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Contents

President's Address

On a recent visit to the Society's Headquarters at Ventnor I was handed a piece of paper outlining the duties of the President. One clause seemed directly written to me - the President was “not expected to be expert in all the fields covered by the various sections." As most of you will know, unlike past Presidents who have been specialists, I am very much an ordinary member with a general interest in natural history and archaeology, but my membership over many years has widened my knowledge and kept up a spirit of inquiry.

With this in mind last May I joined the general meeting exploring the ground around the glasshouses of Wight Salads, somewhere completely new to me. It proved to be two hours of continuous interest as we wandered by the new lakes created from the water used in the hydroponic growing system. With experts in identifying grasses, mosses, flowers, birds all to hand, and all more than willing to point out, identify and explain when I asked any question. It was a real illustration of teaching and learning in the best way. I hope this reassures members who might feel inhibited when they see Section Leaders reminding participants to bring notebooks etc. Just go along as I did and enjoy learning from those who know.

A visit to northern Germany at the end of May brought an unexpected treat; an exhibition of historic books on natural history gathered under the grand dome of the ducal library in Wolfenbuttell, a small town near Brunswick. The examples included medieval illuminated manuscripts and an amazing sixteenth century herbarium. The arresting title "The Marriage of Plant" brought me into the eighteenth century and a collection of first editions of Linnaeus's works, the first time I had seen any of his books, an experience which changed a name into a person. Such unexpected surprises make the best holiday souvenirs.

Joanna Jones

NOTICE BOARD

STOP PRESS

GEOLOGY GROUP REVIVAL – EVERYONE IS WELCOME

Good news for all you geology and fossil-hunting enthusiasts: we are reviving our Geology group with the support of two leading members of the Isle of Wight Geological Society, Paul Newton and Cathy Adamou.

We kick off with a guided beach walk on Sunday 28 September starting at 1 pm from the Military Road near Atherfield Bay Holiday Camp. We will walk the short distance to Shepherd's Chine where Paul will give us a brief description of the ages and types of cliff formations along the 'Back of the Wight' before leading us along the beach to hunt for fossils. Full details are in the new programme.

DO COME ALONG AND SUPPORT OUR NEW GROUP. Stout shoes or walking boots, warm clothes and a windproof jacket are recommended for the walk. And bring a bag if you want to collect fossils.

Margaret Nelmes

ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE SECTION

After the current programme I shall be giving up leading the Access to the Countryside Section and Colin Black will become the leader. He will have the same committee as we have had for some time to help him.

I would like to thank all those who have joined in and contributed to the Access Section walks since 1982, when I became leader. There have been so many happy times and we have explored so many lovely places on our beautiful Island. Many good friendships have been made. I send all good wishes to the Section for the future.

Chris Lipscombe

SOCIETY LIBRARY

It has been brought to our notice that new members may not always be aware of the excellent library we have at Society HQ at Ventnor. This is a private library for the use of members only and has several hundred books on all subjects covered by our Society`s Sections and Groups, most of which are available for borrowing. The Library is open on Thursdays from 10.00 am to early afternoon, or by arrangement with Anne Cahill – tel; 248054

SOCIETY RECORDER CHANGE

Jim Cheverton, after many years, has retired as Recorder for Odonata and Elaine Rice has taken over the position. In future please send any records to Elaine. Her contact details are :-

25 Bannock Road
Whitwell
IOW PO38 2RD Tel: 730187
Email - Erice/Wdragons@aol.com

Country Notes

The Oil Beetle, *Meloe proscarabaeus*, L. An increasing number of records of this species has been received during the past decade, mainly from along our south coast. The Oil Beetle, so called, varying in size between 10 and 30mm, has a defense mechanism, not exclusive to this family, of exuding an evil smelling oily liquid, its blood, through its joints. It is just one of a huge family of some 1500 species, mainly tropical, of which only nine have been recorded in Britain and just three in the Island. Its life style leaves one to wonder how it has survived, for a female with a swollen belly, makes a hole in the ground and deposits some four thousand eggs. This is followed by a second batch and occasionally a third and fourth. Each successive batch decreasing in number. The larvae hatch after ten to twelve days and are immediately active. They have now to climb a flowering plant and reach the inflorescence, here to await the arrival of a Mining Bee, hitch a ride back to the nest of the bee, where it devours the larvae and the store of food.

Another of the family Meloidae, but of a different genus is with us again after an absence of many years. Our earliest record of this species strangely enough, appears in Bromfield's Flora Vectensis, 1856. It is a Southern European species that has on a number of occasions made its appearance in Britain, occasionally in large numbers. The Spanish Fly, *Lytta vesicatoria*, L. made a number of appearances in the first half of the twentieth century and created considerable intererest. Jeffery devoted an entire page to this Species in our Proceedings, Vol.1. P. 96, and again in Vol. 3, P. 151. After reports in 1939 it apparently disappeared, until 2002 or 2003, when Adam Wright discovered it at St. Lawrence. On June 18, 2008, David Biggs and I visited the site and despite the weather being unsuitable, it flies in bright sunshine, we managed to locate a single specimen. This beetle amongst others produces the cantharidin, a diuretic and urogenital stimulant prepared from the dried bodies, and once thought to be an aphrodisiac, but there is much medical evidence that it is highly toxic. The fact that the species has been present at St. Lawrence for a number of years suggests that we have a permanent colony, but I am unaware of its status on the British mainland. (**Photo** –page 17)

Rooks - A long standing colony at the Medical Centre, Carisbrooke, has suddenly been deserted. It was not only a nesting site but a year round roost. It was quite a sight to watch them come in from the south at dusk to roost. Strangely enough a small colony of six or seven nests has been created at the entrance to Archbishop King School in Wellington Road, in trees some twenty feet in height and this in the entrance with all its disturbance.

Magnificent Aerial Display - During the winter of 2007/8 the residents of Newport and Carisbrooke have been treated to an aerial display by a large flock of starlings that has caused people to stand and watch. As the sun disappears below the horizon a small number commence to circle the area and are quickly joined by others from various directions, until a considerable flock has assembled and presents the most spectacular flying display. Turning, weaving, stretching into a long line, returning to a tight group, rising and falling in perfect unison. Apparently with a mysterious instant communication. The whole display lasts some half an hour, when the flock disperses in small groups, making their way to their preferred roosts.

Should this spectacle be repeated in 2008/9, no one would be disappointed if they made a special effort to visit Newport at this time. The Riverway Industrial site is a good spot to observe this display.

The Lily Beetle - *Lilioceris lilii*. Chrysomelidae. Our appeal for information relating to this species had a fantastic response. Although first recorded in Britain in 1839, it was rare and extremely local and it was not until 1998 that our first record for the Island occurred, at Binstead. Literature suggested it was becoming common and extending its range, but still largely confined to S.E. England. Joy, still the standard work on beetles, published in 1932, makes no mention of the species. At the time of the appeal we had just two confirmed records, but a suspicion that with the popularity of the host plant, lilies, it was more widespread than our records suggested.

Our appeal resulted in over 50 reports and from all parts of the Island, from odd specimens to

"destroyed the lilies." Although found predominantly on lilies, not exclusively so. One report "on Snakeshead Fritillaries" but still on the family Liliaceae. Records are from April to June. This appears to be an excellent method of obtaining information, but the object must be easily recognised and the host stated.

Slow-worms - Separating Newport Cemetery from the Quay is a low brick wall supported by numerous brick pillars with stone cappings. The wall is leaning dangerously and is being lowered or removed. Beneath nearly all the stone cappings of the pillars were Slow-worms.

Glow-worms - This is our best known beetle, but to my knowledge we have no record of the occurrence of the male of this species. On May 30, 2008, David Biggs visited Barton Manor and following that visit presented me with a beetle for identification. The accompanying note reads as follows :- "many of these on low vegetation at edge of meadow, Barton. SZ 5394. 30/5/08." This proved to be a male Glow-worm, *Lampyris noctiluca*. Although the males are known to swarm on warm evenings in May and June, this appears to be the first record for males in the Island.

Countryside Artifacts - With our interest in the Island countryside I am sure none of us like to pass an object, the origin or use of which is unknown to us. Milestones are one such source of curiosity, but few remain. They told our forebears the distance to the next town in almost every instance. There are exceptions, such as the stone on Bow Bridge, Godshill, which gives the distance to Appuldurcombe House in one direction and to Newport Quay in the other. Perhaps the stone in Newchurch is even more puzzling, 91 miles to London. Does anyone know why this stone was erected.

Another artifact is the mounting block at the junction of Chine Avenue and Alexander Road, Shanklin. The road to the shore was built to the order of the Rev. Walton White in the 1830s. So steep was it that it was impossible to ride a horse and to enable mounting at the top of the road this stone block was placed there. It is not in its original position, being more in the road and an obstacle to modern traffic. The block is not of its original height, but remains surrounded by a stone seat. A further stone once existed at Cliff Farm, Shanklin, but in the rebuilding of the stone wall it was not incorporated. An excellent example of these mounting blocks can be seen at Chale Church by the side of the entrance gate in the boundary wall. Do any members know of others in the Island.

Bill Shepard

Undercliff Walls Project

Various Society members met on several Wednesdays and Saturdays during January and February to research boundaries and walls in St. Lawrence Undercliff as part of the HEAP project.

Delian Backhouse-Fry was the leader and we met at her house each time to get booted up and organised. We were extremely lucky with the weather; it was almost always dry and sunny for us even though the ground was often waterlogged.

For several members it was an opportunity to explore an unfamiliar area and learn more about the history of residential and commercial development as well as see remains from the Second World War such as the radar station at Old Park.

All finds were photographed, logged onto record sheets and maps, and GPS readings were taken. Old tithe maps were useful sources of information.

Over the course of several outings we traced boundaries from the top of the cliff to where the walls collapsed into the sea.

We saw evidence of the now overgrown Georgian landscaped gardens around the Old Park estate in the form of stone bridges, water features and grottoes. One natural cave in the cliff face had clearly been given a “Blackgang Chine” treatment; this is known as “The Elephant’s Hole”!

Among the most significant discoveries were stone gate pillars with cantilevered steps alongside to cross the wall when the gates were locked. Such a gateway is typical of a tollgate and since the tithe

map names this area as “Toll Field” it could indicate a lost toll road.

We also went out to St. Catherine’s Lighthouse and recorded some old walls nearby. As always on such expeditions there was much of interest outside the scope of the project: the ruined Anglo-Saxon house, the remains of a medieval estate and hunting park, the range of fungi identified by members, the intrepid race against the tide at Binnel Bay are some of my memories.

Many thanks to Delian for organising this and for sharing her knowledge of the area and its history with us.

We will resume the HEAP projects, Ancient Trackways and more Undercliff Walls in the Autumn. The Coastwatch programme is also ongoing to gather and record information about our rapidly eroding coastline. Anyone interested in these please contact Delian, Margaret Nelmes or myself.

(**Photos -** page 18)

Helen Jackson

Society Library

We have three new publications to add to our Library.

"Island of Flowers" - A Seasonal Guide to Wild Flowers of the Wight, text and beautiful illustrations by Judith Hammer. This is a publication not only for those with botanical knowledge, but a perfect book to help encourage the younger generations in Members' families to appreciate our wild flowers.

Our thanks go to Roy Brinton and the Ryde Social Heritage Group for presenting the Society with a copy of their recently published book "Ryde's Heritage Our Town, Your Histories" A most interesting publication, with many excellent photographic illustrations.

"A History of Newport Carnivals 1900-1960" by Bill Shepard and Brian Greening. We are grateful to Brian for donating this copy, a companion to the other publications by Bill and Brian that we have on our shelves.

Anne Cahill

Andy`s Notes

11th January - Geoff Blake found a Seahorse on the deck of his fishing boat after hauling some nets close to shore off Luccombe. He put it into a bucket of seawater and took it back to Ventnor where many of us had a chance to see it. Next day he released it back where he originally caught it.

15th January – I saw a Long-tailed Duck at rest on the sea about 200m off Wheelers Bay. This is the first one I`ve seen here.

25th January – On a trip to Niton, my wife and I saw a recently killed Adder in the road. It is the earliest I`ve ever seen one, dead or alive.

1st February – Colin Haygarth reported a Humming-bird Hawk Moth in his garden at Upper Ventnor. They have been remarkably scarce this year, at least up to the end of June.

2nd February – An injured Oystercatcher with a damaged leg, first seen last year, seems to be recovering well and has, in fact, stayed in the area right up to June of this year.

8th February – A Peacock Butterfly in the garden. The first butterfly we`ve seen this year.

12th February - A Large Tortoiseshell in a garden at Whitwell (Mrs Clark). A further five were seen

across the Island up to 13th April. These would all have been over-wintering hibernations from last summer.

13th February – A Camberwell Beauty was seen by many observers in the Botanic Gardens.
Early morning on this day, I saw a Swallow come in off the sea and over our house at Wheelers Bay. This is my earliest ever sighting of this species. (**Photo** - page 17)

5th March – I saw a Barn Owl late evening in Wheelers Bay. Although I have seen them before in this area, it does seem an unusual site for them.

16th March – Geoff Blake caught six large Black Bream (over 1 kg each) off Yaverland plus Red Mullet, these are usually caught in May. Subsequently, huge numbers of Black Bream were caught by anglers, some repeatedly catching over 100 a session.

27th March – A pair of Siskins spent a day feeding from bird feeders in a garden at Bonchurch (G. Wheeler).

3rd April – The first Clouded Yellows were seen today. I saw one at Wheelers Bay and Adam Wright saw one at Bonchurch. These are almost certainly locally emerged.

6th April – It snowed today ! Quite heavily, but when the sun came out it was all gone in two hours.

5th May – A garden in Ventnor hosted seven Fox cubs with two adults, for many days. A really amazing sight to see them playing and chasing round the lawn in broad daylight.

22nd May – Geoff Blake had 4 Storm Petrels round his boat when fishing off St Catherine`s Point.

23rd May – John Moody caught a Herring on a set of Mackerel Feathers off Shanklin. I`ve never heard of this happening before.

29th May – Geoff Blake had a total of eight Storm Petrels round his boat at the same time, off Ventnor. Later in the day there were six when he was fishing off St Catherine`s Point (some of these may have been the same birds). After this he only saw the odd one or two up to the end of June.

1st June – Colin Campbell saw two adult Shelduck with eight ducklings on the sea about 200m off Bonchurch, being swept up tide towards Luccombe.

Moths – Moth trapping has been very poor so far this year. The constant cool East or North-east wind and cool nights has kept numbers low. There have been virtually no migrants coming in due, again, to the wind direction.

Andy Butler

Megalithic Monuments from Orkney to Brittany

"In archaeology, the only thing we can be sure of is that we are wrong." This quote from the Oxford University weekend seminar on 'Megalithic Monuments' sounded a memorable note of caution among a surge of apparently huge new-found confidence, as lecture after lecture pointed towards a science flush with bold new ideas boosted by fresh techniques and technology, but most of all, perhaps, a greater openness to consider the unthinkable.

'Star' of this particular show was certainly Prof Tim Darvill from Bournemouth University, then

on the eve of embarking, with Prof Geoff Wainwright, Welsh-born President of the Society of Antiquaries, on the first dig for 50 years at Stonehenge, which began on Monday, March 31, 2008, and will be examined in a BBC Timewatch documentary in the Autumn. This dig has also been the subject of daily updates on the Timewatch website, as well as widespread press coverage.

The glitz might well have eclipsed one of the main aims of the dig, which was to find accurate dating evidence for the erection of the Bluestones at Stonehenge, rather than to try to more directly prove the 'Healing Stones' theory that the site was - at least in one phase of its long existence - a "prehistoric Lourdes", well-researched and convincing though that hypothesis might be. Early finds of stone tools, and the 'Beaker' pottery uncovered by Chris Watkins, one of the dig students, on day three, set them well on the way. The rest, as they say, is history. And now, TV history, too.

However, the main value of the weekend seminar was possibly its ability, by providing an up-to-date overview from leading researchers, to re-populate the megalithic landscapes and to point up the commonalities of these peoples, as well as their regional differences.

The great relevance to Isle of Wight archaeology is probably in drawing the ancient history of this Island back in a more sharply focused way to its people, placing them more squarely within the broader context of the living landscape they inhabited - and all that existed at that time far beyond.

Neolithic long barrows, of which we have lamentably few precious examples on the Island, began to be built in the fourth millenium BC and - contrary to previous theories - now appear to have been in active use for only short periods, perhaps only up to 100 years or so. A current surge of re-analysis of these sites on the mainland seems to so far indicate that many were tribal, clan or family tombs, with just a few related generations interred there, the bones of their ancestors re-arranged to accommodate later interments. But others might have had a somewhat darker significance, perhaps the last resting places of tribal warriors fallen in some great local inter-tribal battle, as opposed to larger-scale, more open warfare.

It is to be hoped that the results of this latest research on the mainland will inform any future work that might be undertaken on the Island barrows. It might, indeed, be able to help finally assist any future excavation that might conceivably be undertaken at the imposing 'Black Barrow', steeped in myth and legend, but still as yet unable to even be confirmed as a man-made barrow, rather than a natural landscape feature.

The concept that long barrows were constructed as houses of the dead, the homes of the ancestors, now seems difficult, if not impossible to dispel. The megalithic people across Britain and Europe built and lived in long houses of precisely the same trapezoidal shape. Furthermore, the tombs within the early examples were constructed of wood, on a distinctly similar - though more modest scale - as were the homes of the people of the time.

So what of the Island's far more numerous round, bell and disc barrows, more than 300 in total? It seems highly likely these were originally constructed in this time in the shape of roundhouses, as tributes to outstanding tribal chieftains who, even in death, commanded the extraordinary respect that would have been required to inspire the great effort needed to undertake such monumental work. The ordinary people of the time were certainly not afforded such grand burials.

But the barrows also seemed to have fulfilled a rather more prosaic role, as hillside territorial markers. Usually, built near hillcrests, rather than on the skylines, these bright white mounds - originally chalk covered - would have been highly visible from the valley communities they represented, vivid signposts in the landscape the ancients could point to and say: "There are our ancestors. This is our Land."

Many of the weekend's papers were concerned with examining the regional distinctiveness of prehistoric societies, but it also became abundantly clear there was considerable cultural contact between them, over a surprisingly wide area of the globe. This, of course, calls to mind the discovery of an Armorican vessel during Dr David Tomalin's excavation of a barrow on the Island's Gallibury Down.

Wide-ranging research by Prof Chris Scarre, who hosted the seminar and is currently examining the many monuments of Brittany, has led him to conclude that Britain and France were clearly connected in megalithic times and were influenced by each other.

It would seem natural to infer from the style of monument building on the Isle of Wight that our prehistoric ancestors, rather than being isolationist, shared close cultural connections with the near

mainland whereas, for example, the more distantly separated Isles of Scilly developed a more distinctive style in their many entrance graves.

Dr Trevor Kirk, who has been studying the Scillonian remains, concluded that living on an island can make a big difference in a people's view of the world, with sea and land, and the shifting states between them, perhaps holding a strong cultural significance. This is probably much more marked and noticeable on the Isles of Scilly, where the chambers of most of the entrance graves turn their backs to the bountiful yet often wild and dangerous sea.

But perhaps this notion is also worth at least keeping at the back of the mind when considering the prehistoric people of the Isle of Wight and the world they inhabited?

Maurice Bower

An Unusual Moth

During the return to our cars following a Survey conducted by the Botanical Section, of one of the meadows at Newtown on 31st May 2008, we crossed a field where many plants of Dyer`s Greenwood *Genista tinctoria*, were growing. At the edge of one patch of plants, I noticed a case of a Coleophorid Moth. Moths of the family Coleophoridae are micro-moths, the larvae of which feed on the leaves of particular trees and plants, producing leaf mines and living within cases formed of plant material and silk produced by special glands on the larvae. (The name Coleophoridae comes from two Greek words meaning "case- bearer").

Most Coleophorid cases are small (8-9 mm) straight, brown and inconspicuous. In contrast, the case which I found that day, was relatively large (19 mm), shiny black, curved like a crozier and standing out at right angles from the leaf of one plant. I had not seen this case before.

Many Coleophorid Moths are host-specific and this, together with the extraordinary appearance of the case made it easy to identify as that of *Coleophora vibicella*. Microscopical examination of the contained larvae confirmed the identification. Looking up the old records resulted in the realisation that this record from Newtown was only the second for the Island since 1938.

On a subsequent visit, I examined thoroughly all the plants of Dyer`s Greenwood in three adjacent fields and over the course of two and a half hours I counted 34 cases, evidence of a viable colony.

A.M.Emmet wrote in 1996 : "The moth formally occurred in the coastal counties from Dorset to Kent and in Surrey, also in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and the Channel Islands. It may now be extinct in all these counties except Sussex and Hampshire, where it is very local. Elsewhere it is found in Central and Southern Europe and in Asia Minor – (The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Vol.3).

The larvae pupates in the case attached to the stem of the food plant and the adult moth emerges in late July and August.

There are old records of the moth from Shalfleet, Newtown and Gurnard (1917-1938) and only one subsequent undated record from the Yarmouth to Freshwater old railway track. (**Photo** - page 17)

D.T. Biggs

In Praise of Ivy: A Persecuted and Maligned Asset of Town and Countryside

'Ivy has killed the tree'. We will all have almost certainly heard this statement and regrettably some of us will have said it. Sometimes the comments are less prosaic. A recent article in Tree News referred to 'ivy's poisonous tentacles', bringing to mind images of a hapless tree under attack by something akin to a sea monster. Ironically the alleged victim in this particular case was the most toxic of British trees, a yew. The alleged assailant is nothing more sinister than a common native climbing plant.

Fig. 1 Damage on a wild pear tree caused by a chainsaw used to sever thick ivy stems on the trunk. At the point indicated by the arrow the cut has gone 70 mm into the wood of the tree.

Fig. 2 Hedgerow of oak and sweet chestnut trees.
Many of the trees support prolific growth of ivy on the main stem and in the inner crown areas. However the ivy has not spread into the upper and outer areas of the crowns and does not compete for light in the areas of greatest photosynthetic activity in the tree. (What factors are at work here I wonder to regularly constrain ivy from growing into the outer tree crown?) The tree crowns appear in good health with no sign of dieback or other indications of ill health such as one might expect if they really were being strangled by the ivy.

Unfortunately the attacks do not end in mere defamation. One can often see zealots tearing ivy from trees with determination, even righteous indignation. Sometimes they write to the local press in self congratulation. The more mechanically-minded use chainsaws, often cutting deep into the bark and even into the wood of the tree (Fig.1), apparently oblivious to the damage they have caused in their idealistic crusade.

Professional tree workers join the condemnation, asserting that ivy renders trees more vulnerable to the threat of wind blow by increasing the sail area. Utterly false of course, simple observation shows that ivy does not grow beyond, if as far as, the crown spread of a healthy tree (Figs.2 & 3). It can increase the density of the inner crown but I question whether this significantly increases the wind loading on the tree.

Fig.3 A woodland edge oak tree with dense ivy on the stem and inner crown. Being well within the confines of the crown the ivy cannot be said to have increased the 'sail area' of the tree or the lever arm effect. As in Fig. 2 there is no competition for light in the main photosynthetic region of the crown. There appears to be a good proportion of healthy twigs on the outside of the crown so that one can expect a good live crown in the growing season. The benefits of shelter to a variety of invertebrates, small mammals and birds can easily be appreciated.

I have encountered tree consultants who routinely specify the severing of ivy stems at ground level, without ever justifying or explaining the need. (Do they appreciate a tree stem covered with dead ivy leaves?) One consultant ordered the removal of ivy from all the trees on a crown estate in order to facilitate future tree inspections. Take this policy to its ultimate conclusion we would remove all the trees as well on the grounds of health and safety. Would he or she have employed the same policy in the case of honeysuckle or climbing hydrangea I wonder? Honeysuckle will commonly constrict tree stems causing distortion, producing material suitable for ornamental walking sticks. I have seen two pole stage conifer plantations seriously damaged by honeysuckle to such an extent that the crop was lost in the afflicted area. Old man's beard will also overwhelm large areas of trees and plantations. Ivy is innocent of such damage to trees, its only vices being to blot out the light for lichens growing on the bark or occasionally to compete with fruiting crops. Yet ivy alone attracts widespread loathing and revulsion; few people rush to gratuitously attack honeysuckle or old man's beard. Why does ivy provoke such widespread dislike and contempt? Did some ancient predator lie in wait for our primaeval ancestors behind the dense cover of ivy?

I will admit to lowering ivy on a pear tree in order to remove competition in the crown and prevent interference with fruiting. I have also removed ivy stems from around the immediate area of new pollarding or re-pollarding in order to give the new regrowth a better chance. (Whether this last operation was necessary is uncertain. I remember an experienced forester saying that he tolerated ivy on the

stems of an oak plantation in an effort to curtail the production of epicormic shoots after thinning, but that it had little such effect.) Good husbandry however is not an excuse for persecution or excessive enthusiasm. One might remove ivy from a hedge for the same purpose as one would remove other competitors such as elder or bramble. This should still leave a place for ivy in most parks and gardens for its benefits to wildlife and amenity.

In the garden where I last lived at East Cowes, blackbird, wren, house sparrow, robin, and pigeon all nested in the ivy which we left largely unmolested on trees, walls and fences. The dense shelter presumably also helped to hide the nests from the unwelcome attention of magpie and crow. Mistle and song thrush, blackbird and pigeon ate the fruits which were available for a prolonged period each winter, and pigeon and collared dove ate the leaves (as well as the leaves of my brassicas). The benefits passed up the food chain by providing more opportunities for the sparrowhawk (and alas, for magpie, crow, jackdaw and domestic cat). The ivy on one of the fences also discouraged the ingress of cats into the garden at that point. (The featherboard fence on 125 X 100 mm uprights and concrete spur posts was not going to fall down under the weight.)

The attractive and often spectacular yellow flower globes provide abundant food for insects. I once saw eight red admiral butterflies feeding in October sunshine on flowers of ivy growing on one oak bole. I have also found dormouse nests, and a family of young red squirrels in a dray concealed in ivy on trees. The local council parks department had a zero tolerance policy towards ivy. Where did their song birds or dormice nest? (What song birds? What dormice?) One could have vastly improved the department's conservation programme and the parks' amenity simply by slashing the management budget. Oliver Rackham has correctly observed that much damage has been done to the countryside by excessive tidying up.

Far from being detrimental, I would even speculate that ivy could at times be beneficial to trees. The dense clothing of greenery all the year round may perhaps help to protect the bark from seasonal extremes. This may not be a major factor in reducing frost crack for example but it could be an important factor in protecting thin barked trees such as beech against sun scorch (and in consequence from beech snap syndrome). With increasing summer temperatures this alone could be an important reason for discouraging the depredations of the ivy vandals.

Ivy is a common plant of town and countryside. One does not need to be a specialist to recognise it or go to remote areas at specific times to find it. The benefits or this plant are easy to observe to any one with an open and enquiring mind. I urge the unconverted to set aside their prejudices, forget the factoids and myths, and simply observe the evidence all around them

Richard Lightbown
(Photographs by the writer)

From the 1923 Proceedings

Crabs` Love of Home - A local fisherman, Mr F.Bastiani, informs me that crabs, if removed from their accustomed feeding place and dropped into water many miles away, will quickly find their way back. On one occasion he caught crabs at Niton, marked them, and dropped them at Freshwater, and in a day or two caught them again at Niton. A much more remarkable case was that of a man at Ventnor, who is said to have captured crabs there, marked his name on their carapaces, and sent them to Lands End, where they were dropped into the water, and some time after appeared again off Ventnor. Confirmation, or otherwise, of this extraordinary story would be of interest.

Editor- F. Morey.

Reports of General Meetings

8th March — Heraldry and Inn Signs

Amidst the roar and confusion of battle, William, Duke of Normandy lifted his visor and yelled "Here I am" to his army of knights. By revealing his face, he scotched the rumour that he had been slain. This scene from the Battle of Hastings was recorded in the Bayeux Tapestry. Although drawing attention to himself in a vulnerable state put William's life in danger, there was no other means to distinguish one knight from another. So when William won the battle and became King of England, he was determined to find a solution, and that was the coat of arms.

This is how Roy Middlebrook, member of the Isle of Wight Family History Society and the Heraldic Society, introduced his illustrated talk on Heraldry and Inn Signs, on 8 March at Arreton Community Hall. Some forty members of our Society attended.

A knight displayed his personal emblem on shield, surcoat (the origin of 'coat of arms') and horse. This custom continued right up to the Tudor period, when Henry VIII fought in tournaments. Then it declined, but the badge remained a symbol of prestige for the nobility, passed on from father to eldest son. Heralds kept records of all the designs, which is why this practice is called 'heraldry'.

From Richard II's reign, coats of arms were adopted by brewers, who had to display a sign to sell beer. An innkeeper might display the arms of a local landowner to win his favour, or he might adopt the name and arms of a family from another part of the country, to which he had no claim. He might name his hostelry after a flower or animal of real or symbolic significance, such as The White Hart, the King's pet deer, depicted on signs wearing a red collar and chain, or The Bugle, the name for a young ox.

Roy showed us slides of inn signs on the Island, some displaying coats of arms, others pictorial. Heraldic signs have been replaced by pictorial ones, allowing sign painters free expression. Artistic licence has produced some strange and amusing signs: the Union Inn at Cowes flies its own version of the Union Jack.

As with The White Hart, an inn's name might have royal significance. There is The Crown at Shorwell and the Rose at Ventnor. The sign should display a Tudor rose: red for the Royal House of Lancaster or white for York. The Red Lion is probably the most common pub name in England today. The inn at Freshwater uses the symbol of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster on its sign: a red lion 'rampant', 'gardant', meaning standing on its hind legs and looking straight at you. The White Lion of York is the symbol of Edward IV. There are two inns of that name on the Island: at Arreton and Niton. The Prince of Wales is a popular name, but its three feathers and motto 'Ich dien' (I serve) are not a coat of arms, but the Prince of Wales' badge. The Duke of York is another favourite name. The Rose and Crown in Newport has a unique sign of local appeal: the Lady of Newport giving King Charles I a rose.

An innkeeper often had another source of income and might name the inn after his trade. A good example is The Blacksmith's Arms near Carisbrooke where a traveller could have a drink while he waited for his horse to be shod.

You can find a pub with a military name at Ventnor. The Volunteer displays the badge of the Isle of Wight Rifles on its sign: a castle keep within a wreath, mounted with a crown.

Some coats of arms are divided into quarters. If there was no male heir, the arms passed to the family the eldest daughter married into and they could incorporate it into theirs. The most important quarter of the shield was the top left as you face it. Roy has researched the Fleming family coat of arms, as depicted on the sign at the Fleming Arms at Binstead. It was inherited by the Willis family: three owls in a chevron, surmounted by an eagle. A Willis tomb in a church at Southampton shows the Fleming arms, a memorial plaque shows the arms of both families together, quartered, but eventually the Willis family used only the Fleming arms.

Should you wish to apply for your own coat of arms, you must prove you are of good standing in the community and raise the princely fee of ten thousand pounds.. A herald from The College of

Arms will discuss the design with you, your choice of symbols, subject to heraldic propriety, and a heraldic artist will produce your own unique badge. To claim the right to an existing coat of arms, you must prove you are the sole heir.

Roy Middlebrook's talk was a fascinating introduction to heraldry and inn signs and I for one will pay them more attention as I travel about the Island.

Margaret Nelmes

26th April **Mill Copse**

Splashes of bluebell across a green sward of Dog's Mercury, Celandines beckoning along the path, and cherry blossom floating through the air - what lovelier scene could there be on a warm April day? Some twenty-five members of the Society, with leaders Bob Edney and Colin Pope from the Council's Countryside Section, have come to Mill Copse, near Yarmouth, to see how Wight Nature Fund is getting on with removing conifers, to foster the regeneration of this ancient woodland.

Mill Copse, now covering fourteen acres, has been a woodland for at least four hundred years. It once consisted of Oak and coppiced Hazel, with Wild Cherry, Field Maple and Spindle. Traditional coppice management involved cyclical cutting of Hazel stools and the regular felling of standard trees. In the nineteen-sixties, however, the Forestry Commission almost clear felled this copse, and planted a mixture of mainly conifer with a few broad-leaved trees, such as Beech and American Oak. It was standard practice at the time to increase Britain's timber production by intensifying conifer plantations. And so, by the end of the 1980s, under a dense canopy of conifers, few of the original inhabitants of the ancient woodland had survived.

This is when Wight Nature Fund took over, clearing the conifers from one side of the copse. Volunteers planted over three hundred hazel trees which, together with natural regeneration from suckers and seeds, led to the rapid recovery of wildlife. We find evidence of this on the ground in empty hazelnut shells. Red Squirrels have cut some clean in half, whilst in others Dormice have chewed a big hole. These endangered species need the right woodland habitat to thrive. Birdsong and sightings are also evidence that wildlife has returned: Chiff-chaff, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat and the Song Thrush are all present in the spring. Woodland plants: Bluebells, Town Hall Clock (one of the indicators of ancient woodland), Wood Anemone and woodland orchids, all thrive under traditional coppice management which lets in plenty of light. The Butterfly Orchid is one of the special plants here, and we are pleased to find the more common Early Purple Orchids in flower.

The coastal redwood trees will be kept for their visual appeal, and the Monterey Cypress as a year-round food source for the Red Squirrel. Acorns contain tannins that are too acidic for the Red Squirrel to digest, giving it stomach-cramps. Some Macrocarpa trees are starving a spreading oak tree of light, but their cones are another good food source for the squirrel. Wight Nature Fund has submitted a twenty year plan for a Forestry Commission 80% Coppicing Grant for Mill Copse.

Anne Marston, Leader of the Botany group, encourages those of us with sufficient knowledge to record our findings today, to add to the Society's database. A small number of bird species and over twenty species of moss and lichen have been recorded here, but very few butterflies, dragonflies or damselflies. The Fungi group will be returning here in the autumn for recording.

Wight Nature Fund manages four nature reserves, in parts of the Island threatened by development or neglect, supported by other national and local conservation bodies. Its secretary, Mary Edmunds, is a member of our Society and accompanies us on this walk. Alverstone Mead and Youngwoods Copse near Sandown, and Pelham Woods in the Undercliff at St Lawrence, are its other reserves. Volunteers to help with various tasks are very welcome. Please telephone 400199 for more information.

Margaret Nelmes

17th May **Visit to Wight Salads**

As we drove through the entrance to the Wight Salads main site near Arreton, on Saturday 17 May, Lynda Snaith was waiting to give us directions to the meeting point for our tour of the wild areas. This was just as well, for the tomato growing site is enormous, dotted with rows of huge greenhouses,

storage tanks, warehouses, office block, equipment stores, car parks.

The weather was dull and drizzly at first, but fortunately it improved gradually during the afternoon. Ecologist Ian Boyd, of the Island 2000 Trust, standing in for Dr Philip Morley, the Company Agronomist, led a group of about twenty-five of our members on a tour of the lawns, verges and margins around the office buildings, and the reservoir margins. Ian undertook an independent environmental assessment of the Wight Salad Group's Isle of Wight sites last summer, "in support of the company's work towards sustainable and beneficial environmental management." This followed a similar survey carried out in 2004. Most of the land is organic, with an acidic, sandy soil.

The lawns, verges and margins, well trodden by humans and grazed by rabbits, provide a habitat for pioneer and annual plant species. Many of the rarer plants recorded on the site grow here, such as the Common Cudweed which was in decline, but is now making a comeback on the Isle of Wight.

The three reservoirs and balancing pond provide a wide variety of habitats, from established and densely colonised areas, to recently excavated ground, and bare earth which is newly colonising. We discovered large patches of tiny cup shaped ground cover lichen, known as Pixie Cup Lichen and Dog's Tooth Lichen, in short turf above the balancing pond. In the thick pioneer vegetation around the middle reservoir, we found an abundance of Weld soon to flower. Plants are beginning to colonise the huge spoil heaps from a recently created reservoir. The embankment, rising above a thickly wooded valley, is so steep that, despite a thin seeding designed to stabilise the soil, rainwater has gouged deep gullies.

This wet woodland bordering the whole eastern side of the site is known as Wacklands Withybed and designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Wight Salads owns part of it and leaves the scrubby woodland edge and stream unmanaged. This provides valuable mature habitat and refuge for nesting birds and for visiting Barn Owls, Badgers and Red Squirrels.

The reservoirs are lined with plastic and have no marginal plants. The water is at bath temperature. They attract Tufted Duck, Common Sandpiper and Green Sandpiper. We also saw Canada Geese.

The clay lined balancing pond has been extensively planted with aquatic and marginal plants to attract wildlife. We saw a border of reed and sedge, and a profusion of Yellow Flag Iris in flower. The reed bed is now big enough to support Reed Warblers.

The iron settling ponds are designed to remove iron from the greensand to prevent mechanical damage to the water pumps. These shallow ponds, with wide vegetated margins and shallow riffles, attract dragonflies and damselflies.

No surveys have yet been carried out on the aquatic fauna of the reservoirs. In his 2007 report Ian recommends such a survey, particularly of fish and molluscs.

Margaret Nelmes

7th June — Into the Land of the Dead – Old Sarum, Durrington Walls, Woodhenge & Stonehenge

Our day began with a car ferry cruise across the Solent, a treat in itself for those who spent the hour on deck. We were in optimistic mood: the sun was shining and the sky sprinkled with fine weather clouds, challenging a forecast of heavy showers.

At Southampton twenty-eight people boarded a coach to take us through Salisbury to the city's forebear, *Old Sarum*. The first hill fort here was built in the Neolithic period, when Stone Age hunter-gatherers turned to farming and built settlements. By the Iron Age it was huge. In Roman times this was one of the major towns in Britain, where five roads converged. Here the British were defeated by the Saxons in 552 AD. Then named *'Searobyrg'*, it became a great royal estate, providing protection to farmers and townsfolk. Here William the Conqueror had his noblemen swear an oath of allegiance to him. The Normans built inner earthworks and inside these a royal castle and two palaces. Old Sarum was a thriving medieval city, but lack of space, shortage of water, friction between clergy and royals, and the exposed site led to the gradual drift of the population down to the valley below.

In recent years metal detectorists have found lots of Roman coins and jewellery on this site. Surrounded by an impressively deep moat, it boasts a huge well and significant *'garderobes'*, a euphemism for communal latrines.

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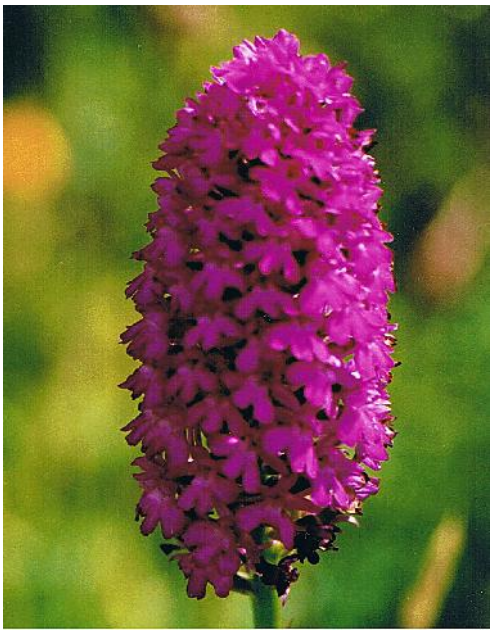


Pyramidal Orchid
Botany 15th June - page 28

Field Cow-wheat
Botany 13th Jan - page 26

Stonehenge

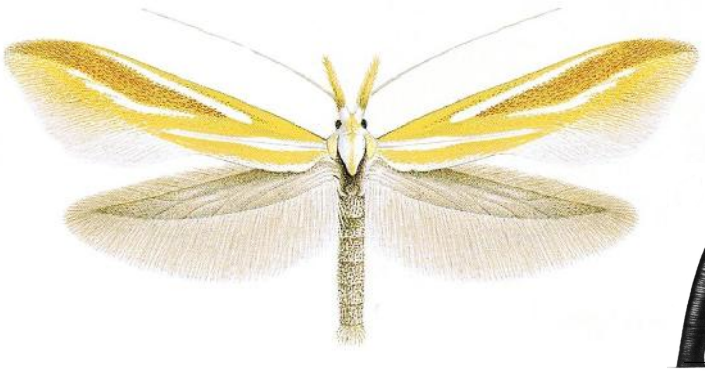
Landing point for Blue Stones

Don Bryan, Dowsing

General Meeting 7th June. page - 14

Jutes on the IOW.
page - 25

Oil Beetle
Bill`s Country Notes
Page - 3



Adult Moth

Coleophora vibicella

Case

Unusual Moth
page - 8

Camberwell Beauty
Andy`s Notes
page - 6

Cave in cliff face
Undercliff Project—page - 4

Steps giving access across a wall.
Undercliff Project
page - 4

Our guide for the day, archaeologist Don Bryan, showed us the ruins of the first cathedral, constructed by Bishop Osmund, William the Conqueror's nephew, between 1075 and 1092. Just five days after its consecration, it was struck by lightning and had to be rebuilt. Was this divine retribution, the citizens must have wondered? The cathedral was Romanesque in style, owned by a succession of bishops, and the Bishop's Palace stood close by, the envy of the king. The foundations of the old cathedral were discovered in 1912 to 1914. It was originally quite small, but doubled in size in the early twelfth century, and fifty years later an impressive new west front with large corner towers was added. As the cathedral grew more powerful, there were tensions between the clergy and the military governor of the castle. Eventually this cathedral was demolished in favour of a new one at *New Sarum*, now Salisbury, begun in 1220 and completed by 1250, which today has the highest spire in Britain.

After taking eight of our party to see the great bustards on MoD land on Salisbury Plain, we drove to West Amesbury, a picturesque hamlet of thatched cottages, with cob garden walls capped with tiles and thatch. Here Don showed us where the ceremonial Avenue leads from the River Avon to Stonehenge. It consists of parallel stones and ditches and along it the *'bluestones'*, each weighing up to four tonnes, which help form Stonehenge's inner core, may have been brought, rafted here from the Preseli Hills in South-west Wales, a tremendous feat for the early third millennium BC. Don invited us to use his dowsing rods to demonstrate how this river crossing is at the point where two vast energy lines converge.

At nearby Durrington Walls Don pointed out a ridge of hills on the near horizon, once the boundary between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Dead. We were at the heart of the Land of the Dead, a landscape dotted with long-barrows and tumuli of various shapes, where the bodies or ashes of the dead were buried. Durrington Walls is a huge enclosure, encircled by bank and ditch, known as a *'henge'*, some five hundred metres in diameter, where funeral ceremonies were held. The dead were venerated in what is believed to be ancestor worship. There is much evidence of feasting: sheep and cattle bones found inside the outer ditch and pig bones found outside. A Neolithic village of tiny dwellings, built before the henge, is thought to have housed the men who built Stonehenge. It is the largest Neolithic settlement found in Britain, with four hundred hut structures.

At the very centre of Woodhenge, a mere stone's throw from Durrington Walls, is the grave of a young child, buried in the foetal position, believed to be a human sacrifice. This henge was originally a wooden structure, similar to the early Stonehenge, and probably dating from the Bronze Age, about 2000 BC, built for ceremonial use. Concrete posts now mark the positions of the original timbers. The rings within rings these posts formed are oval, with the long axis aligned on the midsummer sunrise. The site was first discovered by aerial photography during the Second World War.

Instead of arriving at Stonehenge by road, Don led us on foot along a drover's road running parallel to the ceremonial Avenue our prehistoric ancestors used. The stones, in their elevated position, stand out for miles in today's bare landscape, but the monument was not built on the highest point, as we might expect. Stonehenge's very isolation on a windswept plain, surrounded by sheep grazing land, and even today some distance from any town, has helped to preserve it from stonebreakers. It is outstanding among the Neolithic stone monuments of Britain for several reasons. It exhibits a long history of construction, use and modification; no other monumental henge incorporates stones moved over long distances, and no other stone monument exhibits such sophistication of construction as seen in the shaped and jointed stones, the horizontal lintels fixed on top of upright stones, and the balancing of the whole structure. Carpentry skills have been applied to hard stones.

Only about half of the original stones remain. The outermost stone circle once consisted of thirty upright *'sarsens'* (a type of sandstone), each weighing about twenty-five tonnes, capped by a continuous ring of horizontal sarsen lintels. These stones are carefully shaped, their surfaces and edges dressed smooth, and the individual stones jointed together. The edges of the lintels are smoothed into a gentle curve which follows the line of the circle. Within, and concentric to, the outer sarsen circle, there was once a circle of sixty upright bluestones. Inside these two circles was a horseshoe of sarsens, consisting of five '*trilithons'*, each with two uprights and a lintel, carefully graded by height, the tallest being over seven metres high. It stood unaided for nearly four thousand years until one upright and the lintel fell in 1797. On the surface of one of the uprights faint carvings of prehistoric axes and a dagger were discovered in 1953. Within this horseshoe stands a smaller horseshoe of bluestones, some finely shaped, and

within this lies the Altar Stone, which probably stood upright as a pillar at the focal point of the entire monument.

The oldest henge here dates from about 3000 BC, consisting of a circular earthen bank and ditch. In Phase Two, from about 2900 BC, a complex pattern of postholes indicates that wooden posts were erected, possibly for roofed timber buildings. Then in the third and final phase from about 2600 BC, there is a marked change from building in wood to building in stone. The entrance to the enclosure was realigned, marking the midsummer sunrise and the midwinter sunset, and the first section of the Avenue to the river was constructed. The formation of a double bluestone circle is likely to date from this time, followed by the construction of the sarsen circle and horseshoe. The sarsen stones are thought to come from the Marlborough Downs, twenty miles away, and to have been dragged overland, perhaps using rollers and man and animal power. The enclosure entrance was now marked by two upright stones, only one surviving as the recumbent Slaughter Stone, so-called because its iron stains show up when rainwater seeps into its hollows. The sarsen structures remained in place, whereas the bluestones appear to have been moved several times in different arrangements, and even removed altogether for some time.

Expert opinions vary as to why Stonehenge was built and why people looked after it for about one thousand five hundred years. Don Bryan says that the astronomical theory has now been discounted, but the stones certainly act as a calendar. Maybe they were intended as a symbol of power over the daily lives of the people?. Or standing in a dense area of burial sites, was this a centre for ancestor worship? Many of the skeletal remains found here had deformities, so could it have been a kind of health farm? Chippings from the blue stones have been discovered in the vicinity and these stones are believed to have been prized for their healing powers, so did people come here from far and wide to walk on a blue chip path? Why else would men have taken such pains to bring blue stones all the way from Wales when they could have used local stones? Archaeologists will continue to speculate, but maybe we will never know the answer.

We returned to the Land of the Living, still day-dreaming of our prehistoric ancestors and their amazing feats, and grateful to Don for introducing us to their culture in such refreshing ways.

(**Photos** - page 16) Margaret Nelmes

Reports of Section Meetings

Access

28th January

We needed reasonable weather for this walk, which was to see the winter birds on the sea and on the mill pond at St.Helens. There would be quite a lot of standing about to view through binoculars and telescopes and we did not want it to be cold and windy. Luckily it was not and a good group met at St.Helens car park and walked down the footpath to the Duver. There was plenty of Winter Heliotrope to be seen in flower.

We crossed the Duver to the sea front where telescopes were set up and everyone who wished could see Great Crested Grebes, Oystercatchers and Grey Herons in close detail. We crossed back to the Mill Pond and along the Mill Wall. The tide was rather lower than we wished but there was still plenty to be seen with a Little Grebe really being the star of the show, disappearing and reappearing on the Mill Pond. A total of 40 birds was seen or heard, either on the water, wading in the mud or flying.

13th February

A small group met at Winchester House car park, Shanklin, to try again the walk which was abandoned, because of bad weather, on the previous programme. This was a winter walk as it followed metalled paths all the way, with no mud, which could have been found on field paths further away.
The route followed the cliff top with fine views towards the chalk headland of Culver Down. The geological change to the sandstone of Redcliff could be clearly seen.

When nearly into Sandown the group descended, via the steps, to the revetment below. Several clumps of Butcher's Broom could be seen, their apparent leaves actually being flattened stems or cladodes. Back along the revetment, with the cliff towering above, there was time to look at the sea and the ships sheltering there, before climbing steeply up the steps to the cliff path and the car park.

26th March

In spite of a less than promising forecast, the weather was mild and dry as a group of 15 met for a walk towards Kern and Knighton. Beth Dollery, Maureen Whitaker and Jackie Hart were leaders and send this report.

On the downhill path towards Kern there was a fine display of Primroses and one or two clumps of Violets. We turned towards Knighton and went past the still active Knighton Sand Pit, although not much activity was taking place. Shortly afterwards somebody spotted a Red Squirrel but it was so quick that only a few of us managed to catch a glimpse of it. We also noticed some Town Hall Clock, an ancient woodland indicator and, although early in the season, some Red Campion in flower.

Passing the small group of houses near the Knighton water treatment plant we turned right onto the main road, noting Greater Stitchwort on the bank, and then paused by the entrance to Knighton Gorges. The house itself was one of the noblest in the land and was demolished in 1820, leaving only the gateposts to show that it ever existed. On top of the posts are two stone decorations. They are believed to be Caps of Maintenance. "A Cap of Maintenance is a ceremonial crimson velvet cap lined with ermine. It is one of the insignia of the British sovereign and paraded directly before the monarch during the coronation procession or on such state occasions as the State Opening of Parliament. The origin of this symbol of dignity is obscure. It may have had a purely practical origin being used to help a crown fit more firmly or to protect the head from bare metal on the crown ". (from Wikipedia, the free Internet encyclopedia.)

Turning right back towards the top of the downs we passed the grounds of the water treatment plant and observed the Barn Owl nesting box erected by Southern Water. The gentle slope gradually turned into a more challenging ascent and the last 100 metres needed stout legs and determination.

24th April

Chris Lipscombe's celebratory 90th birthday walk started rather wetly but a group of 8 members met Beth and Maureen at St Helens Green car park. The proposed route had to be changed because of the possibility of mud and was re-routed via the Duver and drier paths.

However they all arrived, smiling, at her house for a choice of nine cakes and a cup of tea. The “kitchen staff” of Jill & John Nicholls, Janet & Tad Dubicki and Chris's mainland friends were tireless in seeing that everyone had food and drink. Many thanks to them. The wet weather gave a chance to look at her lovely birthday cards and flowers and to admire the "Tree of Nine Decades” made by Tad Dubicki.

The sun came out about midday, allowing people to wander round and explore the garden looking for the 90 plants on Chris's list. No-one found them all, but Margaret Burnhill found 84 with several others not on the list. David Biggs found 17 Galls and Leaf Miners and Chris was glad to give homes to so many tiny creatures. 85 people signed the Visitors' Book, having come in at different times of day, and it was good to see so many old friends there. Altogether it was a memorable birthday and Chris sends her thanks to all who made it so. (**Photo** - page 15)

5th May

John Hague led the walk and sends this report. The day dawned damp and drizzly but didn’t stop 17 members meeting at Brighstone Car Park for a 2 mile walk to look at the Open Access land to the north of the village. The walkers started up a hollow way, Rowdown Lane, looking at the sandstone rock formations and the range of flora growing on them. The rain cleared and a bright but breezy morning ensued.

The CROW Act, 2000, created Open Access land, allowing walkers to wander wherever they wish providing that the area is respected.

On the open hillside members enjoyed a spectacle of Bluebells in full bloom with a backdrop of yellow Gorse. A variety of flora was identified including the tiny purple flowers of Ground Ivy and nu-

merous other small plants clinging to the slopes.

Reaching the ridge, views extended to the coast and along the sandstone valley. Members were told about the Landscape Character of the Sandstone and Gravel Ridges leading up to the higher Chalk Downs.

The walk continued on public footpaths, through a new plantation, to reach the junction of Pumpfold, Hoarstone and Rowdown Lanes. Members heard about the meaning of the names of these historic routes which gave access to the downs for grazing in medieval times.

The return route followed Rowdown Lane back towards Brighstone, passing another section of Open Access land. The party remained on the bridleway, as this area was overgrown with Brambles, but it was hoped that, when a stile is erected to connect the two parcels of land through a wire fence, walkers will be able to investigate the small pond hidden in one corner.

Returning to Brighstone, John explained that his information had been accessed from the AONB Unit and the Historic Environment Action Plan papers.

14th May.

Tad Dubicki sent this report of the walk which the Access Section put on the IOW, tenth anniversary, Walking Festival programme.

Almost perfect weather, with a slightly cooling easterly breeze, greeted the 25 people who mustered at Playstreet Recreation Ground car park. This short, circular walk included paths by way of Millennium Wood and Dame Anthony's Copse, in addition to following footpaths and rights of way through part of the Binstead housing estate. The return was made by following part of the Quarr Abbey boundary trail, protected by its ancient hedging, before rejoining Play Lane.

In the Millennium Wood, walkers grouped to hear Colin Black give a comprehensive, historical account of this area, including the origin of the name 'Ryde', with some interesting facts about the wood, detailing the recent planting and pointing out some of the aged oaks of 300 years or more. Colin also gave an explanation of the positioning of the Ryde\Binstead parish boundaries and, later, told us about the ancient hedgerows that bordered our return footpath and were once part of the Quarr Abbey Estate.

Near the end of the walk, a short detour enabled most of the group to take a break for refreshments at the Brickfields Equestrian Centre, before returning to the start point.

11th June

Colin Black led the walk and sends this report of a fine, sunny morning, crystal clear visibility, a northerly breeze and perfect for walking. Starting from the car park on Afton Down the group crossed to the coastal path to Freshwater Bay.

Pyramidal Orchids and Horseshoe Vetch lined the path. The sea was flat calm in the bay but no one was swimming.

Mike Cotterill pointed out the many features of the geology in the chalk, clays and gravel deposited at the end of the Ice Age some 10,000 years ago.

Walking past the Thatched Church, with its new roof, to Green Lane we headed towards Farringford, past the golf course. Red Campion, Butcher's Broom, Goose Grass, Hedge Woundwort and Greater Stitchwort were spotted with many other plants too numerous to name.

At the Tennyson Bridge Colin gave a short history of the Tennyson family and pointed out the Green Door entrance to Farringford.

Passing Farringford Farm the false grain silo was noted across a meadow. It is a phone mast. Golden Hill Fort could also be seen. After a short road walk we came to a cottage with an interesting wall where Mike spotted many fossils built into it.

The next path took us back to the north side of High Down and we walked back towards the bay. Colin pointed out the trees and scrub growing on the down land which was clear until 1954 when Myxomatosis arrived and the rabbits were wiped out. In ten years scrub and rough pasture took over and then trees.

The wonderful views of the Island's south coast were admired and so back to the car park.

Chris Lipscombe

Archaeology

3rd February **The Medina - A Valley From Our Past**

Walk with County Archaeologist Ruth Waller from Seaclose Park along the banks of the river into Newport, with updates on the recent work carried out on the important Paleolithic site at Great Pan Farm.

Two dozen extraordinarily hardy souls turned out in a vicious, bitterly cold wind to hear Ruth's talk, postponed amid dreadful weather in the autumn. But most heroic of all was Ruth herself, rising magnificently to the occasion after two bedridden days nursing a bug.

The Medina flows through a river valley carved during an Ice Age at least 55,000 years ago through the chalk ridge just south of Newport. The present river starts near Niton and appeared when the last sea-level rise flooded the valley around 10,000 years ago.

Vital to the importance of the river, as well as to the emergence and development of Newport at the 'heart' of the Island, is the geology. The Medina River valley is cut through two different types: the chalk ridge to the south, laid down beneath a Cretaceous continental lagoon 65 to 127 million years ago; and to the north, the Lower Tertiary sands, clays and limestones deposited 24 to 65 million years ago under shallow estuarine seas.

The first people to visit, around 425,000 years ago, were early Paleolithic hunter gatherers, at a time when the area consisted of temperate woodland with areas of tidal fen. Neanderthal Man was visiting from 230,000 to 24,000 years ago, with evidence from Great Pan of these early peoples visiting the gravel terraces beside the River Medina around 60,000 years ago. Standing water, with marsh and grasslands, were populated by mammoth, woolly rhino, reindeer, bison, horses, wolves and brown bear. Modern humans, Homo Sapiens, were probably here from around 40,000 years ago.

But there remains a big question-mark over who the first 'Islanders' actually were: Neanderthal or Homo Sapiens? Excitingly, we might be about to find out. A large collection of Lower Paleolithic stone tools found by a Society member, Hubert Poole, in the 1930s at the particularly significant Great Pan (a site now beneath the Newport FC football ground) is to be reassessed by Paleolithic specialists. A bid for funding is now being prepared. Ruth expects the specialists to confirm the people of Great Pan were Neanderthals.

Another mystery, however, seems set to endure. Despite the massive field-walking exercise at Pan - in advance of the next huge Newport 'village' development - when nothing at all of prehistoric significance was found, the lost village of Penna remains just that: Lost.

Another ancient Island settlement near the River Medina, however, will soon reveal it's big secret after further recent work. Another prehistoric site discovered by Society member Hubert Poole in the 1930s has been examined again, this time at Werrar, not far from Northwood Showground. Stone tools were found there in the Poole study, and there was evidence of settlement and that clays were being extracted for manufacture. In the latest work, core and radiocarbon samples have been taken to obtain an accurate date. The paleo-environmental results point to a Mesolithic date. The C14 samples are currently still in a lab in America but will, in due course, yield more accurate dating.

This area, on the West bank of the Medina towards Cowes, would appear to have been a centre of human activity and settlement for a large part of the Island's history. An important area in the unfolding of this long story could prove to be around the little deserted medieval village of Chawton, which has been revisited by archaeologists. Roman pottery and building material has been unearthed there and it is now thought that the Romans controlled from there estates possibly extending over the whole North side of the Island. Certainly, there could have been a significant Roman building there. Geophysics results show distinct evidence of what looks like a building in a field walked by Society members - another site originally discovered by a member - and an excavation is now on Ruth's wish list.

Following latest work there, though, it would seem history could potentially be rolled back in this area very much farther, as Ruth considers there has been a settlement at Chawton since Neolithic times.

This wide-ranging talk, delivered professionally and with great enthusiasm in punishing weather con-

ditions, provided a fascinating overview of the many ages of the River Medina valley and some of the exciting recent archaeological developments that point to its immense importance in the long human story of the Isle of Wight.

Maurice Bower

16th March **Archaeology & Climate Change**

Ice-caps are melting and the sea is rising at an ever faster rate. If coastal communities are to survive climate change, we must learn from past experience. That is where archaeology can play a crucial role in uncovering evidence of how our ancestors survived the great climatic upheavals of the past.

This was the essence of Delian Backhouse-Fry's illustrated lecture on Archaeology and Climate Change, delivered to a packed hall at our Society's Headquarters, on Sunday 16 March. Delian based her talk largely on a survey carried out by SCOPAC, The Standing Conference on Problems Associated with the Coastline. This is a regional group of local authorities and other organisations which share an interest in the sustainable management of the shoreline of Central Southern England, from Lyme Regis to Shoreham-by-Sea, including the Isle of Wight.

We have now reached the end of the Holocene, an epoch that dates from the end of the last Ice Age, and we should be approaching the beginning of a new Ice Age. This is the only way to stop the sea rising. But instead, human activity has had so great an impact that it has reversed the natural order. It all began in the Neolithic Age with the clearing of the forests for farming, but now it is accelerating at an alarming rate.

The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology recommends that we respect the capricious and ungovernable power of the sea, observe and learn from the behaviour of the fluctuating shoreline and from the long-term behaviour of the sea. Putting concrete and hard rock into soft land is unwise. A large harbour, built in 1860 at St Lawrence, is an example. Its walls were broken up by the sea in a day. Marshland, too, should be left alone to act as a natural barrier, absorbing sea water and saving other parts of the coast from flooding.

In the last thirteen centuries people and land have been lost in episodic coastal changes. In 1014 AD a great sea flood swept away many towns, from Cornwall to Kent. The Great Storm of 1953 coincided with a huge surge that swept down the east coast of England, destroying whole communities. Nine hundred people died.

We need to look back at the long-range histories of human activity and see how communities have adapted to event change. Archaeologists can provide the evidence necessary for future planning. Yet archaeology can at present only offer a partial overview of the past, due to a chronic lack of resources for sustained long-term observations. Geo-archaeology is the new science relating to the study of coastal change.

In the Sandown Bay area much evidence has been found for human activity from prehistoric times. Palaeolithic artefacts were discovered in Priory Bay, which had a tropical climate half a million years ago. At Bembridge, raised beach deposits include the remains of Arctic Spruce and the Arctic Buttercup. The advance of the sea created back-ponding of the river flow and triggered the development of marshes. In the nineteenth century a bronze hoard was found in the Eastern River Yar, evidence that there was a maritime community in the Brading Haven area in the Middle Bronze Age. The discovery of a lost village at Arreton reveals that the river was navigable this far inland. At Yaverland Farm a recent Time Team dig uncovered a Bronze Age burial site and numerous Iron Age artefacts, as well as a possible hill fort. This indicates that there were settlements along Culver Haven.

The Roman settlement at Morton, near Brading, is evidence of maritime activity between the first and third centuries AD and artefacts found at Yaverland Manor Farm indicate more Roman waterfront enterprises. Archaeological records show a long history of trade here, using European and Atlantic routes.

In post-medieval times the sea made significant advances in Sandown Bay. In 1545 a Henry VIII stone fort was built at Sandham. By the seventeenth century, however, the sea had destroyed both this fort and its replacement. A new fort, built in the 1800s with a wide foreshore, was also washed away.

Recent building activity in the East Yar floodplain demonstrates how little regard our planners

have for climatic conditions. In wet weather the river valley below Newchurch floods. Wetter winters are predicted in future, due to climate change, and yet the main sewage pumping station for the Isle of Wight was built on Sandham Levels, reclaimed wetland. Sediment archives there should have been cored and examined to identify previous episodic events.

Archaeology is plagued by a lack of funding, storage and care for local research. Several years ago, a survey for the Sites and Monuments Record was carried out by local archaeologists, but artefacts, documents, sources and aerial photographs referred to are missing. So far there is no provision for the ongoing, organised collection of archaeological data in areas vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

However, a group of amateur archaeologists from our society is responding to Delian's call for action, by helping the County Archaeology Service to conduct surveys and other organisations to undertake digs. These activities are both interesting and fun. If you would like to join us, please contact Delian on 853292.

Margaret Nelmes

18th May **The Jutes and the Isle of Wight**

Guest speaker David Hinton, Professor of Archaeology at Southampton University, began with a brief resume of the work of the Council for British Archaeology in Wessex, describing its structure and membership, its campaigning work especially for Stonehenge, its casework on listed buildings, its newsletter, workshops and conferences, and a brief history from the end of World War II. A key role is bridging the gap between full-time archaeology in the county units and the volunteers in the archaeology societies.

Moving on to the main theme of his talk, Professor Hinton then addressed the question, "Why did the Isle of Wight come to be called Jutish in the early Saxon period?" There is really only one key written source: the Venerable Bede, who mentions Old Saxons, Angles and Jutes and states that "from the Jutes came the people of Kent and the Isle of Wight". But how credible was the latter as a model? The increasingly tenable view today is that the majority of the British stayed put and only small groups of invaders were coming in. There was probably not even a great sort of carrying capacity for large numbers to get here and it was highly unlikely that they made it as far as the Isle of Wight.

The earliest Scandinavian brooches have all been found north of the Thames, not in the south, though a few examples of *similar* style - quoit brooches - have been found on the Island. There is a spread of Germanic brooches of the later 5th century in Sussex and Kent, with one of these on the IW, but how old was it when it got here?

Chessell Down cemetery in the 6th century does provide evidence of an elite brooch, though this was more to do with a status symbol than anything Jutish: "I'm a very important person" rather than "I'm from a particular area". In the later 6th century these brooches were only found in East Anglia, East Midlands and up into Yorkshire, but none in Kent or the IW - a distribution which does at least begin to confirm Bede's Angles in these areas and Saxons down south. The wealth of the Island could be attracting Frankish trade but there are still hardly any connections with Scandinavia.

After briefly looking at Barbara Yorke's more convincing place-name evidence, which with its *Ytene* name for the New Forest possibly indicating a 'Jutish' province and encompassing Wihtwara (IW), Professor Hinton nevertheless concluded that the idea that the Island was Jutish was a legend, a construct by Isle of Wight people as a way of expressing independence, one that Bede may have picked up on and contributed to the making of its myth. In short, Bede's picture of people coming all the way from Denmark and peopling the IW doesn't hold.

There were more likely to have been a few people coming over from Sussex, adding to the majority of native Britons already living here. It was more a case of *ideas* being spread: it is possible to get language shifts without having large movements of people. If you wanted to associate yourself with power, you started speaking English.

Alan Phillips

Botany

13th January **Field Cow-wheat working party**

After an unsettled week, the weather on Sunday morning was anxiously watched and when a report of favourable conditions on the Undercliff was reported by our on-the-spot volunteers, we went ahead with the meeting.

The bank was cleared thoroughly and a germinating seed was found. The reports of flowering from last summer had indicated a poor year. There was discussion as to whether the site was becoming shaded by the hedgerow, and this needs to be kept under review. (**Photo** - page 15)

Anne Marston

19th January **Indoor meeting**

The indoor meeting gives the opportunity for the members of the group to make short presentations relating to botanical matters and to bring specimens and photographs for display.

Paul Stanley told us about the Flora of Brighstone Parish, which he and Margaret Burnhill are compiling. Much of the recording is complete and writing up is underway.

Dave Trevan gave a presentation on Cock's-eggs (*Salpichroa origanifolia*), which has become established on the Undercliff near to his home. It was first recorded here in 1927. Anne Marston described the recent work on Wood Calamint, which several members of the section have been monitoring for a number of years. It grows mostly on the roadside edge where it is vulnerable to damage from passing traffic. Towards the end of last year, four small plants were transplanted (under licence from Natural England) to an area higher up the slope. Seed was also collected; some was scattered in the same area as the transplants and the remainder is being grown in pots. We hope to be able to plant out small plants in the autumn in the translocation area. The success of the experiment will be monitored and reported.

Andrew Marston from the University of Geneva gave an international flavour with a resumė of his research into medicinal products from Field Gentian *Gentianella campestris*

Colin Pope gave a presentation of the previous year's botanical recording highlights which included the opportunity to look at some of the plant pictures in the Society's photograph library. He also introduced the review of vascular plant species, which is required for the Island's biodiversity action plan

Finally teams applied their botanical knowledge in a 'Happy botanical families' picture quiz where points were awarded for correctly identifying the family of the central European plant pictured and naming its British relatives.

Anne Marston

10th February **Wood Calamint working party**

We had a good turn out for this meeting and were able to complete the clearance of both lay-bys and the section of slope between them. Last year some of the hazel on the slope was taken out creating a much larger open area. In December of last year four plants of Wood Calamint were transplanted to a level area above the first break of slope. We were pleased to see that three of the plants were still in evidence and had taken well. The site will be examined later to monitor progress. A visit to the site in May revealed a large swathe of nettles had developed in the upper parts of the slope and the lay-bys themselves had vigorous plant growth. Wood Calamint was visible and the situation will be observed periodically to decide on the best course of action.

Anne Marston

12th April **Fishbourne Copse**

Fishbourne Copse is an ancient woodland site (on the earliest maps and pre-dating 1600) between the Solent shore and Quarr Abbey. Our visit was timed to allow recording of the spring flora and the spring generation of gall causing organisms. We recorded 29 species of vascular plant that are associated with ancient woodlands including Narrow –leaved Lungwort (*Pulmonaria longifolia)* Sanicle

(Sanicula europaea) and Tutsan *(Hypericum androsaemum).*

Of particular note was the 'avenue' of Butcher's Broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) bushes, each at least 1m high and similar diameter, which we found on the eastern edge of the wood. This plant was conspicuous throughout the wood, frequently below the branches of large oak trees. This observation gave rise to the suggestion that it was spread in the droppings of roosting birds.

Seven species of gall were recorded of which two were new records for the site. Both were rusts, one *(Puccinia vincae)* which produced galls on Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) and the other (*Puccinia distincta)* caused galls on Daisy (*Bellis perennis).* In addition, six species of leaf miner were observed, all of them producing narrow 'corridor' mines on the leaves of their various host plants and ten micro-fungi.

On our return to the abbey, we walked through the garden where there was a magnificent magnolia in full bloom.

Anne Marston

11th May **Jersey Camp to look for violet hybrids**

This visit presented us with an opportunity to record the spring flora of the rich, unimproved neutral meadows at Jersey Camp in hot sunny weather. Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*) were at their best, a week before the public walk, but numbers were considerably down on previous years, measured in low hundreds rather than thousands, seemingly part of an ongoing trend. We found two patches of Adder's-tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), always local here, and Paul Stanley found Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) by the Clamerkin.

The principal objective of the visit was to assess the current status of the scarce Heath Dog Violet (*Viola canina*). A visit by the BSBI here in May 2004 had concluded that all he plants seen had hybridised with Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*), and the true species was no longer present. On our visit, we scoured the meadows and found three populations, all of which we believed to be pure *Viola canina*. To our relief, this was subsequently confirmed by the BSBI referee, Mike Hardman. However, a population growing on one of the firing banks was considered to be a strong candidate for the hybrid, *Viola* x *intersita*, and these plants are being further investigated.

Colin Pope

31st May **Newtown Meadows**

As the masses assembled in the National Trust carpark in warm sunshine, Bill Shepard pointed out the strong population of Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*) in the field gate opposite, growing with Hairy Buttercup (*Ranunculus sardous*). We then walked through the Harts Farm fields to a field that had been restored to grassland by the National Trust by clearing scrub and grazing with goats.

We passed through one field that had a rich meadow flora, recording species such as Adder's-tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), Quaking Grass (*Briza media*), Oval Sedge (*Carex ovalis*), Heath Grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). We then spent some time in the restoration field, splitting into groups and recording all the species we could find for the National Trust's records. We were able to produce a good list, which comprised a mixture of meadow and woodland species. There was much debate regarding a number of possible hybrids in the field, the outcome of which is dependent upon further studies.

Colin Pope

15th June **Knighton Down**

We began our survey on the west-facing slope, which we had not previously surveyed. This proved to have a number of plants characteristic of chalk grassland including Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*), Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*) and Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*) but it was not as herb-rich as the south-facing slope. On this slope, we found Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolium*), Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) and Rockrose (*Helianthemeum nummularium*) among other species.

We identified seven different species of thistle, six of which were in flower, giving the opportu-

nity to observe the differences between them: Welted Thistle (*Carduus crispus*), Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), Slender Thistle (*Carduus tenuiflorus*), Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*) and Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*)

Of additional interest, and proving very colourful, was the verge on the south side of the road, in particular the fine show of Pyramidal Orchids *(Anacamptis pyramidalis)* and a Sweet Briar *(Rosa rubiginosa)* in full bloom. (**Photo** - page 15)

Anne Marston

Entomology

10th May **Parkhurst Forest**

This meeting was held in the hope of finding Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Grizzled Skipper, but the poor weather earlier in the spring may have hit the population, or delayed its emergence. One member found a Grizzled Skipper after the main meeting was over. There were no definite sightings of the fritillaries. Two orange butterflies were seen over one of the rides, but these were fleeting views and flying higher than one would have expected. A Wall Brown was seen near one of the fritillary sites. Male Brimstones were seen in good numbers and were the most spectacular feature of the visit, with Holly Blue, and Green-veined White among the other species seen. The moth, Brown Silver-lines, and the caterpillar of the Mottled Umber were found. Pools held both Broad-bodied Chaser and Large Red Damselflies. The most unusual record may have been the discovery of the mine of the moth, *Coleophora serratella*, on Elm, not recorded from this location before.

There was also a good selection of typical birdlife for this area, with Chiff-chaffs, Long-tailed Tits, Buzzards, Coal Tit, and Blackcaps, Whitethroat and a distant Nightingale being heard.

Richard Smout

23rd May **Alverstone Nature Reserve**

This was a successful meeting held in Skinners Meadow, and in woodland on the reserve adjacent to Burnt House Lane, the former habitat yielding the best results. Only Sallow Kitten was found solely at the woodland site. 24 species were seen in all, and of these the commonest were Green Carpet and Common Marbled Carpet. Among the more distinctive species noted were a male Ghost Moth, a Peach Blossom, a Scorched Wing, two Orange Footmen and both Pale and Pebble Prominent. Other species of interest were Broken-barred Carpet, Dingy Shell Rivulet, and a couple of Marbled Browns. Our thanks to John Ralph for hosting this meeting and allowing us the use of his workshop to study the contents of the moth trap.

Richard Smout

7th June **National Moth Night**

On a clear cool night, fourteen of us met at my cottage at Moons Hill, where I ran two Robinson moth traps in my garden to celebrate National Moth Night. Numbers were low but by the morning I had recorded forty-three species of macro-moths and nine micro-moths. Species of note included the very local Buttoned Snout, the Cream-spot Tiger and the Small Angle Shades. The Silver Y was the only migrant recorded.

It did not get dark until ten o'clock but we spent the time in conversation imbibing wine, whisky, tea and coffee, and a most enjoyable evening was spent by all.

Sam Knill-Jones

26th June **Eaglehead Copse**

Five members met to study species at this Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust reserve on the north side of the downs, and were greeted by a fine pair of Ravens flying overhead. The most unusual bird seen was however a male Peacock sitting in the area of chalk grassland to the east of the reserve. A limited number of species were seen including Speckled Wood and a Comma, and numbers of

Meadow Brown on the grassland. The Common Emerald, a moth, gave very good views, and there were some interesting hoverflies including the large yellow-tailed *Xylota sylvarum*, and most extraordinary of all a number of the common hoverfly *Platycheirus clypeatus* 'paralyzed' on the stem of woodland grasses through the effects of a fungus. They were 'frozen' with wings wide open. It is thought that the infection affects the internal body parts first, and then the fungus emerges through the soft tissue between the segments of the abdomen. Affected flies die climbing up the plant; it is thought they do this to try to get more air as their supply is increasingly limited by the progression of the fungus.

Among the galls recorded were *Aceria thomasi* on thyme. Of the hemiptera, the most interesting record was *Phylus palliceps*, a mirid bug. This was only the fourth record for the Island, the last record being in 1998, and it was the first record in East Wight.

Richard Smout

Ornithology

20th January

Nine members met at Whale Chine car park on a very gloomy morning. As the weather had been very wet over the previous week the original planned walk was changed. Instead, we walked inland along a footpath from Whale Chine and did a circular walk taking in Windmill Copse on the way back. The Snowdrops were just beginning to flower, as were some Primroses. The farmland near Whale Chine has always been the traditional home for Corn Bunting on the Island but for the last few years they have become a vary rare sight and today was no exception as none were seen. Bird life in general was rather scarce but we did see two Peregrine Falcon, a Kestrel and three Buzzard during the course of the morning. Two small flocks of Starling were spotted, one of about 25 and one of about 50. A Red-legged Partridge was seen, as were several Pheasants. A Yellowhammer was heard and a flock of Goldfinch seen as well as at least 15 Sky Larks. In all 22 species were noted. During the walk through the woods several different fungi were spotted: Coral Spot, Earthball, Yellow Brain Fungus, Jews Ear, Velvet Shank and Candle Snuff.

9th February

Ten members met at the car park by Bembridge Lifeboat Station on a glorious February morning, ideal conditions in which to use the telescope. The tide was coming in so we walked along the beach to Foreland and returned to our cars by an inland route. Purple Sandpipers like to roost at high tide on the structure below the Lifeboat Station after they have been displaced from their preferred feeding area at low tide on Foreland ledges. On the off chance that they were already there, we had a look through the telescope at the beginning of the walk and saw two, at the end of the walk the number had risen to at least nine. We had not progressed very far into the walk when we all looked at two Guillemot through the telescope and a little later picked up a Razorbill. All birds were sufficiently close in to see the difference in their bills. We had very good views of a male Stonechat, with some of us seeing a female. At least 14 Red Breasted Merganser were seen in the bay at Foreland and in the far distance 20 Curlew were seen roosting in a sandy bay. Although there were quite a few Greenfinches heard and seen during the course of the morning only one lone male Chaffinch was seen singing. We had a variety of Gulls: Great Black Backed, Black-headed, Herring, Common and a Mediterranean. In all 30 species were seen.

30th March

18 members met at Brading Railway Station on a fine, calm, mild morning for a walk along the old railway track towards St Helen's. It was a good day for birding as there must have been a fall overnight. At the beginning of the walk four House Sparrow were feeding from bird feeders in one of the gardens by the Station. During the course of the morning Chiffchaff were heard and observed singing. Willow Warblers were also heard as well as Blackcap. A male Blackcap obligingly displayed for us as he sang. Three Wheatear were seen on the Marsh as were three Greylag and at least four Cetti's Warbler were heard. On the sewage beds we saw two Grey Wagtail as well as four Reed Bunting. In all 49 species were recorded.

20th April

14 members attended a meeting at Culver Down kindly led by Jim Cheverton. A good variety of migrants were spotted during the course of the morning with three Sky Lark, a Swallow, two House Martin, at least 12 Meadow Pipit, two Rock Pipit and two Grey Wagtail seen. A lovely male Redstart, a Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, and Chiffchaff were also seen. A Fulmar was seen flying as were two Lesser Black-backed Gull, a Great Black Backed Gull and a number of Herring Gull. Two Raven were seen but no Peregrine Falcon. In all 32 species were seen.

27th April

A joint meeting was held with I.W Ornithological Group at St Catherine's Point beginning at 7 am. The forecast had not been promising but the rain held off until just after 9 am enabling us to see some birds on passage. Before we got to our vantage point we saw three Yellow Wagtails, two flying overhead and one with the cattle. It was well worth getting up early as we saw two Common White-throat, 23 Linnet, one Common Sandpiper on the rocks below us, two Red-throated Diver, at least 58 Gannet flying east and 31 flying west, three Pomarine Skua, three dark phase Arctic Skua and one pale phase, at least nine Guillemot, a flock of six Whimbrel, five Shag, nine Common Scoter, two Sandwich Tern, one Swallow, at least 21 Herring Gull, at least three Great Black-backed Gull, at least two local Fulmar, two Cormorant, four Goldfinch, one Peregrine Falcon seen standing on Gore Cliff and one male Kestrel. Our thanks to IWOG and in particular to Dave Hunnybun and Graham Sparshot.

10th May

15 people met on a muggy, cloudy but pleasant morning for a walk on West High Down led by Caroline Dudley. Having missed out on Dartford Warblers for the last two years we were hoping to see one this time. We met Derek Hayle at the favoured Dartford Warbler spot by the extensive area of Gorse and he told us that he had seen some earlier. We waited and watched and eventually our patience was rewarded with good sightings of two. One favoured a particular tree and we were able to use the tele-scope. Another two species that can often be seen along this stretch of coast are Raven and Peregrine Falcon. Two Raven were seen soon after we started walking along the fence by the cliff edge but the Peregrine we had to wait for until we were on our return journey. Two Guillemot were picked out sitting on the sea and could be seen through the telescope. This is also a good place for fly passes of Gulls near the cliff edge and we saw Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull and Fulmar. In all 34 species were seen during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

6th June.

Five members met Tricia Merrifield at her home at Hillis Corner on a perfect June evening for a walk in Parkhurst Forest. A slight breeze in the early evening had faded to still conditions.

At our first potential Nightjar site we drew a blank, similarly at our second. However, whilst waiting there two churring birds started up to the west and we followed the sounds past two young Long-eared Owls and were rewarded with a close view of one Nightjar flying directly overhead as well as hearing at close hand the 'Krruit' call. Two toads also presented themselves to us. The meeting ended at 11.30 pm. We probably heard three separated churring males.

David Biggs

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARIES' NOTES

New Members

Deaths

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Next Bulletin

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for **1st July 2008 to 30th December 2008** should be sent to:-

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The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 12th January 2009

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