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Contents

President`s Address

On Friday 10th October 2008 a large and varied gathering met at Northwood House for a very special reason. We were attending the launch of HEAP, an unfortunate acronym, which still makes me think of garden rubbish. However, when the letters are opened up we find The Isle of Wight Historic Environment Action Plan, a title which encompasses the historic landscape of the Island, the environment in which we live today and the future which we are bound to protect. It extends the work already being undertaken by the Island Biodiversity Action Plan, a little known but invaluable structure, which has already been at work for ten years. This body brings together the diverse groups, national and local, whose concern is with the habitats and species which are part of our living landscape. The HEAP will do much the same at a local level for the landscape of the Island, the villages, towns, standing monuments which take us from the Stone Age to the present day and, most importantly, the agricultural landscape which is particularly vulnerable to intrusion and sometimes alarming change. Action is an important part of the title and a steering committee is already established to advise the Isle of Wight Council, as it takes up the challenge of change and adaptation to the future. The protection and conservation of our historic urban and rural inheritance, as we move into the twenty first century, is one in which we can all participate and I would urge you to find out more about the workings of HEAP by telephoning 823810 for printed copies or going to their website at www.iwight.com/living_here/planning/Archaeology/historic as soon as possible.

I wonder how many of you ever consider how our Society actually keeps ticking over; how the day-to-day business is managed, who answers the telephone, takes up the mail, checks on the library books at our Headquarters in Ventnor? Every Thursday a group of people meet there to deal with just these matters and much more. They are not, so far as I know, an official committee or an elected body, they

are just there and deal with the administration as it arises. Lorna Snow, Jackie Hart, Maureen Whitaker, Anne and Mike Cahill are the ones you will find there presently, and I can think of many members in the past, who performed just the same tasks quietly and unobserved by most of us. Perhaps the beginning of a new year is a good time to say `thank you' to them.

Johanna Jones

Natural History Records

The recording of plants and animals is one of the Society`s most important operations and we hold in the region of 1,000,000 records. About 300,000 of these have been entered digitally on computer, which has made them available for easy reference. A number of our Recorders also pass their Records to National Bodies.

An example of this has been Jim Cheverton, who for many years has been sending Records to a number of National Bodies and he has just retired from sending records for the Dartford Warbler Survey and the Nest Recording Scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology.

An extract from a letter sent to him by the BTO follows :-

"Dear Jim
I am *sorry* to hear that you will no longer be taking part in the BTO's Dartford Warbler Survey; on behalf of the BTO I wish to thank you for your participation in this important survey.
I notice that you are also a long-standing contributor to the Nest Record Scheme, so I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your achievements as a skilled and dedicated nest recorder and ornithologist. According to our records, you have submitted 6496 nest records to the BTO, which is one of the largest contributions of any Nest Record Scheme participant. Furthermore, you are one of our longest-serving active nest recorders. We have cards bearing your name from as far back as 1956 and your records cover an unbroken run of seasons, spanning *53* years Your most productive year appears to have been 1974, when you submitted histories for 503 nests. For an open-nest finder, this is an astonishing total for a single season—one that few others have matched.
No doubt a more detailed perusal of your nest recording history would reveal many more feats, but even the few facts I have presented above paint a picture of a uniquely able and indefatigable nest recorder. I would say that your contributions to the BTO, natural history and wildlife conservation are exceptional and inspiring and that the BTO owes you an enormous debt of gratitude.
1 hope the Scheme will continue to receive your nest histories in 2009 and beyond; your submission for this season includes a wide variety of species. One of the best things about the Nest Record Scheme is that it is so flexible—where and when and how many nests to monitor are entirely up to the individual."

This is a true example of dedication and Jim should be congratulated for his efforts over many years.

Mike Cahill

Country Notes

Trees. Trees are perhaps our most neglected natural history subject, despite their prominence. Of all the horticultural societies in the Island, none has a list of trees in their parish. Helen Slade, in her November article in the County Press, said she was unaware of a Black Walnut, *Juglans nigra,* on the Island. They are certainly present, but to whom do you turn for such information. May be the objection to the study of trees being the fact they are raised in a nursery. Of course we manipulate them, but we don't create them. Even those species that most of us can recognize, there is so much about them of which we have no knowledge.

Maidenhair Tree, *Gingko biloba*.
A tree of which we have a number of specimens, the finest of which to come to my notice stands at the entrance to the Botanic Garden, Ventnor, certainly planted before the garden was created. Another is that in the grounds of the Melville Hall Hotel, Sandown, in excess of sixty feet in height. The species is dioecious, i.e. the male and female flowers are on different trees and to date I have only encountered males. There is possibly a good reason for this, as the female bears globular fruit, paired on 4cm stalks and smells appalling. I understand Gingko biloba is sold in health shops but have no knowledge of its health giving properties.

Chile Pine. Monkey Puzzle. *Araucaria araucana*
Until recently thought to be the only survivor of a family of trees widespread in the Jurassic era. A number of specimens can be seen locally but being dioecious, males apparently predominate. In fact only two females have come to my notice to date, one in a garden adjoining Bonchurch new church and another in the grounds of Barfield House, Ryde. When fruiting they are spectacular with fruits the size of coconuts.

Wallemi Pine. *Wallemia nobilis*.
In 1994 a ranger in the Wallemi National Park, Australia, discovered a group of trees thought to exist only in fossil records. This discovery was described thus:-"The discovery of the Wallemi Pine is the equal of finding a small dinosaur still alive on Earth." Seeds were distributed world-wide and as we turned into the 21st Century plants were available, two of which found homes in the Island. The generic name commemorates the park where the trees were discovered and the specific, nobilis, David Noble, its discoverer.

Mimosa. *Acacia dealbata.*
Only a quarter of a century ago it was virtually confined to the Seaview and Bembridge area, where it was frequently cut to the ground by frosts, only to rise again from suckers. Today it can be seen in all parts of the Island, making quite sizable trees. Like several imported exotics, fruiting is quite rare. To date an article in the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) News, suggested that seedlings found in the Isle of Wight were possibly the first record for Britain. There are records for Southern Ireland. I am yet to see seed pods on our Island specimens, and these are quite prominent being up to 10cm in length.

Los Altos Park, Sandown. - This park contains a unique sylvan feature, at least in scale, by the Evergreen Oaks, *Quercus ilex*, which borders two sides of the park. Planted so close together one can only assume that the objective was to retain them at hedge height. Now nearing maturity the lower growth has disappeared causing no problem to those bordering the rail track, but those bordering the public footpath allowed free access to the park when the park was private. To overcome the problem an earthen bank was introduced along the line of the trunks. Introduced soil and a sizeable undertaking, the object of which appears to be a demarcation between public and private.

The two rows of trees, some four hundred of them, cover a distance of approximately seven hundred yards and there appears to have been few casualties. Perhaps my interpretation of the scenario is mistaken and someone more knowledgeable of the area will correct this statement.

Spanish Fly. - Not a fly but a beetle, *Lytta vesicatoria*, (**Photo**- page 17) and a notorious one, a very rare visitor to Britain until now. A Southern European species, it has occurred in Britain on a number of occasions and our earliest reference to it on the Island is in Bromfield's "Flora Vectensis." Subsequent records are sporadic and not persisting. In our Proceedings, Vol. 1, P. 96, Jeffery devotes an entire page to this notorious beetle and again in Proceedings Vol. Ill, P. 151, he describes the precarious lifestyle. Jeffery saw the species at Newchurch in 1939 after which it disappears from our records until 2002 or 2003, when Adam Wright noted the species at St. Lawrence. Since that date it has persisted and on June 17th. 2008, David Biggs and I visited the location. Despite the weather not being ideal, a South- easterly wind and an overcast sky, the beetle flies in bright sunshine, we managed to locate a single specimen.

The Spanish Fly is one of the sources of cantharadin, supposedly used as an aphrodisiac, but it is extremely toxic. With so rare a beetle apparently established on the Island the habitat should be protected.

Recovered from the wreck of the SS Republic, lost in a storm off the Atlantic coast of Georgia in 1865, were some 6000 bottles of so-called medicine including Professor Barry's Tricopherous for the skin and hair, a cure for baldness. The concoction combined alcohol with a caustic irritant called cantharadin, supposed to stimulate blood supply to the scalp. It actually left the user vulnerable to convulsions, coma and possible death.

Male Glowworms - In a previous bulletin I stated that the male of the species had not been previously recorded. This was in error. Chris Lipscombe had reported them for some years from St. Helens Churchyard, but the records had not appeared in the Society's listings.

Wild or Feral Honey Bees - A second colony of these insects has been brought to my notice in the Newport area by Sue Blackwell. On this occasion more than twenty feet from the ground in the trunk of a Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris*, with access by a woodpecker hole. A third colony in the same area persisted for many years but the gradual rotting of the trunk eventually exposed the comb and the colony was lost.

A third colony was brought to my attention by Tina Williamson during the preparation of the Histree Trail leaflets. This in the roof of Bonchurch new church. There would appear to be no record of the distribution of these insects and with three colonies known to myself, there must be many more and it would be useful to know just how plentiful they are. Please report any known to yourself.

Histree Trail Leaflets.

These are proving very popular and will take you into places in the Island that you have possibly not previously visited. The leaflets are available from the public libraries and are free.

Bill Shepard

The Brading Big Dig - A Guide's Eye View

Society members were involved in the Brading Excavations in a number of ways. As a guide I spent almost every day on site and had a grandstand view of the project, including daily briefings by Sir Barry Cunliffe and watching the team work through the painstaking tasks of a professionally conducted excavation.

The tone was set at 8.30 on the first morning – Sir Barry runs a tight ship, this was not a training dig, it was assumed everyone would know how to carry out their allotted tasks.

It was clear that Sir Barry has a loyal team of archaeologists who eagerly seize their chance to spend

their summer labouring in a trench; some had come from America. The professionals appreciated the 'luxury' of the catering by volunteers, which allowed them to spend even longer on their knees on the ground.

Within two hours a large part of the site was stripped of turf and barrow loads of earth were cleared to get below the Victorian excavation level. The excitement of a special find on the first day, a Roman child's bronze bracelet, may have led some of us to expect numerous treasures to appear. Of course they didn't, but Sir Barry kept our interest with his infectious enthusiasm for Roman building techniques, aisled halls, social details and general background. We learnt daily of his theories, of what he was hoping to find, how his ideas changed as the work progressed.

We could not predict beforehand how much public interest there would be and it was a delight to show so many people round the site and let them share the thrill of enquiry. Programmes such as 'Time Team' have clearly sparked a public interest in archaeology and given people enough understanding to help them appreciate what was happening and why. They listened to our tours with great interest, often asked pertinent or challenging questions and were content to just stand by the fence watching, as if hypnotised, as diggers gently trowelled small patches of earth.

Just as it began to quieten down in the last week, a feature on local news brought a new wave of visitors.

A daily blog on the villa website was invaluable for filling in anything one missed.

The weather was sometimes kind, but the worst days were gales, which blew down the Herries fencing and almost forced us to close the site to visitors. More importantly we nearly lost the refreshment tent and could not operate the tea urn.

At the end of the three weeks, Sir Barry said he could now answer all the questions he had at the outset and his report is eagerly awaited.

As regards finds, pottery, glass and metalwork was consistent with the finds from the Victorian dig, some rings and a brooch were found and flint tools predating the Roman occupation. A significant find for dating evidence was the coin, found beneath the foundations, of Faustina II, wife of Marcus Aurelius, which seems to confirm Sir Barry's preferred dating of late 2nd century.

The site has now been back-filled for preservation and thoughts are turning to the next phase. My understanding is that Sir Barry hopes to tackle the supposed bathhouse in the South Range and is eager, subject to permission, to investigate parts of the main house that may have been misunderstood by the Victorians.

I for one am keen to be there. Already my appreciation and understanding of this special site has grown enormously and I look forward to learning more of the story.

(Photo – page 20)

Helen Jackson

Andy`s Notes

5th June - Early afternoon my wife and I walked along the revetment between Wheeler's Bay and Bonchurch. We noticed a large dragonfly came in off the sea from the south and across the revetment a few yards in front of us. It flew along the esplanade in front of us a short distance, then zigzagged its way up the cliff, over the top and away. Judging by its shape, colour and 'jizz' I am sure it was a Lesser Emperor, a once very rare migrant but now more commonly seen. The wind over the last 24 hours had gone from east to southeast to south thus perfect for encouraging cross-channel migrants.

7th June - National Moth Night. This is an annual event that takes place right across the UK. There are a number of recorders on the Island and we all take part by running our moth traps and sending off our records to the organisers. This year was not brilliant but I managed to record 20 species but the most interesting capture was a Pug moth that so far has defied identification. Not a single expert in Britain has any idea what it is and the photograph has now gone to the European expert on this species, at the time of writing (Jan '09) I have heard nothing so it could well remain unidentified. (**Photo** page 17).

6th July - Geoff Blake, a local fisherman, saw four Storm-petrels around his boat off St Catherine's Point.

7th July - Geoff Blake saw two Storm-petrels off Luccombe.

9th July - On a very windy day, Geoff had eight Petrels around his boat at one time; they came in very close and one bird actually alighted briefly on his crewman's hand! At the same time another fisherman some way away had five Petrels around him giving a total of 13 in the area. These were not duplicate sightings as Geoff called up the other fisherman on the radio and this confirmed the numbers at that precise time.

12th July - My wife and I saw a Dark Green Fritillary butterfly flying along Bonchurch beach. Most unexpected.

2nd August - I counted 44 Common Blue butterflies from Wheeler's Bay to Bonchurch. This is the highest number I have ever recorded at this site.

15th August - Amongst a clump of red Dahlias in our garden my wife noticed one flower head that was divided precisely down the middle with red on one side and pale orange the other; even the petals were divided exactly in half. She asked Simon Goodenough of Ventnor Botanic Garden and also Alan Titchmarsh about this unusual occurrence and they both said it was probably an example of a condition known as chimera. Around the same time there were a few reports of similar flowers in the County Press (**Photo** - page 17).
23rd August - Three Painted Lady butterflies flew in off the sea and through our garden. Migrants have been very scarce this year.

24th August - Geoff Blake had a Sooty Shearwater fly around his boat about 1 mile off Ventnor.

30th August - John Moody caught a John Dory in a net off Bonchurch. These were very rarely caught years ago but are now almost common (**Photo** - page 17).

3rd September - Geoff Blake saw a Grey Phalarope fly around his boat whilst fishing off St Catherine's Point.
18th September - A Red Squirrel came up our front steps off the esplanade at Wheeler's Bay and through the open French door into our sitting room. It then went quite slowly through the dining room and into the kitchen. It had a good look round then scampered off out the way it came, passing by my wife and me at a distance of only a couple of feet. We were delighted! He can come back anytime!

23rd September - An amazing number of Large White butterflies about at the moment. We counted over 250 in a 200-yard stretch of the eastern esplanade at Ventnor.

12th October - We saw two Pintail flying east past St Catherine's Point.

18th October - A Brown Hawker dragonfly flew through our garden today. This is the first one I have seen in the Island.

11th November - We saw a Holly Blue butterfly near our house today. It was a bit unusual, as a sighting this late in the year is rare but this one had the colouring of a first generation female more likely to be seen in March or April.

17th December - An immaculate Peacock flying around our garden today. This transpired to be the last butterfly of the year.

The Oystercatcher, mentioned in the last Bulletin, that was injured but seemed to be recovering (from a broken leg) stayed in our area right up to the present (Jan 09) and is almost fully back to normal but recognisable.

During December we notice many birds feeding on the berries of our palm trees in the garden. At one time we recorded two Blackcaps, three Blackbirds, two Song Thrushes, two Wood Pigeons and one Collared Dove all feeding at the same time on one tree. Also at one stage eight Wood Pigeons were on the tree at once. Most unusual of all was a Stonechat coming into the garden and regularly taking the berries.

Andy Butler

Society Library

Towards the end of 2008, Alan Phillips published his booklet "Cock and Bull Stories", based on his paper in the 2008 Wight Studies. This attractive publication with many illustrations, has proved a great success and Alan has presented two copies to the Library. One can be found in the Reference Section and the other is available for borrowing.

During the Brading Big Dig, some of our members met and formed a friendship with Robert van Arsdell, from Vermont U.S.A. He is the leading expert on British Celtic coins and a colleague of Prof. Sir Barry Cunliffe. Following his return to America, Robert sent a copy of his book "Celtic Coinage of Britain" as a contribution to our Library. It is a publication of immense importance, now out of print, and can be found in the Reference Section, where it will be readily accessible for information.

Bill Shepard and Brian Greening's new book on Newport, entitled "The Changing Face of Newport" has been bought for the Library, to add to their previous publications.

At the request of Richard Grogan we have purchased Harris and Yalden's currently definitive book "Mammals of the British Isles", published by The Mammal Society.

As this will be my last Library report for the Bulletin, I feel that it is again time to draw attention to the wide coverage, both nationally and internationally, of Membership of our Society. The British Library, the Natural History Museum, the Ashmolean Library, British Geological Survey, New York Public Library and Libraries in America and Germany, to name but a few. Also Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales and Trinity Dublin, who receive legal deposit copies of our publications.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported Jill Nicholls and myself in our Library tenure over the years. It has been a happy time for us both.

Anne Cahill

Delian`s Archaeological Epistle

Well, its nearly a year since Alan Phillips lured me to Shorwell, produced mince pies and suggested that I take over from him, running the Archaeology Section of the IWNHAS. I was somewhat reluctant to take this on, but I had decided that teaching Archaeology wasn't fun any more, so a free space had opened up in my timetable. Added to which Joy Verrinder agreed to take over running the Young Archaeologists Club, which, after five years, needed a new impetus. So IWNAS it was. However, I did change a few things, the most important being that we didn't have one person in charge, instead we have

a group of great hard working and supportive members, to help keep this important Section, going. So many thanks to Mike, Jackie, Jessie, Chris, Helen, the two Jans and of course Daring Diane. I will leave you all to figure out who they are.

We started off 2008 helping out on another phase of the HEAP Project. This was good fun and very interesting as we explored the Undercliff and got to know each other. Hilarious exploits in boiling seas, creeping through caverns and swarming up and down perilous cliffs, all part of the fun.

We then spent several weeks at Span Farm, Wroxall, with the kind permission of Mrs Felicity Corrie. Here we surveyed and fieldwalked interesting cropmarks and learnt the mysteries of Stratigraphy drawings. I well remember a Practical at Brook where we clung to the cliffs in a howling wind, drawing a Mesolithic hearth. We also waded up Brook Creek in search of another Hearth, and Alan, Dawn and Chris all found some really nice worked flints.

By now, the group was really gelling. It is amazing what other things we learnt about birds, fungi and botanical specialities. I think for me the Jews Ear fungus, all brown and slimy and eerily resembling a human ear, had to be the top discovery.

Then there was the great Leper Hospital Dig organised by Ruth Waller. Things didn't always go to plan, and thanks to some weird Geo Phys results, much digging and filling turned out not to a corner of the hospital but a very large chunk of Ferruginous ironstone. Drat!!! The going was very heavy and the weather hot, and perhaps we should have consulted Speed's map when we would have known it was called Claybrook!!!

We have had lots of random coast Fieldwalks as the soaking wet cliffs have descended to the beaches frequently in the last two years. To get a chance to record archaeology before it is washed away, needs a frequent presence. Something the Archaeology Unit cannot muster on their limited staffing.

Our autumn months were largely spent in my garden in St Lawrence, wet sieving the clay blocks that the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Marine Archaeology had excavated in 2007 at the Mesolithic site at Bouldnor, near Yarmouth. As some of you know we found three pieces of string, which have been dated to 8,200 years old. Making this the oldest string in Britain. A great result for the IWNHAS.

On December 6th, the newly qualified Dr Ruth Waller came along to Arreton to present a round up of the Archaeological year on the Island. There have in fact been quite a few other activities going on in the Island in the past year, which some or all have participated in. The ongoing work at Pan, to establish and record the Palaeo Terraces, a work done in the first instance by the IWNHAS early archaeologist, H. Poole. As a result of the surveys and fieldwork at Pan, we can now identify the area of the riverine terraces where Neanderthal settlement was. Recently, Ruth and Estelle Baker, our IW Heritage Officer and another archaeologist, were working on another Community Archaeology Project, for local people. Some of you came along in 2006/7 and helped out in the Pan Community Project headed up by John Ashell, a Society member.

Ruth then turned our attention to the Alverstone Dig, and brought us up to speed about the Finds there. Of course, several Society people took a part in this, and Ian Boyd of Island 2000 has given an excellent presentation on the interpretation of Alverstone. We know the trackways have been dated to Late Iron Age, early Roman Occupation and some Roman Finds have been associated perhaps, with military activity.

We entered a Bid to Leader Plus for a Project called “Under the Ground”, which we have just heard has been approved. Our grateful thanks to Carol Flux, who identified and suggested to us, the Archaeology Unit and the AONB, a Project that would be of immense benefit to the Island all round.

“Under the Ground” would be a Geophysical Survey of all the crop marks and sites identified by aerial photography, which have never been investigated. In particular, sites that are in danger of destruction by ploughing, erosion or development. We have applied for a Grant to buy Geo Physics equipment, training and education for Community Archaeology, and through the good offices of the IWNHAS, to include Islanders of all ages in this fascinating and valuable research into our Island Past. Many thanks go to the Society for granting £2000, to help pay for the training and education programme to be carried out by Wessex Archaeology. The results will be published annually in the Proceedings of the Society and will form an important Resource for Planning, Historical reference and inclusion in future Island Plans.

We are also very grateful at this point to the Council for British Archaeology who have awarded us £750, the maximum, for "Under the Ground" as a Community Project, that will include many other societies and organisations, schools and museums, and will go a long way to putting the IOW Archaeology Record where it should be, one of the most fascinating in the country! With half a million years of human settlement, we need to expand and add to the work of such people as Hubert Poole and Percy Stone, (even if he did throw away all the detritus from the Newport Villa !).

So, this year promises to be a very exciting one for the Society. It is of course very apt as we celebrate 90 years in existence in September, and we hope to have some amazing Finds to go on show at the Society`s Exhibition at Newport Minster.

Delian Backhouse Fry MSc.

A distinctive white form of the Common Garden Snail (*Helix aspersa*)
possibly unique to the Isle of Wight

The Natural History Museum (London) has confirmed examples of shells sent to them as *Helix aspersa*, the Common Garden Snail. The examples are from a very large colony, possibly of thousands of individuals. The colony appears, from my observations, to have been stable for several years and perhaps for millennia! The usual brown ground colour of the shell is consistently replaced by near white, making the molluscs extremely attractive. This is not the result of oxidisation or chemical action as living individuals of all ages and empty shells display this characteristic. The shells appear thicker and heavier than type. The living bodies are lighter in colour than typical *Helix aspersa*, being similar to the colouration of *Helix pomata*, the Roman snail. This distinctive body colour may be more significant than shell colouration. The tentacles (horns) appear thicker than type.

Shells of molluscs are known to show considerable variation. Using the Internet, I have searched the available museum collections nationally. I cannot find any historical or other records of such a dramatic and consistent variation, let alone the changes in body colour etc described above.

The large colony is established in, and seems limited to, a very specific and scarce micro-environment. The environment consists of exposed chalk rubble interspersed with maritime plants. Exposed chalk of course, as in this case, can exist only as an enduring environment in the form of eroding sea cliffs. Elsewhere, such as Downland, it is quickly grassed over. The snails appear to be mainly amongst Sea Purslane, on which they are perhaps feeding, in common with other maritime plants. This environment is within a few metres of the high tide level and exposed to salt spray. The snails seem to have adapted to the salt in their food and to salt spray. Standard snails react very badly to salt! Such a harsh environment is subject to intense predation from sea birds.

I live near the North Downs and have searched the chalk Downland environment for similar variation. I thought the thicker shells of the Isle of Wight snails might be the result of a calcium rich diet. I have found no examples here of the thicker shells let alone the colour change. All examples I found here were similar to those in my garden, having a brown ground colour and grey body.

I believe the snails described above have evolved and adapted to this rare and specific micro-environment into a distinct sub-species. The white colouration and pale bodies offer remarkable camouflage from predators in this environment and makes them hard to spot for humans! There may be other adaptations I am not aware of, perhaps including behaviour. If this is the case, it is a wonderful example of adaptive evolution and Darwinism. To find a new form of such a common species would be very important generally and particularly important to the Isle of Wight.

I am very happy to give the exact location for serious scientific study and wish it to be recorded, but do not wish to publish it because this attractive form of snail has possible commercial value. The micro-environment is also so scarce that extinction of this perhaps only remaining colony is a great risk.

Peter Cosier, Town Hill Cottage, 58 Town Hill,
West Malling, Kent ME19 6QN

Saxon Reburials at Shalfleet

A Christian reburial on the Isle of Wight might contribute significantly to the rewriting of the history of "the last pagan place in England". Seventeen wooden casks containing Saxon remains uncovered during drainage work in the churchyard at Shalfleet in 2003 and during an archaeological dig in the garden of the Old Vicarage in 2005, were interred in the churchyard of St Michael the Archangel in July 2008. The East-West orientation of the original excavated graves suggested the religious beliefs of their occupants.

The reburial service, led by the Rev David Bevington and the Rev Molly O'Donnell, included a rendering by eminent local historian and Society President Johanna Jones, in the West Saxon dialect of Old English, of the Lord's Prayer. The service was followed by a talk by county archaeologist Dr Ruth Waller. Several present described the event as "beautifully done".

The radiocarbon dating of samples from one of the skeletons, placed these people in interesting times for the Isle of Wight, between 660 and 734AD. This spans the Christian conversion of the Island in 686AD, when the West Saxon King Caedwalla is reputed to have invaded the still-pagan Isle of Wight and Christianised it at the point of a sword, killing the Island's king then converting his two sons before also killing them, then going on to slay any Islander who did not immediately convert to his faith.

That great English chronicler, the monk Bede, who bequeathed us this version of history, was alive at the time, although living a very long way distant. Yet the evidence from the 'crime scene', via the remains unearthed in the little village of Shalfleet, now begins to suggest another rather different story.

Dr Waller, who gave a talk in the church after the reburials, says the excavations at the Old Vicarage - with the help of radiocarbon dating - suggest this was a Christian farming settlement of people living in peaceful times. "None of the Saxon burials had any injuries which could be ascribed to battle," she said. Instead, all displayed pathology "indicative of a hard life working a farm or lifting heavy weights". Type 2 diabetes, suggesting obesity, as well as meningitis and poor dental hygiene, were among the afflictions diagnosed from the remains, but none showed any sign of violence.

The ages of the dateable remains ranged from early twenties to around 45 years old, which means these people would have lived through Bede's 'Christianisation' of the Isle of Wight. Yet these were pastoral people, with no experience of warfare, well settled into their surroundings and, most probably, with their own church on the site of the current one. Saxon Christians, probably from Caedwalla's Western kingdom, who had settled on the Island and were thriving peacefully here, among the 'last pagans in England', even before the 'bloody invasion' described by Bede.

Ultimately, isotope analysis of dental samples and DNA testing might well be able to unravel more of this rather obscure, yet historically important story in the annals of our islands, if funding for this can somehow be found. It could also help determine if these early Islanders have any descendants still living on the Isle of Wight.

The wooden caskets for the reburial were made by Shalfleet parish councillor Mike Carr, accentuating the particularly local nature of this event - highly unusual, perhaps even unprecedented on the Isle of Wight.

The original excavations were rather low key, as the landowners were anxious not to draw too much attention to them at the time. And the reburial was similarly attenuated, publicised in advance only within the village itself. In a way, that may have been a fitting farewell to these Islanders of more than 1,200 years ago, laid to their final rest by the people now inhabiting the immediate landscape they called home.

Maurice Bower

New Invader found in Bonchurch

The Western Conifer Seed Bug *Leptoglossus occidentalis* is a handsome beast (**Photo** page - 17) 20mm long, 7mm across, with a brownish-red body with black markings, a curious white angled "hair-streak", a black and white chequered edge to the abdomen and a characteristic and very noticeable swelling of the hind tibia. This insect is a true bug (order Heteroptera) and belongs in the squash bug family Coreidae.

Its natural habitat is conifer forests west of the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico. It feeds on the flowers, developing cones and seeds of about 40 species of conifer with a preference for Pines and Douglas-Fir. In America it is a pest of conifer nurseries.

The first record east of the Rockies was from Iowa in 1956 from where it spread inexorably eastwards across North America, reaching New York in 1990. It was accidentally introduced into Europe, being discovered near Viacenza in north-eastern Italy in 1999. From here it spread rapidly reaching Switzerland in 2002, Slovenia in 2003, Croatia and Spain 2004, France and Austria 2005, Hungary and Germany 2006 and the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the U.K. in 2007.

Weymouth was the site of its first English appearance in January 2007 (Weymouth of course is a ferry port). However the next English records came from moth-traps all along the south coast in late summer 2008. After two records in August from East Sussex and West Kent, and one record from Guernsey in September there are so far 30 records in October, peaking during the second week.

James Halsey found two individuals in Bonchurch; one on the13th October and another on the 25th, both inside his house.

In North America, attracted to light, they frequently enter buildings and can form aggregations of thousands of individuals overwintering inside houses. Here, bereft of conifer seeds they can damage polythene pipes in plumbing and heating systems by piercing the pipes with their sharp feeding stylet, the rostrum. In their natural habitat they hibernate under bark and in bird and rodent nests. The males produce an aggregation pheromone, which induces the individuals to group together.

So far this insect has not been found in England on a live host plant and breeding populations have not yet been discovered. But as this bug has invaded 16 countries in Europe within the last decade we can probably look forward to its establishment here.

I would be pleased to receive notification of other records of this bug on the Island.

Much of this information was gleaned from an article by Malumphy, Botting, Bantock and Reid published in Het News no. 12 2008, the Hemipterist's newsletter.

D T Biggs Hemiptera Recorder.

The New Antiquarians:
50 Years of Archaeological Innovation in Wessex

A small contingent from the Island travelled over for this major two-day conference in Southampton celebrating the 50th anniversary of the CBA (Council for British Archaeology) Wessex region. With some leading archaeologists in attendance, challenging views propounded, and a surprising number of positive references to the Isle of Wight made by speakers, the event proved to be of great interest. I cannot hope to cover the whole conference in detail, but merely select some of the main highlights.

Sir Barry Cunliffe set the scene with his personal impressions of 50 years of archaeology in "one of the richest areas for archaeological data anywhere in Europe". He also extolled the virtues of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, "which is nowadays capturing masses of significant data, is hugely underrecognised, and is involving wide swathes of the community in archaeology that previously never were" - a slightly surprising view to some of us who see the sheer scale of metal detecting as to some extent out of control.

Joshua Pollard on the Neolithic described how more sophisticated dating techniques were revealing that these ancient monuments were often surprisingly short-lived, with some long barrows only in use for five years, and even the great West Kennet Long Barrow no more than 50 years, not the centuries we had previously imagined - which poses the question, what were they doing with their burials for the rest of the time?

Mike Parker Pearson (MPP) referred to the fact that we cannot point to evidence of a single clear dwelling from the Early Bronze Age in the whole of Wessex, though this might be simply because we've not been looking in the right places. He also alluded to the huge middens which cover the Vale of Pewsey, such as at East Chisenbury, which contains the remains of 250,000 adult sheep, 125,000 lambs, 60,000 cattle and 10,000 humans, and asked, just what *are* these sites? They are almost impossible to excavate using the techniques we have at present.

In covering the Early Medieval period David Hinton drew attention to the concentration of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Hampshire and the IOW, marking a dynasty that started out in the north-west of the region and fought its way southwards. He also raised the much-debated questions as to what happened to the British? - Their extermination is unsupported by the archaeological evidence - as well as what happened to the Roman towns?

Carenza Lewis, well known from her Time Team appearances, began her Medieval paper by pointing out that the first medieval dig in this region was by Sir John Oglander at Quarr Abbey, though it wasn't terribly successful! A further accolade was awarded to the Island when Anthony Firth of Wessex Archaeology stated that marine records on the IOW Sites & Monuments Record, have become the model for marine records nationally: they are a great innovation and the Island is leading the way. Sir Barry was also full of praise for Brading Roman Villa, where of course he worked in the summer, its volunteers and its stewards.

Despite the technical nature of his environmental and geo-archaeological work, Mike Allen nevertheless gave an excellent presentation, pointing out how biological remains, soils and sediments can be studied to archaeological advantage, though in the '80s and '90s the discipline lost its way and turned into scientific gobbledygook. In the last ten years, however, environmental archaeology has at last come of age, and now addresses the key questions: how are the Wessex monumental landscape and the Wessex culture related to the environment?

Sue Davies, director of Wessex Archaeology, traced the growth of her own organisation from three people at its foundation in 1979 to the current staggering figure of 200, covering 800 projects per year, no longer just in Wessex, and which includes surveying the equivalent of 200 football pitches per annum. She was adamant that archaeology is, or should be, about people, and criticised some of the other presentations for leaving them out!

One of the conference highlights was the panel discussions at the end of each day. With Tim Darvill fresh from the Stonehenge dig, one hot topic was whether it was still appropriate to dig there, i.e. the excavation v. conservation argument. The consensus: yes, for specific purposes and to re-examine previous

excavations, for we are learning things completely afresh about Stonehenge as a result.

Experimental archaeology provided another topic for discussion: is it worthwhile? Yes, but MPP added that it's not enough just to do the experiments; we must ask *why* were the ancients doing what they did? We must beware putting our own 20C constructions on these activities - the reasons we would do these things now - and study comparative anthropological examples instead to gain some clues.

A further theme was the excellent work being carried out by local archaeology societies, and both MPP and Sir Barry made the astonishing claim that the discipline will increasingly be relying on local volunteers in future. University department projects involve huge costs, and the really large excavations of the past are unlikely to be on the agenda, with local societies taking over much of this work instead. This not only brings the issue full circle to where we came in all those years ago, but runs completely counter to what many of us had come to believe, that only professional archaeologists were nowadays qualified to do the bulk of this work.

Just as interesting was the discussion as to how county archaeology societies can enthuse new and especially younger members to join - 'younger' defined as anything up to 40! And what does 'getting involved' actually mean? It can't always involve digging. Are we promising people too much? We can't deliver Indiana Jones-type experiences, and so on. Why this debate was so fascinating was because it mirrored exactly all the points we have discussed over the years here on the Island, perhaps believing that mainland societies were streets ahead, only to discover that they face exactly the same issues as we do.

Finally, a difficult issue that emerged several times over the weekend was the question of reburial of human bones. In response to the neo-pagan 'Honouring the Ancient Dead' campaign and others, the response by most archaeologists seems to be a knee-jerk reaction that "we must fight and fight " these demands wholesale. In my view this is very shortsighted, as I believe there is room for a degree of compromise on all sides. The key demand is for a greater respect to be shown to human remains than has often done in the past, and where possible, when all conceivable tests have been carried out, for ultimate reburial - as for example in the very dignified reburial of Saxon remains at Shalfleet in which our President and County Archaeologist played such key roles. But by not being willing to countenance any discussion at all, archaeologists may well be digging their own grave on this issue.

All in all, one left the conference feeling that the Island, whilst of course remaining unique, is perhaps more integrated with the rest of Wessex and more on the map than ever before, and indeed is even leading the way in some areas. There are substantial achievements to our credit, and hopefully many more to come over the next 50 years!

Alan Phillips

Reports of General Meetings

16th August **Visit to Yaverland Manor**

When Johanna Jones, our President, announced that we'd been invited on a guided tour of Yaverland Manor, I was delighted. A glimpse of the façade from the road had been enough to convince me that this was one of the finest and oldest manor houses on the Isle of Wight, and I had long wished to take a closer look.

The whole of the eastern edge of the Island was once cut off from the rest by the tide, which swept through Bembridge Harbour and along the Eastern Yar valley, past Brading, to flow back into the sea near Sandown. And so until the bridge and causeway were built in the thirteenth century, the inhabitants of Yaverland could not get to Brading parish church. That is why the Norman de Aula family, who built the medieval manor house, founded a chapel where they and the peasant families who served them could worship.

Twenty-five members of our Society began our tour here, on Saturday 16 August, with an outline of the history of the chapel by the churchwarden, Mr Michael Woodley. The entrance porch and chancel arch are original late Norman features. In the latter half of the fifteenth century the chapel became a parish church, and during Henry VIII's reign a garrison church. It continued serving the troops stationed at the coastal forts until the end of the Second World War. Yet by 1888, as we could see from old photographs in the vestry, the church had fallen into disrepair. It was dark and dingy, with old box pews. In 1889 it was restored, enlarged, and embellished with some beautiful stained glass windows, and it is now a Grade One listed building. (**Photos –** page 18)

We first viewed the house from the west front, an unusual variation on the conventional E-shape. A gable juts out at either end, but there are two central gables instead of one, and no porch. Johanna Jones and the owner, Mr David Buckeridge, were our guides. In 1553 a Welshman, Jermyn Richards, bought the manor. He was a brewer who made his fortune from supplying beer to the many ships that docked at Brading Haven. He and his son began to rebuild the rundown medieval house, but they wisely retained much of the massive structure. This makes Yaverland one of the oldest houses on the Island. It bears the date 1620, the year in which the rebuilding was completed (**Photo** – page 18). We noted the tall chimneystacks and the windows representing different periods. The top floor windows are original, but those on the ground floor are early seventeenth century.

We entered the house through a deep porch of holly and yew hedge, topped by Virginia Creeper. The front door opens into a huge hall on two levels with a flagstone floor. Johanna pointed out the enormous depth of the wall and wondered whether this was originally a tower house. The thickness and strength of the beams here indicates a medieval structure, and a doorway on the opposite side of the hall from the front door, which once led to the outside, is also medieval. At the lower end of the hall there is a large open fireplace, a later addition.

At its upper end the Great Hall was reduced in size in the early eighteenth century to accommodate the Georgian Drawing Room. The two large leaded pane windows make this a pleasantly light room. Attractive display shelves are set into one corner. The centrepiece is the mid eighteenth century marble fireplace with its original mirror and baroque plasterwork. From the Book Room, with its original wooden panelling, a door opens onto a spiral staircase, predating the Grand Staircase, which leads to the best bedchamber.

At the lower end of the Great Hall are the servants' quarters. The kitchen has a huge fireplace and bread oven and a long dining table that may have been handed down from one owner to the next for centuries. It also has a fine beamed wall.

An elaborately carved archway from the Great Hall leads to the Grand Staircase, built of oak in the seventeenth century. It has some fine carvings, including a fawn playing a lute and some striking figures, which may represent Jermyn Richards, his wife and son. This staircase, unique to the Island, can be seen as an ostentatious demonstration of the wealth that spread to a much wider section of society at the end of Elizabeth 1's reign. Jermyn Richards came to the Island as servant to the Earl of Lincoln, Lord Admiral, and eventually he himself became Vice-Admiral of the Isle of Wight and Hampshire, a lucrative position, yet most of his wealth came from his brewing business.

Halfway up the staircase we came to the Panelled Bedroom. Other rooms lead off this one, as once there were no corridors or landings in the old parts of the house. A massive beam runs through the room and the walls are wood panelled. A door in the panelling still has its original seventeenth century hinges, and there's a very old window, now blocked off, dating from a time when this was an outside wall. A trapdoor concealed in a large cupboard reveals stairs down into a secret chamber, which is why this bedroom is also known as 'The Smugglers' Room'. The adjoining chamber, 'The Pirates' Room', is said to have been used by smugglers for signalling, for one window looks out onto Sandown Bay and the other towards Brading Haven.

At the end of our tour our hosts invited us to take tea on the front lawn. Here we marvelled at their courage to take on the stewardship of such a large historic building and agreed how fortunate we were to be invited to view it. Johanna Jones, on behalf of our Society, thanked David and Harriet Buckeridge and family for their hospitality.

Margaret Nelmes

13th September **Hurst Castle**

A ghostly apparition gleamed through the wall of fog enveloping us in our small boat. A row of what could have been office blocks rose dimly out of the sea just ahead, and for a moment I imagined we had overshot Hurst Castle and were approaching Bournemouth. Then a white wall loomed up and I could just make out the base of a lighthouse. Yet there was no warning flash, no foghorn.

Our craft turned to follow the shingle bank towards the mainland. We rounded the end and found ourselves in a lagoon between two banks where yachts were moored. The fog was lighter here and we could just make out Keyhaven, a natural harbour from where water taxis to Hurst Castle run. We were now approaching the huge fortress from the landward side.

The English Heritage custodian, Patrick Payne, took thirty of our members and guests on a short tour of the oldest part of the fortress, the Tudor castle, built between 1541 and 1544 to guard the Solent entrance from assault by land and sea. After Henry VIII divorced his first wife, Katherine, and renounced the Catholic Church, he feared a Spanish invasion.

Henry was taking advantage of a natural coastal barrier feature, a long shingle spit projecting from the Hampshire coast about a mile and a half towards the Isle of Wight, narrowing the channel to three-quarters of a mile and creating strong currents. The spit is shaped like a hook. It protects the low-lying mainland coast, provides safe anchorage for small boats, and creates salt marshes where wildlife flourishes.

We entered the fortress over a drawbridge across a moat and through a gateway dated 1873, into the west wing. This is one of two wings built either side of the Tudor castle in the 1860s when Britain feared a French invasion in retaliation for losing the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. Fort Victoria and Fort Albert on the opposite Island shore were built at this time, and together with many others were designed to protect Portsmouth from land and sea. They are now known as 'Palmerston's Follies' because thankfully no shot was ever fired in anger. Hurst was then the strongest single fortress on the south coast of England.

The squat Tudor castle (**Photo** - page 18) once had a drawbridge over a moat and a portcullis. Its central tower, or keep, is circular within and twelve-sided without. Both the ground floor and the first floor probably housed the garrison, being partitioned to form various rooms. A central spiral staircase once led from the basement to the roof, but we had to climb external steps to the first floor. There are fireplaces, a 'garderobe', or latrine, and eight windows through which small weapons could be fired, but perhaps the most striking feature is the fine brick vaulting dating from the very early nineteenth century. A door in the central pier opens onto the spiral staircase, lit through a glass dome in the roof. The doorway at the top is so low that we all had to duck. On the flat roof we found gun emplacements. Some of us returned here in the afternoon, once the fog had lifted and the sun had come out, to admire panoramic views of the Island and mainland coasts, from the Isle of Purbeck to Portsmouth. The central tower and courtyard were originally surrounded by a curtain wall and three semi-circular bastions, but only the north-west bastion retains most of its original form. This was the most powerful of the three, covering the landward approach and the gateway.

The two massive wing batteries were designed to house thirty heavy guns, all aimed at enemy warships entering the Needles Passage. This may seem excessive, but they took time to reload and the latest warships could move swiftly. Moreover, the casements for their protection restricted their angles of fire. So each gun could probably only fire once. All guns and their detachments were protected by massive granite-fronted casements, reinforced by extremely thick wrought-iron shields in front of the guns. (*One of the" big guns" of the Society was there*! Ed. **Photo** - page 18)

The west wing is a rabbit warren of gun emplacements and store-rooms for cartridge cases, gunpowder and equipment. A narrow railway line, built in 1895, runs through the wing. Trolleys had to be pushed along it, as there was no steam engine. It was last used in World War 11 when 160 soldiers were garrisoned here. Two gun emplacements were converted into The Garrison Theatre, believed to be the only remaining example of a wartime theatre in Britain. A 'Naughty Nineties' Music Hall was billed for the afternoon and evening of the day we visited.

Nearby The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's exhibition, featuring Hurst Spit and Keyhaven Marshes, highlights concerns about mainland beach protection works over the past fifty years reducing the natural shingle supply to the spit, causing shrinkage. The spit has to be replenished with thousands of tonnes of shingle, often dredged from the seabed. Urban developments, sea level rise and winter storms also threaten this site. French navigational charts dating from the eighteenth century show the many hazards to shipping in the western Solent, especially at night. Nowadays the permanently submerged shingle bank constitutes an additional hazard.

Trevor Price of the Geological Society of the Isle of Wight, took us on a guided walk of the spit. He told us about the breaches that have occurred in the past few decades, the last and biggest being in 1996 when half a million tonnes of shingle had to be purchased to repair the bank, costing Hampshire County Council five million pounds. The spit is only a few thousand years old and not in its original position. It is moving inland and the hook is building outwards. Channel currents, some from the east and some from the west, deposit gravel here. This is quite thick off the Isle of Wight. During the last Ice Age sea levels were very low and the chalk downs were eroding, covered with flints. When sea levels rose, these flints were carried away by the currents. Flint exposed to air turns brown, and offshore flints have worm holes. Trevor showed us a geological map and pointed out the faults that run from south to north across the Isle of Wight and link to river valleys on the Hampshire coast. He examined the external walls of the west wing of the fortress and showed us where the stone is eroding and where lime from the mortar runs down the walls and stalactites form from the drips.

Some of us visited the acetylene room serving the lighthouse, which is only open to the public several days a year. In 1783, when war with France was over, Trinity House commissioned lighthouses to be built at the Needles, Hurst and St Catherine's Point. The Hurst lighthouse was sited 200 feet west of the Tudor castle and equipped with two lights showing to the east and south-west. It was shaped like a pepper-pot, nearly 58 feet high, and had two keepers. There was no fresh water supply to either lighthouse or fortress and they had to collect rainwater. In a drought they had to carry water from the mainland or pay for a boat to bring it. In 1812 a second lighthouse was built 500 feet north-east of the castle. It was taller than the first and so they were known as the 'high' and 'low lights'. When the two battery wings were built in the 1860s, the low light had to be demolished, its replacement being built on the inside of the curtain wall of the new fort. The keeper gained access from outside the fort by means of a hinged iron staircase, which could be raised or lowered using pulleys. This prevented enemy access to the fort via the low light. At the same time a new high lighthouse was built close to the original high light. Acetylene gas lamps replaced the oil lamps, the gas initially being manufactured in the adjacent acetylene room, which a lighthouse keeper invited us to view.

I returned to the Tudor keep for more detailed exploration. There was an interesting exhibition about Henry VIII castles, many of which still survive, and stories of two high profile prisoners confined here. In November 1648 King Charles I, and twelve servants were brought from Carisbrooke Castle. The servants reported that the Captain did not greet the King with due observance and that he was 'very slenderly accommodated'. The place was 'noxious' with 'unwholesome vapours' and fogs. The King was allowed to walk along the spit. He only stayed here until 19 December, when he was despatched to Windsor Castle, tried and executed, all in the space of six weeks.

The 1700 Act against Catholicism ('Popery') condemned those convicted to perpetual imprisonment, and Hurst Castle was deemed a suitable prison. Yet it housed few prisoners, this not being its purpose. It must have been a very isolated, draughty and meagre existence. Father Matthew Atkinson pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey to converting a woman to Catholicism and hearing her confession. In the early years of his imprisonment here, the Commander invited him to his small farm, where he enjoyed 'a pipe of tobacco and a glass of ale', but complaints were made and the privilege withdrawn. After thirty years living in Hurst Castle, Father Atkinson died, aged 74.

The tide was low when we embarked on our homeward trip to Yarmouth, and we had to be ferried to our boat in one of the Keyhaven water taxis. The sun was warm and cameras were clicking as we admired the views. Thanks to Lynda Snaith, who had organised this trip so carefully, we had had a fascinating day.

Margaret Nelmes

Spanish Fly
Country Notes. page 4

Unidentified Pug Moth
Andy`s Notes. page 5

John Dory
Andy`s Notes. page 6

Bi-Coloured Dahlia
Andy`s Notes. page 6

Western Conifer Seed Bug
Invader in Bonchurch . page 11

Big Guns at Hurst Castle !!
page 15

Henry VIII`s Castle
page 15

Yaverland Manor
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Yaverland Manor Church
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Yaverland Manor
page 14

Aminita ovoidea
Fungi Report. pages 29/30

Geastrum triplex Earth Star
Fungi Report. pages 29/30

Hemimycena tortuosa
Fungi Report. pages 29/30

Hemimycena tortuosa
Fungi Report. pages 29/30

Trametes versicolor Turkeytail
Fungi Report. pages 29/30

Brading Big Dig 2008.
page 5

Hearth Surveying.
Wed Activities. page 27

Hearth Surveying.
Wed Activities. page 27

Mudlarking .
Wed Activities. page 27

The Beast of Binnel Bay !!
Wed Activities. page 27

8th November **The History & Natural History of the Coast from Binnel Bay to Blackgang.**

Anyone passing Arreton Community Centre on the afternoon of 8th November might have imagined we were holding a comedy club, from the laughter that issued forth, as both Andy Butler and members of the audience shared memories and anecdotes about the exploits of such eccentric characters as Uffa Fox. Like Andy, a number of the forty or so members in the audience grew up on the Isle of Wight and his talk and slide show evoked many memories.

Andy began his talk on a more serious note, by attempting to discover something of the early history of the western corner of the Undercliff, from Binnel Bay (at St Lawrence) to Blackgang. His main source of information was Vicky Basford's 'Vectis Report (1980)'. In the Palaeolithic period there is a record of human habitation here, although some artefacts may have been brought down from the cliff-top in landslips. An Acheulean axe, some 250,000 years old, was found at Binnel. Andy invited us to pass around some axe heads and other flint tools found on the Isle of Wight. One was a fake, fashioned in Victorian times by a local entrepreneur. Surprisingly, no artefacts have been found in this part of the Undercliff from the Mesolithic period, when the island began to separate from the mainland. In the Neolithic period, when farming began to replace hunting, people tended to settle near rivers, and the Undercliff may not have provided land good enough for farming. A polished flint axe was found in Puckaster Cove, between Binnel Bay and Castlehaven, a Tribrachial flint on Ventnor beach, and arrowheads, scrapers and other tools at Niton. Discoveries from the Bronze Age are a stone cist containing a skeleton and bronze socketed axes. There were no surprises when the Binnel 'midden', or rubbish dump, revealed a high consumption of fish.

From the Romano-British period many coins have been found at Binnel, Puckaster and Niton. After the Jutes, came the West Saxons, in 686. No artefacts have been discovered from this period, but only a few people have been looking and it is a big area. We do, however, have Saxon place names. In Medieval times Old Park was enclosed land for hunting. Spindler, a German philanthropist, bought the park in 1883. In the short time until his death he undertook to supply clean water to the inhabitants of Whitwell and to construct a harbour at Binnel Bay. This was known to posterity as 'Spindler's folly', for it wasn't long before it`s walls were breached by stormy seas. He also built a windmill. His vision was to create employment and bring prosperity to a poor area. Spindler was a very wealthy industrialist. He was also kind-hearted and would create jobs rather than lay off his workers. Andy showed us a slide of local men digging the lake at Old Park. Spindler enjoyed the company of actors; Andy showed us a photograph of Sarah Bernhardt, taken at Old Park.

Andy then showed us some slides of wildlife to be found along this coast. He explained that he had fished here for many years before becoming a National Trust Warden. Little Egrets are now well established here, and the White Letter Hairstreak and Glanville Fritillary can also be seen.

'Mirables', an estate adjoining Old Park to the west, is mentioned in 1327 in records of 'Feudal Aid', a tax raised by the king. The owner was Roberto Mirable. William, of Wickham College near Winchester purchased it and the three Orchard brothers lived there. But they refused to pay the tithes and so the college impounded their sheep. They had a large flock of some two hundred sheep. The brothers, in what some of our audience agreed was true Isle of Wight fashion, seized back their flock, but they lost the court case. Mirables is in the parish of Whitwell. Inland parishes claimed a share of the coast for the shipwrecks, of which there were many on the southern tip of the island, notorious for its turbulent seas. Andy showed us slides of some of the shipwrecks along this coast and how local inhabitants rescued passengers and crew before the introduction of lifeboats and helicopters. A rocket was fired, sending a line to the ship which people could hold onto to prevent them from being washed away and to guide them to the shore.

Puckaster Cove was a popular sandy beach in the early twentieth century. There were cottages close to the beach for the longshoremen who kept their fishing boats there. These dwellings have long since disappeared, claimed by landslips or the sea. Locals used to fish from a long groyne, catching huge crabs

close to shore, until the landowner at Reeth Lodge, the big house on the cliff-top, dismantled it. Puckaster is an old English name meaning 'the rock inhabited by a goblin`. Charles II once landed here, and in the nineteen-twenties, Prince Edward.

A slide of Castlehaven shows a popular bathing beach with bathing machines. A few years ago the Council commissioned major sea defences here to prevent the loss of more homes through landslips and tidal erosion. This landslip area is also home to some rare invertebrates. The Lloyds Signalling Station, demolished in the nineteen eighties, was at the top of Castlehaven Lane. Near the cove a skull was found in recent years, protruding from the low cliff-face. Archaeologists unearthed the skeleton of a teenage girl. This was not a burial and no artefacts were found with her to help date the bones. So far they have not been carbon dated.

At Knowles Farm, near St Catherine's lighthouse, you can see the hole in the ground dug for Marconi's mast. And at nearby Watershoot Bay, in 1998, bird recorders devised a plan to lure Storm Petrels into a net, using a moth trap. A photograph of the Chale Bay Mackerel Gang, taken in about 1900, shows all but one of the men dressed in black. The one in white watched the sea from the cliff top and signalled to the others where he could see a shoal. They had the hard task of hauling in the nets. A photograph taken in 1909 shows the Blackgang and Chale Regatta, which attracted the gentry. It was held at Rocken End, on what is now the Nudist Beach. The high cliffs beyond, at Windy Gap, are home to Peregrine Falcons, which have spread throughout the Undercliff in recent years. This area is also an excellent site for the Golden-ringed Dragonfly. Andy showed a slide of a scene familiar to those who have frequented the Undercliff in recent years: a road collapsed, only this was in the early twentieth century. Another slide depicts a coach, probably travelling from Ventnor to Blackgang, near Windy Corner, on the Old Road, which ran under the great rock-face. The road was permanently breached here in a major landslip in 1928. Traffic had to be diverted inland via Niton village and a new road constructed, along the cliff top and down to Blackgang.

This was a fascinating talk from a man who, over the decades, has acquired a wealth of local knowledge and a collection of interesting artefacts and photographs.

Margaret Nelmes

Reports of Section Meetings

Access

9th July

Lee Farm, Wellow. Walk to be led by Stephen Cowley

The weather was against us on this day. Early in the morning Stephen rang to say the farmland was under water owing to heavy rain the previous day and with more rain over night it made walking impossible.

With regret he would have to cancel. Another date will be arranged in 2009.

18th July

Glow-worms. Annual count at St Helens Churchyard (day 1).

16 people gathered in the car park at 2200 hrs, to be greeted by Chris Lipscombe with her books about the worms, or should I say beetles. As this was the last walk to be led by Chris it was fitting to see a firework display as we set off. It was at Osborne House and we had a spectacular view. 27 worms were counted, two had males with them, their combined lights must have been the brightest and were found by Paul Scott.

19th July

Glow-worms. Annual count at St Helens Churchyard (day 2).

5 people assembled for another count and 35 Glow-worms were found. Although these counts over the years have not been officially reported, they do seem to be fairly accurate as the numbers are always about 25 to 35. (*Glow-worm records have now been entered into the Society Biological Database – Ed.)*

Thanks to all the people who had the interest to come. Many of them remembered as children seeing the glow in hedges and gardens. If you live in rural areas you may see them, but I suspect very few are now seen in suburbia.

22nd August

Brading Down - A fine morning greeted eleven members plus two guest walkers as they assembled at the viewpoint information board on Brading Down, overlooking Sandown. This vantage point gave us fine views towards Shanklin to the south and Arreton to the north-west. Numerous deep draft tankers waiting in the anchorage south of the Nab Tower were also noted.

We started our walk on the south side of the Down, adjacent to the Newport road. From there to the gate at the north-west corner of the enclosure and then crossing the road to the Nunwell side of the Down. We followed the Rights of Way track towards Nunwell Farm by way of part of the Nunwell Trail (footpath B30)

Many impressive and historic trees lined our route (southern boundary of the Nunwell Estate) and of particular note are "two in one" Beeches known as the 'King and Queen'. Taking a small detour on the Nunwell Farm approach track, we paid special interest to the notorious mushroom shaped Oak, in the latter stages of its life and rotting away from the top.

The final stage of our trek took us along 'Ladies Walk`, which enabled us to inspect some truly magnificent trees, in the main Beech, Lime and Oak. One Oak being 400 year old and reputed to be one of the oldest on the Island.

Leaving 'Ladies Walk' we took the path that led us back up towards the Down's road, passing the chalk quarry and reservoir and thus returning to the car park.

14th September

Luccombe Walk. - 13 people attended for this walk on a fine morning after a long spell of wet weather, although showers were expected.

Starting at the St Blasius car park, we crossed to a footpath that led to Popham Road. Colin Black gave a short history of the Popham family, who were Lords of the Manor of Shanklin from the early 1700s. St John the Baptist was their private chapel, although it was renamed in 1890 as St Blasius.

Walking up towards Luccombe we passed a new development, with many comments by the group on how it did not blend into the architecture of the area. A Victorian Hotel and the Cottage Hospital were pulled down to make way for the development.

Towards the village we passed a site owned by the National Trust called Haddons Pit, but we have no history of this site.

Turning into the village we had another view of Sandown Bay, with the rain clearing Selsey and the South Downs beyond was clearly visible.

Taking a permissive footpath at the top of the village, we had good views of Shanklin and St Boniface Downs. A Small Copper butterfly was seen on Fleabane, with the sun shining it`s colours were stunning. A lot of Speckled Wood, Gatekeepers and Large Whites were also seen. We turned onto Luccombe Farm road, walked past the farmhouse and we all stopped to admire the cottage garden and the beautifully kept holiday cottages. Past the farm and walking on, to a footpath over stiles and down to meet the coastal path by the old tea gardens.

The Footpath sign to Luccombe Chine was on our left and we stopped to reminisce on past exploits down the steps and walks along the beach.

Walking again towards Shanklin, we passed the table on the path selling home made jams, but no honey this year. The next stop was at the old café a favourite for ramblers and walkers on the coastal path,

sadly it closed several years ago. The path now begins to climb to the point where we turned off past the wartime ARP hut.
It was now downhill, to the start point. On the way down we passed some trees, which are on the Histree Trail Groves and Gardens. We stopped to study the leaflet at the points indicated.
We then crossed the main road to Ventnor, into the Big Mead recreation park and to the car park.
An excellent walk, our thanks to Jill and John Nicholls.

8th October
Twelve members met at the Godshill car park for a 2.7 mile walk, led by Tad Dubicki. We passed Godshill Park House by way of the Stenbury Trail and proceeded as far as the Freemantle Gate, then bearing to the southwest and following the Worsley Trail under Gat Cliff. We progressed northwest towards Sainham Farm, before returning through Sainham Woods and finishing by approaching Godshill from the rear of the Griffin Inn.
En route some observant members noticed two Walnut trees, which were bearing fruit. We managed to collect a few of the nuts and shelled them, however they were inedible. Just after passing Godshill Manor Farm a small group of grazing Alpacas became the focus of interest. Soon afterwards we approached the Freemantle Gate, the main entrance to the Appuldurcombe Estate from Godshill. The gate was reputedly designed and built, in the 'Ionic' style by the English architect James Wyatt (1746-1813), famous for the design of Fonthill Abbey. Of particular note, was the hinge mechanism of the gates. Bearing right on to the Worsley Trail, we followed the stone wall, this being the boundary of the estate and once landscaped gardens, by Capability Brown.
Proceeding, we passed under Gat Cliff and returned to our start point by way of Sainham Farm and Sainham Wood.

17th November.
7 people assembled at Newchurch Car Park on a misty dull day, however the walk was not dull in the least.
Walking down the south side of the JIGSAW woodland we noticed how much it had grown. Spindle and Rowan berries gave a bright display. Butchers Broom was noted on the hill up to Hill Farm. At the farm there were no pigs to grunt a welcome. A large tree had blocked our way on the walk out, this was now clear owing to ROW guys` efforts. There were no geese past the farm as we walked down to Youngwoods Copse.
The information board was studied, Serotine bats were explained as a large woodland bat which flew on the woodland edges, the Pipistrelle is smaller and can fly through woods. Further on Red Squirrel were seen. We stopped at the Barbara Aze seat for an apple stop. More squirrels around us, 4 in total.
We then went through lower Alverstone Garden Village to a footpath very much like a hollow lane, on the east side, passed large clumps of Bamboo and up to the road. Crossing to the next path, Death Cap fungi were spotted. Down to Brett's Meadow, which had been cleared of bracken, then further on again to Hill Farm. The geese were now out and stopped grazing to look at us.
Through the farmyard, where the hounds made every one aware of strangers in the yard. After passing the farmer, who was very friendly, on to the bridle way, where the trees were in autumn dress, and then down to Hill Heath. The woodland has been harvested and the more open wood will produce flora not seen for some time, and also more Bluebells.
Cross the muddy brook overflow and on to the JIGSAW's northside. Common Funnel Fungi were all along the footpath back to the car park.

8th December
22 members assembled at the Broadway Centre for the Christmas get together. A walk was followed by coffee and mince pies. 17 decided to walk round Los Altos Park (The Heights).
The weather was crisp and cold with frost, but the sun was shining which gave everything an autumn glow.

Bill Shepard gave us an interesting explanation of the trees in the park and why it is different. Evergreen Oaks dominate the area and were probably planted as hedges for wind cover on the high ground, which was the Los Altos house gardens. Over time these were not cut and grew into large trees. Interesting others, were *Pinus nigra*, a native of southern Europe planted in groups. A much later planting of Wild Service trees was noticed. These were probably planted when the park was given to the people of Sandown. Hot mince pies and coffee were well received on our return. Two competitions were laid on so the walkers would not nod off after the exertions of the walk.
The leader thanked all members for their support and help over the past year, and the committee for their excellent catering arrangements.
We can now look forward to the Spring and the walks in 2009.

Colin Black

Archaeology

20th July **Little Span Farm**

On a sunny, breezy day a large group of us had a leisurely but informative walk through Span Farm, Wroxall and onto the downs, accompanied by Felicity Corrie, who farms there with her husband and is very enthusiastic about the historic and archaeological aspects of their land. The area around was farmed here under the ownership of Quarr Abbey hundreds of years ago, and records go back as far as Winchester College.

As soon as you go up the lane from the farmhouse and through to the first field on the left, you start touching history. Aerial photographs show the outline of what appears might be a very large building. The site is at an ideal point, and has uninterrupted views for 360 degrees; it has the best sea views in Wroxall, and would have been even better in ancient times when no buildings interrupted the view. It has been conjectured that prior to any Roman occupation it could well have been an Iron Age farm. A hollow way runs through, making it a good place for exchange or purchase of goods, stock etc. The hollow way comes across the downs on the other side of the main road, crosses the road, then runs up on Span Farm side and joins up with the Stenbury Trail. On the other side it goes down to the Horseshoe, and on the downs where there are Iron Age barrows. The barrows seen at the top of the hill are Bronze Age. People would have been using this landscape from very early times. There are lynchets (terraces created for farming) on the hill across the road.

We continued the walk through two fields and came to the sunken track that comes up from Appuldurcombe, where rumour has it that Lord Worsley used to walk to visit his mistress. A deer park wall runs next to the path, which is probably Elizabethan in origin.

There had been fantastic views for most of the walk, and as we came to the end of what remains of the original Appuldurcombe wall surrounding the estate, we looked out to the obelisk and over the water to the Spinnaker Tower at Portsmouth - just by turning a few degrees the views progressed as in a kaleidoscope from ancient through to modern heritage.

We crossed over the public footpath with views to the right to Compton and to the left towards France! And still the barrows were there - eight barrows on the field edge. Finally back down the tarmac path with myriads of butterflies of all variety accompanying us. There are many public footpaths criss-crossing this area, which make it a fascinating and photogenic walk at any time of year.

Jan Peters

21st September **Coastal Management**

I suspect I am not the only member who has visited the Society's rooms at the Salisbury Gardens headquarters but has not explored the rest of the building.

Natasha Dix gave us an interesting talk about the work of the Coastal Management Section of the County Council and a tour of the exhibition rooms at the Coastal Visitors' centre. Some of the work is high profile but this was a good opportunity to learn about some lesser-known aspects of the work.

Most of the challenges facing the staff are familiar to us, but I had not realised that the Isles of Wight has the largest coastal area of any English county, yet the smallest budget because of the small population. We are all aware of the range of coastal environments – estuaries, sand, cliffs etc., but it was interesting to hear that the Undercliff is the largest urban landslip area in Europe.

We saw a dramatic computer simulation showing how the Island was formed by the rising sea levels. Modern changes were put into context when we learnt that Ventnor is constructed on the site of landslide complexes over four thousand years old.

Modern coastal changes are due to natural processes, such as weathering and longshore drift, and to human activities. The building boom in Victorian Ventnor caused land disturbance because of the numerous cesspits created on unstable sites!

Whilst causes of climate change are both man-made and natural, the focus at the unit is on climate impact and monitoring is a key task. Bore holes in Ventnor 100ft deep are used for core sampling and monitoring movement.

There are four management options considered for dealing with erosion:

1/ maintain existing defence lines

2/ advance existing defence lines

3/ managed realignment

4/ no active intervention

Both environmental and economic issues need to be considered such as the need to maintain beach levels for tourism and the large amount of building aggregates produced.

Engineering solutions can be hard (e.g. seawalls, rock armour, tetrapods) or soft (e.g. beaches, dunes)

After the talk we toured the exhibition rooms. There are some stunning photographs and Natasha showed us some historically interesting materials.

This was a fascinating opportunity to set our ongoing coastal archaeology work into a wider geographical, geological and historical context. Helen Jackson

23rd November Bouldnor Underwater Excavation

Members of the Society have continued their practical support of the Hampshire and Wight Maritime Trust's investigation under the Solent off Bouldnor Cliff (see Bulletin no 49, Feb. 2008)

`We were therefore particularly pleased to welcome Jan Gillespie from the Trust to talk to us about the work of the Trust in general and the work at Bouldnor in particular.

The Trust was established in 1991 as a joint venture by the Isle of Wight and Hampshire County Councils. It is now run as a charity, carrying out research, educational and community work and has extended its operations to include international exploration.

Jan's presentation focused on a few projects -

It was whilst searching for the wreck of the Assurance, a frigate sunk in 1753 that a further wreck, the Pomone, a frigate sunk in 1811, was also discovered on the same site. The latter, lying in the sheltered and comparatively safe waters of Alum Bay has been developed as a dive trail with its own underwater booklet which divers can visit just as we landlubbers might visit an archaeological site on land.

In the Eastern Solent the Trust organises an annual week exploring the wreck of the HMS Impregnable.

Shore side work includes sites revealed by erosion and scouring by traffic, such as the Bronze Age track on the River Test exposed by the movement of ships turning.

At the international level, the Trust is involved in the 'Gibmara' project, investigating the routes by which early man travelled out of Africa via what is now the Gibraltar Straits.

For those of us involved in the Bouldnor cliff work it was particularly interesting to learn about the background and wider context of this, as well as an update on the finds. The project has featured on local news and on BBC's 'The One Show' and is recognised as one of the most important Mesolithic sites in the country.

The site was first identified in the 1970s when fishermen brought up artefacts; divers subsequently discovered the now notorious lobster clearing worked flints out of its burrow.

The site is 80 – 100 metres off the Island and at about 12m below surface is the deepest site of

its kind in British waters. There is a 4m platform and then a cliff dropping about 12m. Conditions are not easy, with strong tides and murky waters in a busy shipping lane and the site is eroding at a worrying rate.

Over the years several hundred worked flints have been brought to the surface along with sufficient environmental samples to give a picture of the site over a period of time, including, at different times, forest of pine, oak and hazel.

The human occupation site dates from approximately 8,5000 years ago. Evidence includes pits of burnt flints and wooden 'planks' laid on a platform of branches, carbonised wood, charcoal, flint flakes and wood chippings, all suggestive of 'industrial use' – possibly the country's oldest boat-building yard!

Jan showed us a photo of one intriguing find - the fibre or hair found last summer and yet to be fully identified.

A number of the finds were made by a group from the IWNHAS sieving and sorting through the mud lifted by the divers. Most exciting is a twisted fibre uncovered by the Island Young Archaeologists Club and recently confirmed as the oldest string found in this country. The find has been reported in the Jan/Feb 2009 issue of British Archaeology.

We will continue our sieving and sorting during 2009. Anyone interested in helping can contact Delian or me for information.

Watch this space, not to mention local and national media, for further information.

Helen Jackson

Miscellaneous Wednesday Activities of the Archaeological Group during 2008

Delian Backhouse-Fry led members of the Group to a number of different sites during the year, particularly during the winter months when there had been many cliff falls along the coast, which exposed prehistoric activities.

In February we looked at some coastal hearths at Brook and surveyed one of them. This has been dated to the Bronze Age. **(Photos** - page 20)

In April we went to Southampton University to meet up with the Hants & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology (HWTMA) to sort through some sieved finds from the Bouldnor Underwater Cliff excavation. This involved some very close work looking through minute shells, wood, flint flakes and microliths, and seeds from 8000 years ago.

Following this in September and October, Delian went over to Southampton to bring back boxes of ancient mud from this site, which we have sieved, dried and sorted. We had great fun in Delian's back garden spraying the mud with water to get the mud through the sieves and called it 'Mud Larking' (**Photo -** page 20). Besides finding more flint tools, burnt flint, seeds and wood, we found some worked fibre. One piece of which turned out to be the oldest string in Britain!

During the summer we visited Watershoot Bay to see if we could find Roman pottery, but we only found one or two pieces. The track down, passing Knowles Farm, to the Bay appears on the oldest Island maps and must be a very ancient trackway. Also, in the summer we did some survey work at Span Farm with the kind permission of the farmers.

Recently, we went to Yaverland beach to survey the exposed cliffs for any historical sites emerging. Two sites of pits packed with small beach stones were seen, of yet unknown provenance.

We began the activities with a visit to Binnel Bay and appropriately enough we finished with a visit there. The first visit was to look at the very active landslip area to see and identify early boundary walls. The last visit was looking for the Neolithic layer. An ancient midden packed with very degraded shells was examined and samples of deliberately split bone and some shells were collected.

It`s also amazing what one finds at Binnel Bay. (**Photo -** page 20)

Jackie Hart and Mike Cahill

Botany

13th July **Kern Farm**

Kern Farm lies north of the village of Alverstone. The southern part is on sandy soils and stretches down to the Eastern Yar, and at the northern edge is Kern Down, which has a chalk flora and extensive views to the south. It rises steeply and, as it has not been cultivated, it has a good range of flowers. The Field Scabious *(Knautia arvensis)* was making a good show, as were Eyebright (*Euphrasia* agg), Squinancywort *(Asperula cynachica)* and Carline Thistle *(Carlina vulgaris)*. Fiddle Dock (*Rumex pulcher*) a plant with distinctive leaves was found at the western end on the edge of a chalk pit. Its distribution on the Island is fairly localised, and this site fits the pattern of it occurring on dry south-facing banks.

During the course of the afternoon a rare shield bug *Canthophorus impressus* was found. It is about 6mm long, iridescent dark blue in colour, and feeds on bastard toadflax, a rare chalk grassland plant. It has also been seen on Tennyson Down and West High Down this year.

9th August **Bembridge Point**

There has recently been extensive clearance of Sea Buckthorn scrub on Bembridge Point and we were intending to record the flora that is re-establishing in the cleared areas. However the continuous drizzle, which had set in during the morning persisted and developed into heavier rain so our meeting was cut short. However under the guidance of Ann Campbell who has made a detailed study of the area this year we were able to look for some of the site's specialities. Rough Dog's-tail *(Cynosurus echinatus)* and Hare`s-tail *(Lagurus ovata)* are two distinctive grasses found there. Fragrant Evening-primrose *(Oenothera stricta)* and Sea Rocket *(Cakile maritima)* have both been particularly common this year, and the population of Tree Lupin *(Lupinus arboreus)* has increased. The striking blue-flowered Kangaroo-apple *(Solanum laciniatum),* an alien species, has also appeared this year.

6th September **St Helens Duver**

Our meeting at St Helens Point was punctuated by heavy showers, necessitating a retreat back to the cars at one stage. However we did manage to record about 40 species in total. Dwarf Mallow *(Malva neglecta)* and Common Stork's-bill *(Erodium cicutarium)* were flowering well, but the Autumn Squill *(Scilla autumnalis)* was almost over. Plants of Bulbous Meadow --grass (*Poa bulbosa*) were recognisable by their swollen leaf bases, which break off the plant and enable it to spread. By the Old Mill Pond there were a range of saltmarsh plants, including Annual Seablite (*Suaeda maritima*), Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), Annual Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea*) and Sea Purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*). Sea Wormwood (*Seriphidium maritima*), a plant that is known from only three locations on the Island, was re-found.

11th October **Fishbourne Copse**

A warm sunny afternoon was ideal for our second visit to the ancient woodland bordering the Solent shore to the north of Quarr Abbey. The meeting got off to an excellent start when we had a good view of two red squirrels chasing each other round one of the large trees near the buildings. The main purpose of our meeting was to record leaf miners, galls and microfungi. Progress around the wood, initially was slow as members of the group collected many specimens for David Biggs to identify either at the time, or in the following days. We were able to add considerably to our list from earlier in the year and in total added 27 new species to the list for this site of which 10 were galls, 8 were microfungi and 9 were leaf miners.

We found a total of 13 species using the English Oak (*Quercus robur*) as their host including some well-known galls caused by gall wasps such as oak apples (caused by *Biorhiza pallida*), marble galls (caused by *Andricus kollari*), knopper galls on acorns (caused by *A. quercuscalicis*) and silk button spangle galls on the leaves (caused by *Neuroterus numismalis*). Field Maple *(Acer campestre)* and Hawthorn *(Crataegus monogyna)* each supported a total of five species of gall causer, leaf miner or microfungi.

26th October **Trees in Shanklin**

The object of this meeting, the third in three successive years was to introduce a neglected area of our knowledge of the vegetation of the Island. Three collections of trees, Tower Cottage Garden, Rylstone Garden and Big Mead, all in close proximity provided a wealth of diversity, far too numerous to enumerate in this short account. Mention must be made of the Liquidamber, freestanding in the middle of the lawn in Rylstone Garden, dressed in autumn colours. For an excellent introduction to this fascinating area, follow the Histree Trail leaflet number 7 "Groves and Gardens".

Reports by Anne Marston except for
'Trees in Shanklin' contributed by Bill Shepard

Entomology

18th August **Sibden Hill**

Four members met on a dull day, at this Local Nature Reserve on the outskirts of Shanklin, and the rain set in after ninety minutes. Conditions were far from ideal, and this reduced the number of species found on the wing. A Meadow Brown and a couple of Speckled Woods were the only butterflies. We saw a single moth, the Mother of Pearl, but there were good numbers of Orthoptera, with Dark Bush Cricket, and Common Field and Meadow Grasshoppers all being observed. The most spectacular views were of a small leafhopper *Graphocephala fennahi,* the Rhododendron Hopper. These were found in good numbers on the bracken and rhododendrons, just below the remains of the old sunshine recorder at the top of the hill. This was only the fourth record for the Isle of Wight of this species but it was clearly well established here. The species came to England in the 1930s and is well worth looking out for in any area of rhododendrons, particularly in the late summer. They are unmistakable: the wings are viridian and the blue-green colour is offset by a red stripe. The heads are yellow. Even on a dull day this species looks bright.

A number of mines and galls were found which were new for the site. Of these the most interesting was the mine of the micro-moth *Phyllonorycter blancardella* on Crab Apple, for which this is only the fourth Island record since the 1930s.

Four Swifts were seen flying south, and Jays were heard but not seen.

22nd September **America Wood**

Five members visited America Wood on a fine bright afternoon. Many of the most interesting butterfly species and some of the best birdlife were seen on the approaches to the wood from Upper Hyde Farm Road. These included Comma, Small Copper, and at least a dozen Red Admirals attracted by tree sap near the entrance to the wood proper. We spent a lot of time admiring the forays of a couple of Spotted Flycatchers, and there were a pair of Buzzards, a Sparrowhawk and a party of Siskin among the other birds to be seen. Once again there were a number of Jays in evidence.

Inside the wood Large Whites predominated. Harlequin and Sixteen-spot Ladybirds were found, as well as the Hawthorn Shield Bug, a Sloe Bug and the Woundwort Bug. One of the most interesting records was the second record for the handsome bug *Liorhyssus hyalinus* first recorded on the Isle of Wight in 2007, and which is clearly starting to colonize.

The other record of particular interest was the mine of a sawfly *Scolioneura betuleti* on Downy Birch. This was recorded as an adult by Saunt, back in 1934 in Shorwell, but this is the first record of the mine of this species on the Island.

Richard Smout

Fungi

Our first meeting was held on 7th September several weeks before we usually start our autumn season as we wished to see the very rare *Amanita ovoidea,* The Bearded Amanita. A Mediterranean species only found regularly in Britain on St Boniface Down and is found in association with Holm Oak. A very steep climb was required from the Industrial Estate but we were delighted to see it thriving and were able to see it in all stages. At the time of planning this meeting we were not expecting to see any other fungi as it is usually too dry, but we had a very wet summer and some other species were found. What was particularly interesting, and unexpected, was to see a number of normally woodland fungi growing in open grassland and clearly associated with Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularia).* In all 23 species were identified including two identified by specialists, *Boletus radican (Boletus albidus)* under Holm Oak identified by Alan Hills and *Entoloma incanum,* Mousepee Pinkgill, confirmed by Alan Outen.

Our next meeting was on 4th October at America Woods, a site we have not visited before as a group as car parking is a problem. In all 38 species were identified including fine specimens of the Earthball, *Scleroderma citrinum* with *Boletus parasiticus* growing on it. This is a common sight in these woods. We also had two species of Amanita, *Amanita citrina,* False Deathcap and *Amanita phalloides,* The Deathcap. The latter is very aptly named. The Deceivers were well represented with *Laccaria laccata,* The Deceiver and *Laccaria amythstea,* Amethyst Deceiver. *Phallus impudicus,* The Stinkhorn, was also seen; the only other time this was found during the season was at Firestone Copse.

The next meeting was our annual foray with Alan Outen again identifying the specimens for us. This year a very knowledgeable group from the Hampshire Fungi Group joined us. The morning session concentrated on the south of the wood and the afternoon, north to the Old Mill Pond. In total 216 species were recorded in Firestone Copse many of them species that we (IWNHAS members) are unable to identify for ourselves – resupinates in particular and also tiny *Mycena* and related species. We were particularly pleased to see *Clavariadelphus pistillaris,* Giant Club, and *Craterellus cornucopiodes,* Horn of Plenty. The Giant Club looks just like a miniature version of the Giants Club illustrated in children's fairy stories. This was the first year I had seen this species. I have seen The Horn of Plenty, a black fungus, in the same area for some years now. The next day some of us went to Bonchurch Landslip and a further 103 species were identified by Alan Outen during the morning. In all, a total of 30 new records were identified during the weekend.

On 1st November we met at Jubilee National Trust car park on a very overcast morning for foray at Westover. It soon started to pour with rain and, although, we were under the trees for the most part, the meeting was abandoned after about an hour. We mainly searched for fungi under Beech trees which had turned a beautiful colour. Conifer stumps were also seen. Despite the fact we had a sharp frost a few days before the meeting and some of the fungi were rather dry we identified 30 species. *Bjerkandera adusta,* Smoky Bracket, was well represented and *Clitocybe nebularis,* Clouded Agaric, as well as *Collybia dryophila,* Russet Toughshank. Margaret Nelmes found a fine specimen of *Geastrum sessile,* Sessile Earthstar just before we abandoned the meeting.

Our next meeting was at Mark's Corner on a dry, mild morning. The tree cover mainly consisted of Beech, Sweet Chestnut and Oak and, although, we had to work hard to find the fungi 55 species were identified. *Hemimycena tortuosa,* the tiny white *Mycena* found in Robin Wood last year was also seen here this time. 12 other *Mycena* were identified. The Russulas seem not to be much in evidence during our forays this year, having fruited early, but we managed to find *Russula mairei,* Beechwood Sickener, and *Russula ochroleuca,* Ochre Brittlegill. Two Boletes were seen, *Boletus cisalpinus (chrysenteron),* Red Cracking Bolete, and *Boletus pruinatus,* Matt Bolete, and particularly fine specimens of *Ganaderma adspersum*, the Southern Bracket. A very striking pink slime mould was admired but not identified. It looked like a miniature alien spacecraft on many long stilts and was probably a species of *Stemonitis*.

Mill Copse was our next meeting; the last time we visited was in 1992 when the midges were out in profusion. This time we were free from these biting insects, as it was a very cold overcast morning. Mill Copse used to be predominantly conifer trees but since Wight Nature Fund has managed the site they have gradually been clearing them from the wood. Although some conifers remain there are also Oak, Hazel and Birch. Again, we had to work at finding fungi, however, 53 species were identified. The dominant species was *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis,* The Goblet, a late season fungus. Both the Wood Mushrooms were represented with *Agaricus silvicola,* The Wood Mushroom, and *Agaricus silvaticus,* The Blushing Wood Mushroom. A very photogenic clump of *Trametes versicolor,* Turkeytail, was seen on a stump and one rather dried up specimen of *Tricholomopsis rutilans,* Plums and Custard. In the car park a clump of *Stropharia aurantiaca,* Redlead Roundhead, was seen growing on wood chippings on 15th November at the end of IWNHAS winter walks bird meeting. However, they were no longer there on 29th November, the date of our fungi meeting. We did see *Tubaria furfuracea*, the Scurfy Twiglet, which is another characteristic wood chip fungus.

The last meeting on 14th December was a very wet affair with 6 stalwarts turning up for the meeting. It was decided to collect the specimens and then retire to the café for a coffee and identification session. Unfortunately, we had some very cold, frosty nights during the previous week and not many fungi were about. We were particularly interested in seeing what fungi would be found in the very specialist substrate of wood chippings and wood retaining walls at Ventnor Botanic Gardens which produces specialist fungi species but little was around although we did find *Stropharia aurantiaca,* Redlead Roundhead, which has a reddish cap and yellow gills with dark spores, the gill colour very reminiscent of Sulphur Tuft. A particularly fine specimen of *Pleurotus ostreatus,* Oyster Mushroom, was seen growing on the wood retaining walls by the glass house. A rather dried up specimen of *Macrolepiota procera,* the Parasol Mushroom had us fooled but Colin and Jillie took it home to look at the spore print. Two specimens of *Geastrum triplex,* Collared Earthstar, were unexpectedly found and nearby a small brown fungus with a very distinctive detached ring on the stem again was taken home by Colin and Jillie and identified as *Conocybe rugosa,* a specialist of wood chip cover. David saw *Puccinia lagenophorae*. This is a yellow rust fungus and seems to grow in some profusion on Groundsell and can easily be spotted. You may well have some in your garden or street.

(Photos - page 19)

Jackie Hart

Geology

28th September A Fossil hunt at Atherfield

On a beautiful, warm and sunny late September afternoon I can't imagine enjoying anything half as much as simply strolling along a sandy beach hunting for fossils. And some twenty-five of our members must have thought so too, for they accepted my invitation to come along. Paul Newton and Steve Hutt, from the Geological Society of the Isle of Wight, kindly offered to take us on a guided walk, and they brought with them some fellow enthusiasts.

We met on the Military Road near Atherfield Bay Holiday Camp and walked along Shepherd's Chine to the beach. Looking westward, Paul and Steve described the various geological formations of the coastal landscape, from the south-westerly tip of the island at the Needles to where we were standing. The very white Upper Chalk cliffs west of Freshwater Bay are full of flint. They are almost vertical, owing to a collision between Africa and Europe, and earlier tectonic plate movements, which squeezed the land and forced it upwards. Chalk is a marine rock. Middle and Lower Chalk, which is full of marcasite and iron, extends into Compton Bay, where the base of the Lower Chalk can be seen. Beyond this, sandwiched between the Upper Greensand and the Lower Greensand there is Gault (or *'Blue Slipper'*) Clay. All the rocks within our view, from the Needles to St Catherine's Point, are of Cretaceous age. On the island the rocks get increasingly younger as you travel northward. The Wealden beds, from Compton Bay to Atherfield Point, contain the skeletons of terrestrial dinosaurs which are a hundred and thirty million years old. There are also trace fossils of dinosaur footprints which have fallen onto the beach.

We turned eastward, where the mudstones of the Shepherd's Chine Member form the base of the cliffs as far as Atherfield Point. Here we found thin slabs of limestone on the beach. These are packed with shell debris: disarticulated valves of the brackish water bivalve *Filosina gregaria*. Turning them over, we discovered many small U-shaped *Diplocraterion* burrows. These limestones may have been formed by storms sweeping across a shallow lagoon.

In the Perna Bed (Greensand), at the base of the Atherfield Clay Formation, you can find bivalves (two shells hinged together, such as oysters), gastropods (snails), brachiopods (similar to bivalves, and which attach themselves to rocks), corals and serpulid worm tubes. We found various kinds of fossilised oyster shells, including a flat type and the large oyster *Aetostreon*. Oysters build up many layers of shell for defence against rough seas and predators. There were also many trace fossils in the rocks strewn about the beach. These are the burrows and trails made by various sea creatures moving through the mud on this shallow marine shelf.

At Atherfield Point there is a hard ledge of Perna Bed forming a long reef at low tide where you can find bivalves and a small bun coral the size of a golfball. From here we could see the whole of Chale Bay, as far as St Catherine's Point. Continuing eastward, we came across soft, grey-brown clay containing fossilised lobsters. These are identified as blue or pinkish-brown protuberances.

The highlight of the walk for me was discovering the *crackers*, huge doorknob shapes dotted along two horizontal strata on the lower cliff-face. Some of the nodules have soft cores containing beautifully preserved ammonites, bivalves, molluscs, gastropods, crustaceans, and echinoderms (such as sea urchins, the skeleton being composed of six-sided plates).

The Back of the Wight, or south coast of the island, is a good area for fossil hunting because its cliffs are constantly falling, but this is also a hazard. Another is being cut off by the tide. You need to time your trip to coincide with a falling tide, giving you some hours to explore before the tide reclaims the beach. Here you can easily lose track of time, and so it is a good way to unwind from the hectic demands of twenty-first century living.

The coastal scenery from Atherfield to St Catherine's Point is dramatic, untamed. Virtually sheer cliffs rise like impenetrable fortresses, dominating the landscape and dwarfing any humans on the beach. Only the most adaptable plants still cling to these crumbling walls. Wind and rainwater have carved the Upper Greensand at the top into fantastic shapes: pinnacles and turrets. Streams of brightly coloured minerals: red and yellow, flow from the base of the cliff, staining the rock. It only takes a little imagination to transport yourself back some two hundred million years to an age, long before Man evolved, when ammonites flourished here.

Margaret Nelmes

Ornithology

19th July

Nine members met at Fort Victoria Country Park on a pleasant but blustery morning. We began with a sea watch and throughout the 35 minutes there was a passage of Sandwich and Common Tern flying east to west. We also saw many Gannet flying west; at least 35, some very near and we had great opportunities to see this beautiful bird close up. Immatures were well represented. Later the Gannet were noted flying east. We also saw Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Black-headed Gull. On the sea close to us we had a good view of Guillemot, one seemed to remain all morning near the derelict pier, as we saw one there on our return from the walk at mid-day. We then walked up through the wood past Fort Warden and back along the fields. We did manage to see a few Swallow, 6, House Martin, 3, and Swift, 16, and an immature Stonechat in the usual place.
28 species were seen or heard during the course of the morning.

17th August

Ten members braved the pot-holed track to meet at the far car park on Luccombe Down on a pleasant morning. Unfortunately, we had not had much of a fall of birds over night and only 22 species were seen

during the course of the morning. A few Swallows and Sand Martins were seen but no House Martins – not many of the latter have been in evidence during the summer months. Four Swift were also noted. We were delighted to see three Dartford Warbler and a Raven was first heard and later seen. A Peregrine was seen near the radar station, three Kestrel hung in the air, three Buzzard used the thermals and a Wheatear remained on a fence post for some time for us to admire it. A Grey Heron flew over and was later seen flying toward the cliff at Luccombe.

7th September

David Biggs reported. Ten members met at the National Trust car park at Mottistone on a perfect autumn morning to walk up to Mottistone Common, through the grounds of Brook Hill House then back over Pay Down. Thence down to the Longstone and further down to the starting place. 33 species were definitely identified with a possible Hobby. Included in the number were 3 species of raptor – one each of Common Buzzard, Kestrel and Peregrine, two species of Woodpecker – three Green Woodpecker and one Great Spotted Woodpecker. There were five Sand Martin and abundant numbers of House Martin and Swallow. It was nice to see seven Mistle Thrush and in the warbler category – one Blackcap, one Garden Warbler, one Common Whitethroat, and three Chiffchaff.

12th October

In surprisingly bright and sunny conditions, considering that much of the rest of the Island was shrouded in fog, six members met at the Chalkpit car park at West High Down, for a leisurely walk up to the bushes, around the Beacon fence line and then down to the lower slope of the down opposite Warren Farm. Much of the time was spent watching seven obliging Stonechats and two Dartford Warblers in the gorse. Moving overhead were five Swallows, five House Martins, four Skylarks, five Pied Wagtails and four Siskins. In total, 14 Chiffchaffs were seen and/or heard and eight Jays, including a group of seven. There had been a recent influx of the latter species from the Continent. Also of note were a charm of 16 Goldfinches and two Ravens on the ground near Tennyson's Monument. In all, 26 species were seen.

9th November

A total of 19 people set off from the River Road car park at Yarmouth on a walk that had been advertised to the general public in the Winter Walks leaflet produced by the Isle of Wight Council. This was the first walk advertised in this way by the Society for several years. The attendance by non-Society members was good and several people expressed an interest in joining the Society during the walk and were given membership forms. Everyone was glad to get out after a few days of very wet weather, although it was still very windy. The tide was initially high so we went directly to the old railway track to see what was on the station ponds and Rofford Marsh, where the water levels were high after being very low for most of the autumn. Most notable were the resident Mute Swan pair with this year's three large young, five Shoveler, four Snipe that flew up from Rofford Marsh and good numbers of feeding Wigeon and Teal. We then walked back up the railway line to Mill Copse Scrape from where we could see two Grey Herons hunched down in the reedbed on the opposite side of the river, one Little Egret, two Oystercatchers and two Grey Plovers. On the way back to the car park, the tide had dropped exposing some fresh mud for a feeding Turnstone, which was much enjoyed by all. A total of 36 species was seen.

22nd November

Sixteen members met at Ryde Canoe Lake at high tide on a very cold morning for a walk along Ryde Sands and through Appley Park. The Sanderlings were feeding just above the tide on the beach opposite the lake and 105 were counted along with 19 Ringed Plovers and four Dunlins. On the Canoe Lake were 57 Mute Swans, 13 Canada Geese and many Mallards. The tide quickly receded and farther east along the beach we saw two adult Mediterranean Gulls and three Common Gulls, four Oystercatchers, 91 Brent Geese and a Little Egret. A single Great Crested Grebe and a few Cormorants were on the sea. We then headed inland to Appley Park, which was more sheltered out of the wind. Here we saw Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, a single Redwing, Mistle Thrush, several Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits, and many Woodpigeons in the treetops, including young birds without white neck collars. Thirty species were seen in total.

14th December

Seaview - The morning began with fog but by the time nine members started the walk the fog had cleared. As usual we started with a sea watch along the Duver. Fortunately the sea was calm. We had good views of Mediterranean Gull, Red Breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe. Two of us saw two duck fly east, low and very near to us and identified them as two female Smew. We visited the Hersey Reserve next where we saw Little Grebe, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Coot, Moorhen, a very snooty Cormorant, 4 Lapwing, 32 Oystercatcher, 3 female and 2 male Tufted Duck, a Buzzard and a Fox. We continued walking along the sea front and met up with a group of IWOG who pointed out 7 Great Northern Diver swimming in the distance, but we had good views through the telescope. We then walked inland past the now closed Wishing Well where we saw the free flying Barnacle Geese - 172 in number, with a Snow Goose and a Blue phased Snow Goose as well. In the woodland we had Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long Tailed Tit and Chaffinch. During the morning we saw 45 species in total.

Jackie Hart & Caroline Dudley

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARIES' NOTES

New Members

Deaths

Society Officers

President Mrs. J. Jones, Woodlands Cottage, Marvel Lane, Carisbrooke, PO30 3DT

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Next Bulletin

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