their new spring foliage. And we have been inspired by the efforts made at Kew to raise awareness of the great diversity of plants in our natural environment, reminding us how amazing and precious they are.

Thank you so much, Dave Trevan, for all your hard work in organising this trip for over forty of our members.

Margaret Nelmes

Section Meetings

Access

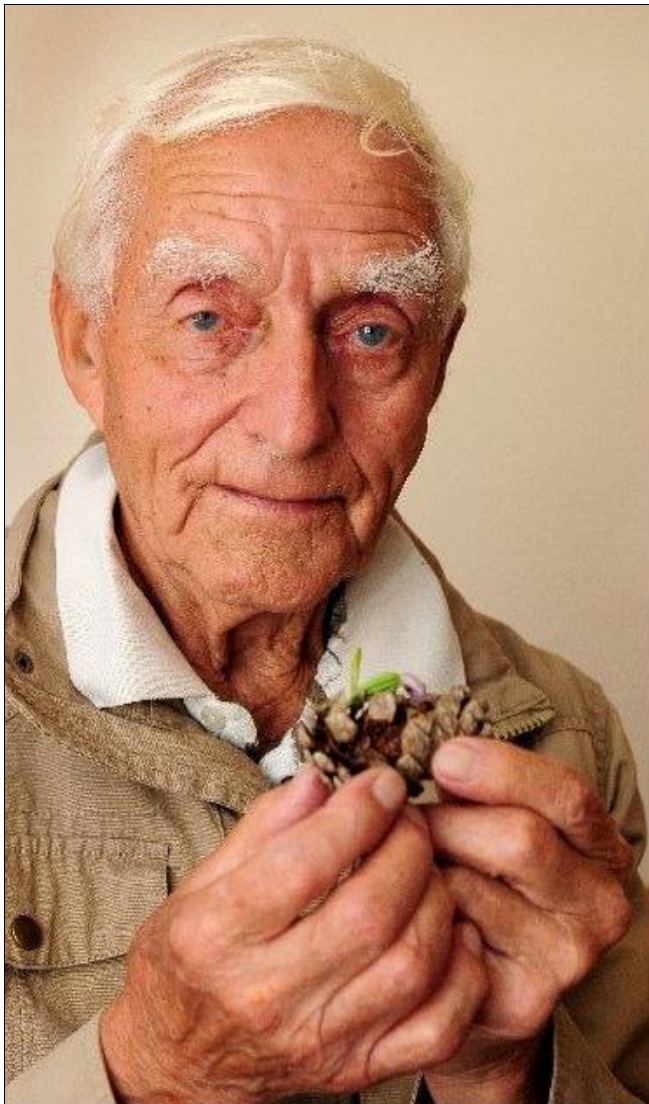
29th January

St Helen's

Ten members met at St Helen's Green car park for our annual walk down to see the winter waders that visit Bembridge Harbour area. It was rather cold although the wind had dropped a little from the previous day, which enabled us to use the telescopes. Our route took us across the Green, down Duver Road, along the footpath through St Helen's Common to the Duver and then over to look at the sea. We walked along the promenade to the spit and over the Duver to the Mill Pond, over the Causeway and up Mill Road back to the car park. A few Winter Heliotrope were in full bloom on the Common, always a welcome sight in the depths of winter. Very few birds were about there, mainly Blue Tit, Great Tit and Blackbird. The wind was bitterly cold off the sea, so we took what shelter we could along the promenade. It was lovely to see Chris Lipscombe and a Dutch friend who met us down by the café. Chris started these winter waders walks many years ago. Here we saw a male and female Red-breasted Merganser bobbing about between the waves, a Great Crested Grebe as well as Cormorant, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. A very obliging Mediterranean Gull kept flying low in front of us so we could pick out the distinguishing features. We were not able to linger too long in view of the cold. but our walk to the end of the promenade produced both Black Tailed Godwit and a Bar Tailed Godwit so we could compare the differences. We also had Grey Plover and Redshank, and two Mute Swan flew by on the other side of the estuary. Further round we had Little Grebe, Mallard, Teal, Coot, eleven Shelduck and 27 Gadwall. A Buzzard swooped on the sand in the



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A Remarkable Bee Orchid
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(Photos with the kind permission of
the IOW County Press)



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Newt embryo
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The Longstone and Barrow
Neolithic Page 21





DyersGreenweed

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Field Cow-wheat



Cage Fungus

Mill Pond and flew into a nearby tree, we could not see if it had managed to catch anything. In all we saw 34 species during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

15th February

Knighton

This walk was cancelled because of heavy rain and the fact that this had made part of the route impassable and unsafe.

20th May

Yarmouth, Bouldnor and Mill Copse

Although the temperature was mild, the day was disappointingly cloudy and this meant that fewer insects were seen than had been anticipated. We met at the car park near Yarmouth School and walked into St James Square. We looked at the outside of the Church, the Town Hall and The George Hotel, which had been the home of the Holmes family. Yarmouth had two Members of Parliament until the Great Reform Act of 1832, and the borough was entirely in the pocket of the Holmes family. Even fewer people voted here than in Newtown, and the result was always a foregone conclusion. From 1801 to 1831 the greatest number of voters, in any one election here, was nine. Burgesses were elected for life and their private friendships with the Holmes family were even more important than their political allegiances.

We then walked the length of the High Street, admiring The Towers and narrow passageways, like Eremue Lane, that led down to the Solent, before walking along the seawall to Bouldnor. There were impressive stands of Harts-tongue Fern on part of the bank, and we found the lilac flowers of Salsify.

Having regained the main road at Bouldnor, we looked across to the site of Eastmore House. In the 1930s this had been the home of the Countess of Carnarvon, the widow of the famous Egyptologist. The building was later taken over by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and became St Swithun's, a remand home for boys. Along the road we admired the four verandah "bungalows", built in the late 1890s in Indian colonial style, some with "Pritchett's dragons" on the roof, the decorative ridge tile finials.

Our next stop was at the site of the Tollhouse adjacent to the junction with the Thorley Road. The nearby post-box marked the parish boundary between Yarmouth and Shalfleet. We then walked along the road to the Freshwater Yarmouth and Newport Railway line and followed this as far as Mill Copse. After an excursion into the northern half of the Copse, we returned via the embankment (which had marked the edge of the old millpond before the arrival of the railway in the 1880s), admiring the Mill that has been bought by AJP Taylor in the 1950s and marveling that the quiet area north of the stream had once been the town gasworks.

Although the weather was not good for insects, a number of bird species were seen during the walk. These included Whitethroat, Reed Warbler, Great-spotted Woodpecker and a very fine flock of eighteen Black-tailed Godwits, some of which were in the rich colours of their summer plumage. When they flew, with their distinctive black and white pattern on wings and tail, they were a magnificent sight.

Richard Smout

Archaeology

Archaeology Meetings: Talk and Walk

Delian Backhouse-Fry gave monthly talks on Saturday mornings at St. Lawrence village hall followed by Sunday visits to a relevant site. Each talk provides an introduction to an archaeological period with a focus on the Isle of Wight. These talks were fascinating for experienced members wishing to update and expand their knowledge and for those new to the subject. As the following reports show, continuity and progression are recurrent themes.

Helen Jackson

5th & 6th March

After The Ice Age

Saturday

Some nine thousand years ago Britain was part of a huge peninsula. During the Ice Age, very few people lived as far north as Britain, but during a mini warming-up period, hunters moved north, living in caves. In Cresswell Caves in Derbyshire, cave paintings depict various animals, including the ibis. The painters must have migrated from much further south, as the ibis did not live in Britain.

Evidence of modern humans, Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age Man, living in Ireland predates that found in Britain. These humans were not just hunters: they also built boats like the curragh. A big Palaeo-river flowed northwards from Spain into what is now the English Channel and emptied into the Atlantic. Small bands of people migrated into Britain. They were highly skilled, especially in stonework. Delian passed around some fine examples of stone tools and recommended some books on the subject. The forests began to form and men made bows and arrows, enabling them to hunt more effectively.

At Bouldnor, off the Isle of Wight's north-west coast, evidence has been found in the past ten years of a Mesolithic camp. This is some of the most important evidence found from this period. Lobster fishermen first alerted archaeologists to the discovery of some stone tools, brought to the surface by lobsters they caught in their pots. The Solent was once part of the huge river on whose shores people made their home. Artefacts found on the sea bed off Bouldnor include fish hooks, flint tools and string. The string was discovered by members of Delian's local Archaeology group and is about eight thousand six hundred years old. Planks were also found, but what were they used for? The Needles and Old Harry's Rocks on either side of The Solent are all that remains of a great chalk ridge that joined the Island to the mainland. But the rise in sea temperatures was rapid and in perhaps only fifteen years it burst through the chalk, flooding the Solent river valley and the human encampment there. Let us hope that the inhabitants received adequate warning to move their camp to higher ground. The Museum of Marine Archaeology at Fort Victoria has displays of axe-heads from this period and there are other locally found Mesolithic artefacts at Carisbrooke Castle Museum and The Museum of Island History.

The Mesolithic was largely a mobile society of hunter-gatherers. At Brook, on the Island's south-west coast, there is evidence of camps made on river banks. In recent years Delian has shown us hearths in the cliff-face with burnt flint and hazelnut shells. But no Mesolithic pottery has been found on the Island, as it has in Yorkshire and Ireland. The Mesolithic Age lasted in Britain for some three to five thousand years, but this varies according to region. It started not in the south, as might be expected given the climatic variations, but in the far north-east, in Orkney, some twelve thousand years ago. Unfortunately all Mesolithic sites in Orkney are now underwater. At the National Trust's visitor centre in Newtown there is a display of mammoth, bison and auroch bones, as well as antlers, found along this coast, that Mesolithic Man would have hunted, together with beaver, otter, red deer, ducks, geese and squirrel. At first they built temporary camps, but they gradually settled.

Delian went on to discuss recent archaeological discoveries in Britain and other parts of the world and how they have changed beliefs and attitudes. Archaeology is in constant flux and those who practise it must be highly adaptable. As it is based largely on conjecture, archaeologists are often in dispute. Later evidence may corroborate or disprove a long-held theory. Technology, especially the metal detector and Geophysical equipment, have greatly increased the number of finds and, together with increased media interest, the rise in popularity of archaeology.

Margaret Nelmes

Sunday

We met at Bouldnor viewpoint car park and walked through woodland to explore the beach. This can be a very fruitful area where artefacts from a range of periods can be washed up. Mesolithic flint tools were on our mind that day as we looked to where the Solent covers the Mesolithic site being excavated by Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology.

9th & 10th April
Saturday

The Neolithic

A good group of about 20 members attended this talk on the Neolithic. Delian made sure that our understanding of the island context was set within the world and European context.

The term Neolithic refers to the time of settled farming and communities, which happened in different parts of the world at different times. In Europe warmer weather reduced the need for migration and also supported the growth of crops.

Last year Delian visited Catal Huyuk in Turkey, a hugely important site that has been excavated over many years to reveal settlement from about 7000 BC. Wall paintings found in houses serve as a 'living diary' showing domesticated animals such as sheep, cattle and chickens and, very significantly, an ard (a basic plough).

As regards Britain, she reminded us of the Mesolithic period when, at the end of the last ice age the tundra was gradually replaced by forest. At Star Carr in Yorkshire there is evidence that Mesolithic people were becoming more settled from the previous hunter-gatherer life style and were beginning to clear the surrounding forest.

Research is changing our understanding of this period all the time. Did the farming revolution develop within the existing population, did a new influx of people bring a new culture, or did a smaller number of travellers introduce the technology and seeds into Britain? Current thinking generally favours the latter theory.

It is now generally accepted that the people who settled in the South West (including what is now the Isle of Wight) came from Western France as the weather warmed.

Delian painted a vivid picture of travel and trade over several thousand years based on the Atlantic seaboard and providing cultural links across this area separate from the east of Britain which linked naturally to central Europe. With the English Channel smaller than it is now and favourable currents, culture, ritual, burial practices, grave goods and other items would have spread from Brittany and evidence shows similarities. So evidence from, for example, Brittany and Ireland could give an indication of culture here.

The first field systems began to appear, small settlements then grew in size and the social life changed dramatically as communities grew larger.

Houses, being made of wood, have left little evidence, but seem to have been relatively sophisticated; painted wall plaster has been found. Skara Brae, made of stone, can give us clues as to the care that was taken to make homes comfortable.

Monuments are used in the landscape as a means of communication; they were constructed for specific purposes such as burial, or to mark events such as the solstices. So ritual was central to daily life and was also leading to the emergence of an elite, such as those who were allowed into the chambered passages at seasonal festivals.

Axes seem to have been significant, with images appearing on numerous monuments. Flint was essential for tools and Grimes Graves in Norfolk shows how good quality flint could lead to a well-established industry and trading network.

There is little evidence of warfare at this stage; the picture is of settled communities co-operating with their neighbours for certain occasions and a life driven by religion and ritual within the landscape.

The first metal – copper – began to appear at the end of this period. The Amesbury Archer, buried near Stonehenge, had a copper knife. The scene is set for The Bronze Age!

Sunday

A glorious spring morning greeted the group of over 15 who gathered at Mottistone car park. As we walked up the Holloway, Delian told us about Prof. Tim Champion's theory of 'processional ways'. He suggests the approach to an ancient monument was planned with a series of rises and falls to control the view of the approaching monument before the final appearance provided maximum impact. Walking up before the trees were in full leaf enabled us to gain a good impression of the landscape in which our route is situated.

The Longstone itself, with the recumbent stone in front, marks the entrance to a Neolithic barrow; a raised area still gives an idea of the scale. The site was excavated by Jacquetta Hawkes and Mortimer Wheeler. **(Photos page 17)**

We were able to see the site in the context of the wider landscape, looking to the lynchets (farming

terraces) on the side of the down and the Bronze Age barrows.

We then walked up the hill to the east, stopping at the shallow earthworks marking a large rectangular enclosure. There is considerable dispute as to its age and purpose, but the spring in the centre must be significant.

Returning to the Longstone we went uphill in the opposite direction to a Bronze Age barrow on the hillside. This was eroding rapidly after the 1987 storms and was protected with layers of earth from immediately around. Intriguingly, a number of Mesolithic microliths have been found in this earth.

As we returned along the track we were intrigued by a large stone lying on the hillside. Although typical of the local geology it looked like another stone shaped and positioned for a purpose, perhaps originally upright.

Only two Neolithic long barrows have been identified on the island – at Mottistone and on Afton Down.

18th & 19th June

The Bronze Age

Saturday

The sequence of talks was not in chronological order as we did not want to be trampled underfoot by ‘Walk the Wighters’!

Current thinking sets the Bronze Age between 2,500 and 800 BC, but we should also remember how the beginning of that time merged with the late Neolithic. The gold hair-braids and copper knife found with the Amesbury Archer show that metal working was taking place in the late Neolithic. The mixing of tin and copper to form bronze must have opened up so many opportunities – weapons, tools, boat building.

Whilst in the Eastern Mediterranean there is a store of knowledge based on early writing, in Britain our evidence comes from artefacts, art, structures and the landscape.

A local example of the importance of landscape was seen when the Archaeology group carried out geophysics at Newbarn Farm near Calbourne. From the hillside where we detected Bronze Age barrows we could see several significant sites on the Island and the mainland. These people were very aware of neighbouring communities. It is thought that boundaries marking control of an area were marked by earthworks or barrows or pits. On Bodmin Moor where stone was used there is good evidence of field systems and roundhouses forming communities.

Stonehenge of course is iconic and is part of a much larger landscape. The avenue from the River Avon uses the topography to control the view as visitors approach. We noted a similar feature last month on our walk to the Longstone.

The earliest bronze has been found in Anatolia but Britain had important deposits of tin and copper. Grave goods, including amber and coral, show evidence of the long distance trade. It is probable that trackways became established, both locally for moving stock and long-distance for trade.

The marvel of producing bronze swords and axes may well have created an elite group of craftsmen. It is tempting to try and enter the psyche of these people who first witnessed this amazing transformation of base metals into bronze and the transformations it led to.

Community, trade and other aspects seen in Neolithic archaeology have become more established. By the end of this era larger settlements (e.g. Danebury, Maiden Castle) were appearing; routeways, ritual, lifestyle were progressing towards the Iron Age.

Sunday

It was a windy, but sunny and clear spring morning for our walk up Brook Down to look at the barrows. The view reinforced Delian’s emphasis on the landscape and relationship of sites. We could see Newbarn Farm, Gallibury Hump, Mottistone, Afton, St Catherine’s and Headon Warren – all sites of Bronze Age barrows. On the mainland were Hengistbury Head, Purbeck, the Ridgeway behind the coastal plain and the hills behind Chichester. The barrows – we counted nine – have suffered from earlier excavations, but are still impressive. We also noted how they would have served as a marker for sailors. We began to wonder about the message these barrows were presenting, perhaps not just commemorating the dead, but marking territories, warning hostile visitors but welcoming traders and

offering hospitality. Were standards or other markers placed on top? There is so much evidence we cannot hope to find.

14th & 15th May

The Iron Age

Saturday

In Britain the period is now regarded as about 1000BC – AD 43 except in Ireland and Scotland where it was not ended by Roman occupation. Our understanding of this era has changed in recent years especially the terminology. It is acceptable to speak of the Celts but they are seen as coming from the Atlantic coast of Europe not Eastern Europe as was once thought..

We also have more written evidence from this period but we must be wary of Roman bias! Evidence for tribal and individual names comes from coinage and Ptolemy's tribal map of Europe which shows the Occes on what we now call The Isle of Wight.

The language/s of Britain at that time have been given the term Brythonic. John Margham says 3 place names on the island are associated with that language: one is 'Caris'.

Worldwide the first evidence of iron manufacture was in China and Japan whilst in Europe it was in Turkey and Mesopotamia.

The iron-making process was much more complicated than bronze but the metal had more uses and was more adaptable. As it became more widespread it altered the social system, being more widely used and manufactured, rather than restricted to an elite as bronze had been. However the sword continued to be a symbol of power.

One cause of social change could have been the worsening climate which reduced farming on the higher land used in the Bronze Age. Shortage of land probably led to conflict and the importance of powerful leaders and tribal allegiances. Slavery became more widespread. Settlements became larger, often based on hillforts which showed regional variations and tribal identity and customs. Some hillforts were proto-towns, with different areas for different activities. Roundhouses could be spacious with delineated areas. They usually faced southeast towards the midwinter sunrise but have been found in West Wight opening northwest perhaps due to the prevailing winds.

As regards food, chicken was introduced from the Middle East in the Middle Iron Age and we have the first evidence of malting barley to produce beer.

On the Island a range of pottery has been found, particularly in the Undercliff area. In 1929 the grave of a warrior was found in the grounds of Craigie Lodge at St. Lawrence. The finds included coloured glass - purple, yellow and, most prized, red. Barry Cunliffe's excavations at Hengistbury Head found glass ingots from Antioch and glass beads. Glass decorations have also been found on the Battersea shield so it seems to have been highly valued..

Sunday

We walked round Gander Down near Brading, the site excavated by Time Team in 2001. Looking at the low land, it was easy to see how a wide, navigable body of water fed in from Bembridge and across to what is now the low land behind Sandown revetment. We could see the Roman villa on a raised site and realised that, subject to tree clearance, there was a commanding view of the approach.

Dowsing and aerial views indicate that the enclosure formed by earthworks is a frying pan shape with the handle end being most sheltered. We followed the field round the end to the creek on the other side. We could see it would have been wide enough for boats and Mike Cahill said a Time Team core suggested the water was twelve feet deep in Roman times. There is still good quality flint on the site. The remains of the earthworks are still visible from the side of Culver Down.

The archaeology group hopes to carry out more geophysics on this site, so the story continues.

Helen Jackson

Botany

29th January

Indoor meeting

This year the indoor meeting was held at Medina Valley Centre. It followed the established pattern of reports on the previous year's meetings, updates on our on-going projects and short talks by members of the group.

Tony Stoneley described the monitoring of the flowering of Field Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum arvense*, at the St Lawrence Bank site which has taken place for several years. A detailed picture is emerging of how the abundance changes during the season and from year to year. Colin Pope gave an update on last year's recording season on the Island. The number of items for the small exhibition was reduced this year and we hope that as people make interesting discoveries this season, they are planning ahead to take photographs or collect information for next year's display.

We were fortunate to have illustrated talks about two areas of Europe this year – one from Dave Trevan on the plants of the Azores, where the area enjoys a Mediterranean climate. Words like 'large' 'colourful' and 'exotic' come to mind. Many of these plants are grown in this country as glasshouse specimens or outdoors in milder areas, so we were familiar with some of them.

The other talk, from Colin Pope, was on the flora of Iceland where the climate is much harsher. In the clefts of the rocks where the microclimate is less extreme, a variety of plants grow and we were able to recognize 'family likenesses' of some of these plants with our native flora.

13th February

Wood Calamint site clearance

Unfortunately, the date set for our annual clearance of the lay-bys dawned damp and drizzly, and before long, steady light rain set in. Our group was somewhat depleted in numbers but we managed a thorough clearance of one of the lay-bys by lunchtime. We checked on the translocation plots to look for plants in their vegetative state but no more were planted this year. However, we hope to resume this next winter.

8th April

Swanpond Copse

We had a bright and sunny afternoon for our visit to Swanpond Copse, a Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Reserve. It is an ancient woodland to the south of Ryde. It is bordered on the west by the Isle of Wight Steam Railway track and the Monkton Mead Brook flows through it. The trees include Oak (*Quercus robur*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Aspen (*Populus tremula*) and the understorey has shrubs such as Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*).

Most of our recording effort was related to the ground flora. Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) a plant which is uncommon and local in Island woodlands was in flower, so we were able to see how it differs from other buttercups. Other highlights included some fine specimens of Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) a large clump of Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) and Narrow-leaved Lungwort (*Pulmonaria longifolia*). The display of this plant on the bank along the railway track, next to the adjacent Angel's Copse, was particularly outstanding.

We also looked for galls, leaf miners and micro-fungi. Seven gall causers were recorded; five of these were new records for the site and there were three leaf miners, one of which was a new record for the site. Of the eight micro-fungi recorded, six were new for the site and one, *Septoria hederæ* on ivy, was a new record for the Island.

7th May

Pelham Woods (contributed by Dave Trevan)

Pelham Woods is managed by Wight Nature Fund, who employ a warden in the growing season to keep the paths open and attend to health and safety issues. For many years conservation work parties from the Isle of Wight College have spent several sessions each autumn clearing pole sycamores and elder. More recently, conservation courses have not been funded, so villagers have stepped in under the auspices of the St. Lawrence Community Association, and have cleared areas of the site, and had a thoroughly enjoyable time getting involved!

A copy of the management plan (currently being updated), was examined. Key parts of this include increasing the areas of Ash, and decreasing the dominance of Sycamore, Elder, Nettle and Ivy to produce a more open character and increase diversity. At the time of the visit there were two major health and safety issues, namely a rotting and unstable boardwalk that traverses a wetland area, and bridge in need of major repairs. Both of these have now been very successfully repaired and are fully functional. A further problem was the dumping of garden rubbish on parts of the site and the encroachment of non native species like *Buddleia davidii*.

Members then spread out around the site and between them recorded over 70 species. Amongst the more notable plants recorded were Italian Lord's and Ladies (*Arum italicum* ssp *neglectum*) which has a bright yellow spadix, and Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hederaceae*, a parasite on Ivy. There were also some good stands of the Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* ssp. *montanum*). Recording stopped when we reached the eastern end of the wood.

As an additional treat, Dave took the group up the steep path of the Paradise Walk, to the St Lawrence Bank SSSI. They were able to enjoy the spectacular rock formations and a slightly different range of plants; Eric Clement commented that it was "like being in the Mediterranean." At St Lawrence Bank members looked out for plants of Field Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum arvense*), (Photo page 18) but there was also a good display of Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*). Just before the end of the walk Tony Stoneley, pointed out a Cage Fungus (*Clathrus ruber*) (Photo page 18) in the grounds of St. Lawrence Village hall.

Finally the group spent some time in the St. Lawrence Peace Garden. All in all, an enjoyable afternoon!

21st May

Golden Hill Country Park

The soils of Golden Hill Country Park are derived from Tertiary rocks of the Solent series, and it has areas of both calcareous and neutral grassland as well as secondary woodland. Initially we concentrated on the grassland and built up a list which included plants characteristic of both these grassland types including Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Eyebright (*Euphasia officinalis*), Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and a good stand of Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) just beginning to flower. One spike of Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) was found and a fine display of Common Spotted Orchids, (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) Southern Marsh-orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and their hybrid (*Dactylorhiza x grandis*). Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) was recorded on this site for the first time in 2003 and was present in reasonable abundance in approximately the same location as its first discovery.

A considerable amount of scrub removal has taken place at Golden Hill Country Park over the past winter and one of the objects of the meeting was to look for Pale Dog Violet (*Viola lactea*) which was found last year by Caroline Dudley, to see if it was continuing to benefit from the clearance. We had timed the meeting hoping to find it in full flower, but the very warm spring meant that flowering was over, but several plants recognisable from their characteristic leaf shape were found in an area of cleared scrub. Three other species of violet, Common Dog Violet (*V. riviniana*) Hairy Violet (*V. hirta*) and Heath Dog Violet (*V. canina*) were seen during the afternoon which gave the opportunity for us to see how to distinguish them.

We finished by walking through the woodland where we added plants such as Harts-tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) to our list.

4th June

Ashengrove Down

Ashengrove Farm has a west-facing steep slope with a good chalk grassland flora and this area has just been confirmed as a local Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The site is notable for its display of Cowslips (*Primula veris*) earlier in the season but these were all over by the time of our visit. Most of our recording took place on the upper parts of the slope where we found a good range of typical chalk downland species including Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*) whose flowering was over but was recognisable by its hairy leaves, Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), which has clusters of tiny pink flowers, Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*),

Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Quaking Grass (*Briza media*)

Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) was just coming into flower and Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*) was in abundance but not in flower to any great extent, making inspection of the turf essential before sitting down anywhere for a closer look!

There were two particularly interesting finds. Firstly a patch of Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) (**Photo** page 18) was seen near the top of the slope. As this is a plant more usually associated with meadows on neutral soil, there was speculation that the soil underlying it was a clay lens within the chalk. The other plant was Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*) found not on the Down itself, but at the edge of the adjacent field. This is a relatively uncommon plant of arable fields.

Anne Marston

Entomology

4th May

Jersey Camp

This was the first of two moth-trapping evenings at the Camp in 2011, and we were grateful to David Maidment for making the arrangements and providing a very useful room in which moths can be studied under cover. The weather was a little disappointing, as it started to drizzle shortly after the meeting began, but the light rain was short-lived.

In the end twelve macro-moths were identified and one micro, *Adela reaumurella*, the males of which have very long antennae, and are very distinctive. Among the other species seen were Orange Footman, Pebble Prominent, Bloodvein and Poplar Lutestring. Both Scorched and Broken-Barred Carpets were observed, but the most interesting species to be recorded was probably a Seraphim, a species which is rather local in its distribution.

3rd June

Haseley Manor

This meeting was by kind permission of Anthony Roberts, and again the use of a room in which to study our finds was very welcome, as it gave everyone an opportunity to view and photograph species that had been recorded. As at Jersey Camp, two lights were run. One was in the nature reserve area between the ponds, and then (when that proved to be a limited success) it was moved to the garden of the manor, at some distance from where the main trap was running. The day had been warm, but the evening was quite breezy at times. The publicity for the meeting flagged up two target species: The Ghost and Elephant Hawk-Moth. We had no success in finding The Ghost, we may have been too early in the season, or perhaps it was too windy. However we did succeed in finding Elephant Hawk-Moth, Small Elephant Hawk-Moth, and (largest of all) Pine Hawk Moth. A total of thirty-one species were seen, which is a good tally for our meetings which usually end by midnight and do not therefore get the full range of species that may be present at the time. This was an evening with a lot of very strikingly marked species, most notably three Cream-Spot Tigers, a dark form of the Peppered Moth, Burnished Brass, and both Buff and White Ermine. Two Figure of Eight moths were seen, and three examples of a migratory species the White-Point, which has a very intense point of white on a rufous wing. One species flummoxed the two leaders of the group, Elaine Rice and Richard Smout. Each of us studied the small orange-brown species overnight and came to the same unlikely conclusion that the species was a Rannoch Looper, which is found in central Scotland. The species is however a rare migrant, and that evening there were a large number of records from southern England, from Kent to Portland Bill, of this moth, presumably an influx from the continent. All three Loopers that we found were male, as were the vast majority of the records for this migration.

As well as these moths we were treated to views of both Barn Owl and a Little Owl. The latter flew down to examine the mercury-vapour lamp and the moths that it was attracting, and shifted from one leg to another, almost in a dance, as it decided what to do.

7th June

Golden Hill Fort

This was a pleasant afternoon with sunny intervals, but rather too breezy for a successful entomological meeting. Kestrel and Linnet were seen flying overhead. The meeting proved to be best for butterflies with a total of six species being observed, including both Brown Argus and Common Blue. Good numbers of Dark Bush Crickets were seen, and Meadow Grasshoppers were also identified. *Oedemera nobilis*, a common green beetle where the male has swollen hind femora was observed, as were a number of the commoner bumble-bee species.

Richard Smout

Geology

17th April

A Walk to Whitecliff Bay

Faced with a towering wall of chalk imprisoning you in the bay, you feel very small and insignificant. But then you're whisked off on a journey - not through space, but time. You hurtle back some tens of millions of years in seconds, as you stare at the almost vertical strata of the London Clay Formation. Huge crumbling monoliths rise at right-angles to the great chalk headland. You adjust your mind to the Paleogene period, somewhere between 65.5 and 23 million years ago. Now you've shrunk so much, you cease to exist at all.

Cathy Adamou, our Guide from the Geological Society of Isle of Wight, takes eleven of our members on a stroll around the Whitecliff Bay, pointing out the various formations as we search for fossils, both in the cliff and on the beach. She tells us that the fossils in the clay indicate a warm climate where lush forest bordered a warm, shallow ocean. The clays were deposited after the Cretaceous Period, by the end of which some 75% of life on Earth had been driven to extinction. Common fossils in the London Clay are crabs and lobsters, fish, and casts of big clam bivalves. The stiff, bluish coloured clay turns brown when it is weathered. Concretions, shaped like dodos' eggs, some containing iron pyrite ('Fool's Gold') and crystals of selenite, fall out of the cliffs as they erode. There are serpulid beds, one on top of another, made by marine worms which excrete calcite to make worm tubes to protect them from predation. We find lines of pebbles in the vertical strata, indicating that there was once a pebble beach here. Moving on, away from the headland, the next rock formation we encounter is the Bagshott Sands. This orange sandstone contains coal with a covering of yellow sulphur. It is crumbly. One of our party finds half a fossilised sea urchin, and here too we see nemelites: tiny spiral-shaped gastropods in the cliff. Beyond the beach cafe and roadway up the cliff, Cathy points out lower cliffs made of Bembridge Limestone, and on top of that the younger Bembridge Marl. These were water meadows where calcium was deposited by plants. The meadows were seasonally flooded, and when the ponds dried up, limestone was formed. As we clamber up the long steep cliff path, we are amazed to see little houses perched high up on the cliff edge and still inhabited.

We owe Cathy many thanks for taking us on another fascinating journey into the far-distant past.

Margaret Nelmes

Ornithology

15th January.

Seaview

After days of rain, Saturday proved to be a dry morning although it was very wet under foot. 15 members met for a seawatch, followed by a visit to Hersey Reserve and then a walk along some quiet roads and footpaths in the Seaview area. Brent Geese, Cormorant, Red-breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull and a diver sp. were seen over and on the sea as well as two Mediterranean Gull, one a full adult. We were rather surprised to see a Little Grebe close inshore. The only waders seen were Oystercatcher. On the Reserve six Pochard and six Tufted Duck were noted, as well as nine Teal, and three more Little Grebe, 40 Coot and Mallard. At least 12 Canada Geese were seen flying over. On a field off Nettlestone Hill we saw a flock of at least 192 Barnacle Geese, free flying from Seaview Wildlife Experience and with them were two Snow Geese and two very smart Red-breasted Geese. In all 32 species were recorded during the morning.

20th February

Brading

16 members met at Brading Railway Station for a walk along the old railway track and the old dyke wall that surrounds Brading Marshes. Having had quite a lot of rain recently the paths were very muddy, but the morning was dry. It was nice to see that the water levels were high on the Marshes but the birds there

were still at some distance. A flock of at least 70 Canada Geese were present, as were a large flock of Coot and Wigeon. A Cormorant was seen sitting in a tree as well as a Buzzard, with a further two seen flying overhead. A Kestrel remained on a post for sometime. A Reed Bunting was heard along the old railway track as well as a Cetti's Warbler and a Water Rail. At least three Shelduck were seen on the Marsh and two Grey Heron, as well as a flock of Lapwing. Near and in the Sewage Works we saw Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Chaffinch, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail and a pair of Grey Wagtail. In all 45 species were identified during the morning.

19th March

Gatcombe

15 members on a lovely, crisp Saturday morning met near the church for a walk along Snowdrop Lane to Little Gatcombe and Newbarn Farm and returning along the bridleway and footpath to the church. For the walk we had a mixture of rural gardens, hedgerows, woodland edges, farmland and Downland. There were a number of Buzzards during the course of the morning, six soaring together and three moving west as well as another three singles. There was an abundant number of Woodpigeons, Jackdaws and Rooks as well as at least 12 Pheasants in the various fields. Three pairs of Red-legged Partridge were seen. We had three Great Spotted Woodpecker and heard a Green Woodpecker. Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, and Blackcap were seen in the gardens along the Lane and we also saw Canada Geese, Mallard and Moorhen. Some time during the morning we saw a Raven flying. In all 31 species were noted.

Along the footpath leading to the church a leaf of a Broad-leaved Bamboo was found covered in a brown rust. David Biggs took it and identified it as *Puccinia longicornis*. As we have no previous records for this species and there are only three other records on Broad-leaved Bamboo in the country, mainly near Kew, David was advised to send a specimen to Kew.

30th April

Fort Victoria Country Park

17 people attended on a sunny but very windy morning. As it was rather cold to begin with and not much activity over the Solent. We only had a brief sea watch before heading up into the woodland. There were five Gannet flying east and we saw Black-headed Gulls, Herring Gulls and a Cormorant. There was a constant, steady light movement of Swallows throughout the morning. Besides seeing Blue tit, Great Tit, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Robin and Wren, we heard Blackcap, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff. Near Cliff End we saw two Wheatear and Linnet, as well as House Martin, Jackdaw, Dunnock and Song

Thrush. House Sparrows were in some scrubland, nine males together and at least five females a little distance apart. Standing on a boundary fence near the stile we counted six female Wheatears and soon afterwards we heard part of the song of a Nightingale. Starling, Goldfinch and Green Woodpecker were also noted. In all 31 species were recorded.

8th May

St Catherines Point

Only six of our members joined IWOOG for an early morning sea-watch at SCP, none of us managing to arrive for the start of the session at 7 am. (Apologies to David Hunnybun). Although the watch on Saturday had started slowly it picked up after 1½ hrs and mainly waders passed through. May 8th however had very few movements, mainly Gannet, but there was a Great Skua, two movements of two Artic Skua, Kittiwake, Manx Shearwater and Guillemot, and a Whimbrel was heard.

5th June

Firestone Copse

14 members met in the car park for a circular walk in the woods taking in the pond and Wootton Creek. Unfortunately, Elaine Rice was unwell so Jackie Hart led the walk. Bill Shepard pointed out some Beech trees in the car park, which had much smaller leaves than normal and also had larger Beech mast. This is considered to be a defensive mechanism to survive the current drought conditions. During our walk we spotted four Red Squirrels in four different areas of the wood. The bird life was rather sparse but we saw or heard Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Wren, Woodpigeon, Buzzard, a dead immature Kestrel, Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Great Spotted Woodpecker and two Shelduck, Black-headed Gull and a Heron on the Creek. In all we saw 20 species of bird during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

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New Members

Deaths

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Next Bulletin

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to 31st December 2011 should be sent to:-

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The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 12th January 2012

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