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# Bulletin

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## President's Address

The summer of 2009 was filled with the preparation and organisation of the celebratory exhibition at Newport Minster, which finally appeared on time, all the screens and exhibits in place and the computer slide show working efficiently. The two sections of the exhibition proved to balance well. Richard Smout must be congratulated in achieving a visually stimulating display. With a judicious selection of text and illustrations Richard brought the whole subject to life. Many who saw the display will have realised for the first time the importance of Morey's work to the life of the Island.

Visitors enjoyed the historic survey of the Society's progress over 90 years and many spoke of their delight in being reminded of Local Look, which had been part of their summer activities over many seasons. One early arrival was a lady who was surprised to find her grandfather's name among the Officers of the Society. This was Frank Snow, the first treasurer and we now have a photograph of him, as part of the Society's archive.

Many people contributed to the success of the exhibition and I should like to thank you all. Two members must be mentioned particularly; Lynda Snaith, who was responsible for the production of the posters and their distribution and Mike Cahill who was always ready to respond to my many requests right up to the opening day. It was a worthwhile project but it must not be left at that. This was the first time for many years since the Society had presented itself to the public in this particular way. We must keep it up.

You know by now that in November we received notice from the Isle of Wight Council requiring us to leave our headquarters within six months, a situation demanding immediate attention. Our Council met on 16<sup>th</sup> November and from that date had six months in which to make plans for the future. Suggestions from members came in very quickly and all are being explored but it seems likely that we may have to take time before we find a permanent home. Meanwhile, temporary accommodation to house the office equipment and allow the day to day management of the Society should be available in the time we are permitted. This sudden crisis has concentrated our minds on the future of the Society. We are fortunate in having resources to help us weather the storm and see how best we can adapt to changing economic conditions and I have no doubt that all will be well.

Joanna Jones

# NOTICE BOARD

## **New Bird Recorder for the Isle of Wight**

Graham Sparshott has now moved to Scotland and a new Bird Recorder has been appointed. He is Dr Robin Attrill, 17 Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6BA. Robin@rpatrill.freemove.co.uk. Tel No. 01279 423467. All records should be sent to him and the preferred format is by using IWOG's MS Word template. A copy can be obtained from him or you can send electronically by MS Excel spreadsheet or an email, or a paper copy. Records can be submitted on an ongoing basis or *en bloc* at the year's end – ideally by the end of January annually. Supporting photographs, even less than optimal 'record shots', for rarities are very valuable.

Robin is a native of the Isle of Wight and still regards the IW as 'home' and does most of his birding here, typically visiting 2-3 times a month.

**Jackie Hart**

## **Moth Records**

Please send any moth records for recording, to Ian Fletcher.

Speedwell, Solent Road,  
Cranmore . IOW. PO41 0XY  
Email:-  
speedfletcher@virgin.net

He will arrange for verification by  
Sam Knill-Jones .

## **Hedgehog House**

The Society has been donated a wooden Hedgehog House. If anyone has a Hedgehog visiting their garden and would like the house, please contact HQ.

## **Red Squirrel Survival Trust bi-annual Survey**

Anyone is invited to take part in the Survey and the Form can be found on the Web at:- [www.rsst.org.uk](http://www.rsst.org.uk) To find it, go to :- Home Page – RSST News – Take part in RSST's Red Squirrel Survey.

## **International Year of Biodiversity 2010**

The United Nations has declared 2010 International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) to celebrate the diversity of all life on Earth. IYB UK is being led by the Natural History Museum and has over 200 partners supporting the campaign including the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership. This coming year there will be many events celebrating the rich tapestry of life around us, opportunities to discover why biodiversity is important for a healthy environment and ways to get involved in monitoring and conserving your local wildlife. If you would like to find out more about the campaign visit the official IYB UK website at [www.biodiversityislife.net](http://www.biodiversityislife.net)



## Country Notes

**.Rooks at School.** Archbishop King School, Wellington Road, Newport, is host to a colony of Rooks. Seven nests are sited just within the busy entrance and situated in Silver Birch, *Betula pendula* and Weeping Willow, *Salix babylonica*. No nest is more than twenty feet from the ground and humans and rooks are competing to be heard.

**Buddleia & Butterflies.** If the *Buddleia davidii* was sold today under the name of "Butterfly Bush" it would probably contravene the Trades Description Act.

There is no doubt the Buddleia no longer holds the same attraction for these insects and in the absence of a scientific explanation theories become acceptable.

No doubt butterflies have a preference for food species and with the considerable reduction in numbers, the Buddleia has been relegated to little more than a secondary source of supply.

**Disorientated Wasps.** A strong colony of wasps, *Vespula vulgaris*, had taken possession of an out-house in Newport. It would appear that the queen had been lost, for there were attempts to build comb in numerous places. One of these being down the edge of a curtain. ( **Photo**, page 17 )

**Some special trees.** When we refer to a Red Oak the accolade for that brilliant autumn colour is awarded to *Quercus rubra*, but you may be looking at one of five species. For instance, the oak in Chestnut Close at Shide is a Pin Oak, *Quercus palustris*. A *Quercus rubra* can be seen in Binstead Churchyard.

**Pride of India, or Golden Rain Tree.** *Koelreuteria paniculata*. One excellent specimen best viewed in July when in flower. The specimen in Spring Lane, Carisbrooke is spectacular when viewed from the south. Unfortunately the view from Carisbrooke High Street is denied by the close planting of a conifer. Another specimen can be seen in the Medina Arboretum, planted as a memorial and now of flowering size. Unfortunately the plaque reads "*Sorbus aucuparia*".

**Monkey Puzzle or Chile Pine.** *Araucaria araucana*. An easily identified tree, but have you seen it producing cones. The best specimen, brought to my attention by Toni Goodley and photographed by Hilary Higgins, is in a front garden in Moor Lane, Brighstone. ( **Photo**, page 17 )

**Foxglove Tree** *Paulownia tomentosa*. Unless in flower or fruit can be confused with the next species. In Rink Road, Ryde, this species separates the highway from the Doctor's Surgery.

**(Red) Indian Bean Tree.** *Catalpa bignonioides*. When in fruit and they remain on the tree through the winter, the pods can be a foot in length. The finest specimen to come to my notice is at Shide, just in the Blackwater Road, where the vegetation runs down to the river.

**Maidenhair Tree.** *Ginkgo biloba*. Perhaps the tallest specimen stands in the grounds of the Melville Hall Hotel, Sandown, but the best one is close to the entrance of the Ventnor Botanic Garden, but on land of the Ventnor Cricket Club. If you are tempted to view, remember this tree is deciduous. I am waiting to see this tree in fruit, an event we shall all be aware of and it is hoped worthy of a Tree Preservation Order.

**Spanish or Hedgehog Fir.** *Abies pinsapo*. As you enter Ashley Cemetery, you are confronted by two conifers, one on each side of the main path. An inspection will convince of the authenticity of the common name of Hedgehog Fir. The photographs are by Hilary Higgins. ( **Photo**, page 17 )

**Line of Posts.** The photo is of a little known or ignored artefact that accompanies you along almost the entire length of the Cowes to Newport cycle track. Concrete posts, equidistant and approximately two

feet high with a concave top. In 1900, Newport had an electricity generating station. Cowes did not have this facility and electricity was supplied from Newport. The cable ran alongside the railway on top of these posts.

### Finally a request.

Has anyone seen a Dutchman's Pipe, *Aristolochia* spp., on the Island, other than in the Ventnor Botanic Garden ?

Bill Shepard

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## The Octogenarian

Upon reaching this status eight years ago, I decided a suitable celebration would be a **health check**, not a visit to the health centre, but to make my acquaintance with Michael Hoy. Furthermore, this was not to be achieved via the zimmer frame path from Blackgang, but a direct assault on the western escarpment.

Thus, my ninth successive visit commenced at Chale Green and by way of Gotten Lane I would place myself at the foot of the escarpment, but would require a walk southward to a path some three degrees from vertical and undoubtedly initially introduced by a mountain goat. By a gentle five paces and a lengthy pause under the pretext of admiring the scenery, repeated numerous times, I finally stepped on to the plateau, followed by a gentle stroll along the roof of the Island to the Hoy.

On this occasion Hoy was not my primary objective, for Mike Cotterill had described what I conceived to be a specimen of inosculation on a Beech tree *Fagus sylvatica* (where one limb or branch of a tree joins another in a perfect graft and continues as a single limb). The tree was discovered without difficulty and I was confronted with the strangest natural sculpture I had ever witnessed in my life. To try and describe and theorize on its origin would be futile, it is one of those objects that has to be seen.



The **health check**; sound in body. Mind, suspect ?

P.S. This picture (taken by Mike Cotterill) of a “handle” on a Beech tree on Newbarn Down appears to be a similar feature and seems to be confined to this tree species.

Bill Shepard



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## Yet another Gall Wasp Invader

Six alien Oak Gall wasps have invaded the Island over the past 35 years, each with its own characteristic galls. The now common Knopper gall caused by *Andricus quercuscalicis* was first recorded here in 1975. This was followed by the Cola Nut gall of *Andricus lignicola* in 1986. *Andricus aries* and its dramatic Ram's Horn gall and the Sea Anemone gall of *Andricus grossulariae* were both found in 2003. All of these galls affect our native Pedunculate and Sessile Oaks.

In 2008 *Plagiotrochus quercusilicis* was discovered on Holm or Evergreen Oak and now *Neuroterus saliens* has appeared here on Turkey Oak. So far the only site discovered for this new gall is on the Osborne Estate where two examples were found on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009. (**Photo**, page 17 )

The gall is a small red oval object 3-5mm long and 1.5mm wide with pointed ends. With the microscope it is seen to have very numerous transverse ridges. It is to be found on the midrib or petiole of the leaf or on young twigs. It is a southern and central European species affecting several different Oaks and is especially common on Cork Oaks in Spain.

For those interested in languages *saliens* is Latin for leaping and it is a curious fact that warming the gall and its contained larva in the palm of the hand results in the gall jumping, due to contractions of the body of the larva. Remember jumping beans ?

D.T. Biggs  
Gall Recorder

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### Alien Breeding in Dave Dana's Garden

In Issue 51 of the Bulletin published in February 2009 I drew attention to the arrival on the Island of two adult individuals of the Western Conifer Seed Bug *Leptoglossus occidentalis*. James Halsey had found them in his house in Bonchurch in October 2008. There had been a large influx across the Channel all along the south coast of England from late summer to October. At the time of writing that note, there was no evidence of breeding in England but I wrote that we could probably look forward to its establishment here.

Recently, Dave Dana sent me a photograph of an immature bug, which he had found in his kitchen in Wroxall on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009 and I was able to identify it as a late instar nymph of *Leptoglossus occidentalis*. Such nymphs have only undeveloped wings. This means that it could not have flown here and had to have been bred locally. I sent the photograph to Bernard Nau, who is the national recorder for Heteroptera (True Bugs) who confirmed my identification and that this record was the first record of breeding in Britain.

Sam Knill-Jones had two adults in his moth trap at Totland on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009. It is possible that another individual was found in a house in Nettlestone, but the owner being just an Ornithologist and Mycologist, the insect was shown the door !!

Native to North America west of the Rockies, the bug was accidentally introduced into Europe, being first discovered in Italy in 1999. It feeds on the flowers, developing cones and seeds of various conifers, being a pest of conifer seed nurseries. It also causes alarm by its habit of congregating in swarms inside houses in winter.

( **Photo**, page 17 ) by Dave Dana

D.T. Biggs  
Hemiptera Recorder

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### Andy's Nature Notebook

**3<sup>rd</sup> July** – It wasn't until today that we saw the first Hummingbird Hawkmoth of the year, this is surprising as they are usually recorded in the spring.

**5<sup>th</sup> July** – First Jersey Tiger Moth of the year in the garden.

**10<sup>th</sup> July** – On a visit to a wood near Havenstreet we saw 10 Silver-washed Fritillaries flying through the trees in the dappled sunlight, a wonderful sight. (**Photo** page 19 )

**12<sup>th</sup> July** – On a walk through Castle Cove (near Steephill) on a sunny Sunday we recorded 100s of Five-spot Burnet moths on Buddleia flowers at the rear of the cove. On one small patch of Buddleia there were at least 250 moths. Also on this day there was an Essex Skipper in our garden. Most interestingly of all was a phone call from Ian Merrifield to say that he had just seen a Large Tortoiseshell at close range nectaring on Bramble flowers along the Shide to Blackwater cycle way.

**17<sup>th</sup> /18<sup>th</sup> July** – Two days of south westerly gales and rain.

**23<sup>rd</sup> July** – The first Clouded Yellow of the year. Seen in our garden, this is another butterfly that we would have expected to see in the spring.

**25<sup>th</sup> July** – A Southern Hawker dragonfly round our new pond.

**28<sup>th</sup> July** – Numerous Painted Lady butterflies about today. These would be locally emerged as a result of the massive invasion in the spring.

**30<sup>th</sup> July** – A Jersey Tiger of the form *Lutescens* in the garden. Instead of scarlet hind wings this form

has yellow ones. A Common Darter dragonfly around the pond.

**7<sup>th</sup> August** – About 200 Painted Ladies and roughly 50 Large White butterflies on the Buddleia at the back of our house. There were also thousands of the small hoverfly *Episyrphus balteatus* in our garden to day.

**8<sup>th</sup> August** – There are now something like 400 Painted Ladies and 150 Large Whites plus Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks, Red Admirals, Commas and Holly Blues all in the confines of our garden. A fantastic sight and a red letter day in butterfly watching for us.

**9<sup>th</sup> August** – A Scorched Carpet Moth in the garden and just along Ventnor esplanade we recorded at least 100 Painted Ladies and 50 odd Large Whites all on one Buddleia bush. Clouded Yellows have also been regular sightings over the last few weeks. A walk along the lower slopes of Bonchurch Down on this day yielded 3 Marbled Whites, c 40 Adonis Blues, ( **Photo** page 19 ), c 30 Chalkhill Blues, 2 Clouded Yellows, c 30 Common Blues, 2 Wall Browns and numerous Painted Ladies. Another great day!

**29<sup>th</sup> August** – It's been one of the best years for Blackberries that we can remember. It was only taking 15mins to pick a 1lb of prime fruit. Fortunately where most people do not bother to pick this finest of berries there's plenty to go round for those of us that do. There is nothing better than Blackberry and Apple crumble or plain fruit cold with cream. Wonderful!

**3<sup>rd</sup> September** – A Red Squirrel ran across the garden in front of us and shot up a Palm Tree. A rather bizarre sight.

**8<sup>th</sup> September** – Two Southern Hawker dragonflies around the pond.

**11<sup>th</sup> September** – A Hummingbird Hawkmoth prospecting round the eaves of a house in Ventnor, looking for a winter hibernation site.

**17<sup>th</sup> September** – A Whimbrel settled on the rocks in Wheelers Bay at the front of our house.

**24<sup>th</sup> September** – Wall Brown in the garden.

**27<sup>th</sup> September** – On a fishing trip down the coast we saw 2 Little Egrets on the rocks below Woody Head and, flying over, 2 Ravens at the same time. There were also massive shoals of fish about mostly Garfish, Bass and Mackerel. A welcome change as this year has been very poor for fish.

**1<sup>st</sup> October** – The last few weeks have also been very good for fishing off the beach and rocks round Rocken End. In particular there have been huge shoals of Twaite Shad. ( **Photo** page 19 ). This is a fish that looks a bit like a Herring and many anglers were taking them home thinking this is what they were, unfortunately they are a fully protected species and should have been returned to the sea. Incidentally they are very bony and do not taste of much. I have to say that we tried them before they were protected!

**10<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> October** – We have observed many Painted Ladies passing through the garden and heading out to sea in a southerly direction.

**16<sup>th</sup> October** – 10 Clouded Yellows plus Painted Ladies around St Catherine's Point.

**27<sup>th</sup> October** – Over the last few days large numbers of Harlequin Ladybirds have been recorded throughout the Island.

**28<sup>th</sup> October** – A Black Redstart on Bonchurch Front.

**5<sup>th</sup> November** – The Oystercatcher that we saw a year or two ago with a leg injury reappeared today. He appears in good health but the bad leg is still just noticeable.

**15<sup>th</sup> November** – A Clouded Yellow appeared in the garden today which is quite remarkable as the previous 24 hours we have had severe westerly gales with 100 mph gusts and torrential rain.

**18<sup>th</sup> November** – A Purple Sandpiper on the sea defence rocks by Ventnor Haven. November has been a very wet and windy month.

**December** - In the early part of December Geoff Blake, a local fisherman, saw 2 Storm Petrels off Ventnor. I think this is very unusual at this time of year.

**10<sup>th</sup> December** – A Clouded Yellow and a Red Admiral were flying around the bank at the back of our house. The following night the wind turned east and very cold weather then set in for many days.

**20<sup>th</sup> December** – An angler caught a 7.5lb Bass from the esplanade at Wheelers Bay. This is on the day when snow and ice caused chaos on the mainland with the trains in the Channel Tunnel stopped!

**26<sup>th</sup> December** – A Heron cleared our pond of fish in one short visit. ( **Photo** page 19 ).

We were not pleased.

Andy Butler

## **National Archaeology Week: The Anglo-Saxon Bounds of Bathingbourne**

To coincide with the national Festival of Archaeology in general and the Guildhall Museum's summer exhibition "Saxon Wight" in particular, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August Anglo-Saxon landscape expert John Margham led a 5-mile walk round the southern half of the surviving Anglo-Saxon estate boundary of Bathingbourne – effectively in what we know today as the parish of Godshill. This follows on from John's walks for the Society round the estate boundaries of Ashey and Bowcombe during his previous summer visits to the Island. It is based on yet another of the original Saxon charters of the Island translated into modern English and interpreted by him, and showing once again that these land boundaries still exist within our modern landscapes.

For Lammas or the first day of harvest, it could not have been a wetter, windier start as 21 souls huddled together outside the Griffin at Godshill, a number far exceeding John's expectations - given the dreadful weather - of those who had originally booked for the walk. The excursion took us to places where some of us had never been before, through slippery mud, across fields of maize six feet high where all trace of a footpath had been ploughed out, and other such delights. But none of it deflected John one iota from the task in hand.

The original Saxon charter was based on a grant made by Eadwig, king of the English from c.955-959, to his theign Aethelgeard; it consisted of five hides – an elusive and changeable measurement of land - at Bathingbourne. In the wind and the rain the route was a particularly difficult one to match on the modern OS map with the original Anglo-Saxon estate map John had provided us with: the following are some selected highlights.

The original charter mentions as boundary points: not surprisingly, the stream known as the 'Bathing Bourne'; 'the ditch to the stone' which follows the Arreton/Godshill parish boundary; and 'the green way to the other stone' – the 'green way' being the modern metalled road known as Bathingbourne Lane, whilst the 'other stone' would appear to have been located just to the north of Bobberstone. 'The sandy highway' was most likely the line of the road from Shanklin to Godshill, where the place-name Sandford preserves something of the original tenth-century description. 'The rush pond' may refer to either the surviving small pond to the north of Gat Cliff or a larger one, now dry, to the east. John proposed identifying 'the stone hill' with the prominent carstone hill immediately south of Sainham, a more plausible interpretation than Kokeritz's suggestion of the hill on which Godshill church now stands. This location accords well with the adjoining point on the bounds, the 'hollow brook', identifiable with the small, deep valley running northwards from Sainham to the east of Godshill. The stones mentioned in the charter would all appear to be boundary markers rather than anything prehistoric.

Rarely can a walk involving such a scholarly historical analysis of early medieval documents have been accompanied by such unfavourable weather conditions, and it is a tribute to John's tenacity that he stuck firmly to his agenda. At the end of the walk he paid tribute to Margaret Gelling, who died earlier in the year: her leading role in place-name studies has meant that without her invaluable assistance this research into the Anglo-Saxon charter bounds of the Isle of Wight, and many others like it round the country, would not have been possible. A round of applause concluded the session and, despite everything, we all departed feeling thoroughly rejuvenated.

Alan Phillips

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## **Brading Big Dig 2009**

Whilst it felt like old times as the diggers and supporters gathered on the first Sunday in August, this year's dig was quite different from last year's, investigating several smaller areas rather than just one large building. Sir Barry Cunliffe approached the South Range with little information as to what was under the ground beyond an outline plan and a pretty watercolour of what was thought to be a bathhouse, later equipped with ovens,

The resulting excavations revealed much and left more intriguing questions about this fascinating site.

The existence of the bathhouse was confirmed and, despite being left exposed to the elements and used as a rubbish dump until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, enough of the foundation walls survived to produce a good plan. Intriguingly, an older ditch crossed the site at an angle and has produced some dating evidence. Another surprise was the puddle of molten lead near the edge of the flue, evidence of the on-site plumber making or repairing the lead pipes that carried the hot water to the plunge pools.

The base of one of the later ovens was also found and it seems that they were part of a later building that replaced the bathhouse whilst using part of the existing walls.

Trenches to investigate the rectangular 'farm-buildings' exposed some substantial square chalk footings that could be evidence of a granary (as supposed by the Victorian archaeologists) but could signify some other substantial building..

Sir Barry also set a select few to work on the West Range inside the main cover building. By 'tidying up' some of the walls, corners and doorways he was able to produce an order of construction for this building that must change our current story,

Inevitably, we are left with a new set of questions. With the bathhouse dated at some point in the second century we now ask, "Where is the house that this bath suite served?" And what was the purpose of the rooms with raised floors at the rear of the West Range?

I hope the work continues next year. As well as finding out more about the West Range, Sir Barry hopes to excavate the site of the pre-Roman settlement below the car park. Meanwhile I eagerly await the publication of the interim report. ( **Photos**, page 18 )

Helen Jackson

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### Rare Migrant Moth

On 21<sup>st</sup> August, I noticed a moth similar to a Red Underwing in my moth trap in my garden at Totland, which I thought could be an example of the Rosy Underwing (*Catocala electa*). It was rather frisky and as I put a pill-box over it the moth flew into my pyjamas and dressing-gown. However, I managed to get it into the box but it was very nearly the one that got away! This is an extremely rare migrant and is the ninth British record and new to Hampshire and the IW. On September 17th and 20th, I caught two male Clifden Nonpareil (*Catocala fraxini*), which is quite a scarce migrant, and so it has been a remarkable year for this family of moths.

Sam Knill-Jones

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### Cemetery Warden Scheme

#### God's acres to be saved...

How many people reading this have enjoyed a contemplative walk around a burial ground?

Church graveyards and municipal cemeteries are a window into the past. They are often one of the last remaining habitats of rare wildflowers including orchids. An array of bird, bat and insect life can be found. Butterflies are known to benefit from the ivy and long meadow grasses. Venerable majestic trees such as oak and yew and beech can be seen. Add to the array of native wildlife the social and local history that can be gleaned from the headstones it is no wonder that many people are fascinated by these places. A place of death and remembrance and a space for heritage and wildlife.

On the Isle of Wight the Footprint Trust has launched a Cemetery Warden scheme thanks to support from Heritage Lottery funded West Wight Landscape Partnership.

Those wishing to train and become Cemetery Wardens will have an interest in nature conservation, the landscape, heritage and the community – as this scheme intends to seek to bring together these diverse concerns. Members of the IWNHAS would be most welcome due to their interests and expertise.

Cemetery Wardens will act as ambassadors for burial grounds, seeking to inform, educate and involve the local community and working with the owners of the site. They will work with other interested



individuals and groups to assist in looking after the local burial ground. This scheme covers all burial grounds, including municipal cemeteries and churchyards, subject to the owner's permission.

The scheme welcomes people of all faiths, or none, to take part in this on going project. All those completing this free training course will be volunteers of the Footprint Trust and insured by them.

If you have an interest in burial grounds please contact the Footprint Trust for more details or find the leaflet in your local library.      info@footprint-trust.co.uk      Tel; 01983 82-22-82.

Ray Harrington-Vail, General Manager, Footprint Trust Ltd, Riverside Centre, The Quay  
Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 2QR

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### **The Sticky Mousetrap**

In the days, when the Island communities were governed by their own councils, these six authorities contributed to the financial support of a joint pest control unit. There were six operators, ensuring that one would be operating in each area.

An experienced operator had been called to a tobacconist/confectioner's establishment where a solitary mouse had been seen. After several attempts to capture the miscreant, he reported his failure and another operator was sent, and another, until five operators had been outwitted by this tiny creature and admitted defeat.

The sixth operator had been deliberately excluded from this operation for fear his mannerisms would exacerbate the situation further, but that point was long since passed. After five very experienced operators had been defeated this sixth operator actually volunteered to face this irate proprietor. Surely this action describes the person who had been excluded from the operation to date. His decision was treated with derision, but there was nothing further to lose.

At eight o'clock the following day, as regular as an alarm, the telephone was answered with trepidation. "Good morning, would you ask the operator who called yesterday to look into the shop in passing, there are fifty cigarettes for him". Stunned silence followed. How had he done it? He purchased two sticky flypapers, the kind you hung from the ceiling when flies were prevalent and a nuisance. Backed one side with newspaper and placed them along the skirting board. The mouse was neatly rolled up and completely trapped.

Bill Shepard

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### **A Digger's Diary**

Brading Big Dig 2009. Sunday 2nd August 2009 arrives at last! Arrive on site at 08.30 to find a sizeable crowd gathered in front of a line of huts, a yurt, a small marquee, a generator and three portaloos. After a brief briefing by the dig director, Sir Barry Cunliffe, the diggers are despatched to the area that will become the main excavation. Pegs and strings demarcate a rectangle fifteen by ten metres, we are divided into small teams, assigned a team leader and set to work deturfing.

That day our team, led by Graham, join all the other teams in deturfing, shovelling, mattocking, barrowing and turf stacking. It's tiring work but working in a team of three with Mark and Sally gives the barrower a rest whilst the barrow fills; tasks are rotational.

On day two, to my horror, I am late! Graham's team are already hard at work and not in need of additional help, I am assigned to Wendy and will join her team working on the most westerly strip of the excavation. The rectangle is divided into five width ways, each three metres wide.

Over the next few days we work in teams of three mattocking, shovelling and barrowing, removing the most recent material first, in this instance the chalk infill deposited in the 1990s to provide visitors with an approximate ground plan of the South range structures excavated by the Victorians. Care is taken not to spread the chalk onto adjacent 'clean' soil. Later, as the now proud soil areas are excavated,

we are vigilant for changes in soil colour. Bob van Arsdell, a member of Wendy's team, is a proficient mattocker and a stickler for straight sided sections! I discover that he has travelled especially from Vermont, USA, and has done many excavations with Sir Barry.

The site changes fast; by day four a central dark brown soil region is causing much interest. Is it a well? a soakaway? In the southern part of Wendy's team area an orangey natural soil has appeared, chalk / flint footings stretch from east to west across the northern part, with a large area of rubble and masonry off centre and towards the south. Tasks are becoming more detailed - the chalk/ flint footings have to be cleaned back. Gavin and Mark teach me to use a small plumbers tool, called a tang, to fine clean. Much metal work is appearing from the dark soil area - Wendy finds part of a hand grenade and a squashed tin bath appears.

On day five, we are asked to extend our area of the excavation in the hope of locating a corner of a wall, so it's back to deturfing, mattocking, shovelling and barrowing. Our only rain appears, late in the afternoon, the tools must be cleaned well this evening. At tea break we are greeted with very welcome Magnum ice-creams!

Day six - the work to the extension continues, we also clean back the fallen masonry and after lunch have our first tour of the site, with Sir Barry, an extensive overview that puts our area into context with adjacent areas - including the stunning stone based cold plunge pool that has been excavated nearby. Gavin excavates a deep 'V' sided ditch in the orangey soil and finds a shard of Iron Age pottery!

Over the next couple of days we continue to clean the masonry area, revealing a wall and Dave's trench has revealed in situ Roman salmon pink/ grey tiles at its base, thought by Sir Barry to be the base of the Hypocaust flue! Wendy is now recording dimensions of each feature in a notebook, which will be used by Sir Barry in the production of the site report.

I learn how to recognise Tufa, not imported but a locally occurring material in limestone regions, found close to springs and used by the Romans in bath-houses. That afternoon I am thrilled to be asked to fine clean the flue tiles, carefully cleaning around each individual tile with a tang and paintbrush. I cannot help wondering about the people who were here originally, creating the fires that had baked those tiles a deep salmon-pink.

Day eight, I'm working with Dave, excavating a new trench, to try to locate the original cut for the stoke hole. The sides are gravelly and have much Victorian rubbish amongst them - glass bottles, rusting ointment containers, fragments of a leather boot! It's hard work, shovelling out material above head height! In the afternoon I am seconded to Lisa's team and work with John, who has excavated a trench through the Roman plough soil down into the orangey natural soil beneath. Sir Barry has asked us to observe for ditches and drains thought to be located there. I am struck by how beautiful this site is - I've been on several previous excavations but this site is like a work of art - the section sides are so straight that they look machine cut. Everything is completed in meticulous detail.

On day ten we are again mattocking, shovelling and barrowing. Gavin and Mark explain the best way to mattock. The mattocker is the 'lead' - constantly noting changes in soil texture, colour and degree of resistance to the mattock - all could denote that a new feature is about to appear, in which case careful trowelling is required to avoid damaging something.

Day eleven, I am asked to clean an area for drawing and am concerned that I've taken off too much - the problem being that you cannot put it back! Once gone it has gone forever....In the afternoon I work again with John, exposing the original outer face of the bath-house wall.

On day twelve Gavin notices an arrangement of stones and on careful trowelling feels that this may be one of the missing Roman bread ovens discovered by the Victorians. Wendy agrees with his interpretation.

Day thirteen is spent with Simon, excavating a ditch that is believed to be Iron Age in origin. We are looking for dating evidence to support this, as Sir Barry believes that this ditch was re-used by the Romans to drain the baths. Simon shows me how to collect samples of the dark grey / brown clayey layer for flotation. That lunch time we have our second guided site tour with Sir Barry, so much has changed in a week! That evening there is a party and already some people have to leave.

Day fourteen, I work close to Kate, Sally and John in the flue area. The task is to expose the wall and return wall from under the dark brown Victorian fill. There is much yellow mortar emerging - Roman mortar! It is a beautiful golden yellow coloured material.

Day fifteen, its my last day - but I'm trying not to think about that! - working with Gavin and Simon on a new extension. The soil type is changing quickly, becoming softer and we are working over a ditch. Several small pottery shards, thought to be early in date, possibly Iron Age, appear along with a Roman bronze coin. All too soon it is 17.45 and Graham is calling "clean up your loose".

It has been a great privilege to be part of this – I've met a lot of great people, have enjoyed the camaraderie and excitement and have worked with many professionally trained and student Archaeologists who have taught me a great deal.

We have enjoyed excellent support in the form of the team of dedicated ladies and occasional man in the tea tent, providing endless cups of tea, in clean cups! Cakes, biscuits, occasional ice-creams and daily provision of raw materials from which to create huge, high energy yielding sandwiches. The administrator Rosemary who has kept things running smoothly, the team from the Archaeology section of the IWNHAS who have come along daily to help wash finds and assist David on the flotation tank, the metal detectorists, working away on the ever growing spoil heap, and Sir Barry Cunliffe, who with his dedicated team of professional Archaeologists has made me feel as included and valued as a team member as I've ever felt on a 'dig'.

Alison Broome

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### Acid Grassland

In the UK, there are many kinds of grassland each with characteristic species of grasses, wild flowers and other wildlife. These differences depend on factors like the nature of the soil, altitude and land use, both now and in the past. Acid grassland occurs on nutrient-poor, generally free-draining soils with pH ranging from 4 to 5.5 overlying acid rocks or superficial deposits such as sands and gravels. It often forms a mosaic with lowland heath, and is also found in parklands and on coastal cliffs. Where it exists on slopes, cultivation has been difficult and it is normally managed as pasture.

On the Island, acid grassland often is associated with dry heathland particularly within Brighstone Forest and on Ventnor Downs. It is found on sand or gravel deposits, such as St George's Down and Head Down, and on stabilised sand dunes at St Helen's Duver and the former intertidal sand flats now within the reclaimed Brading Marshes. Away from the coast, it occurs on the ferruginous sandstone of the low hills south of the chalk ridge, such as Row Down at Brighstone. Acid grassland has declined substantially, mostly due to agricultural intensification although in some areas, afforestation has been significant. Not only have there been large losses, but the many of the sites which remain are small and isolated.

Acid grassland is characterised by plant species such as Heath Bedstraw, Sheep's-fescue, Common Bent, Sheep's Sorrel, Sand Sedge, Bristle Bent and Tormentil. Small amounts of heather may also occur. Acid grasslands may also have a high cover of mosses and lichens. British plant communities have been described the National Vegetation Classification (NVC). Several NVC communities characteristic of acid grassland are found on the Isle of Wight:

U1 dominated by sheep's fescue, common bent and sheep's sorrel (widespread here)

U2 Wavy hair-grass dominated (very rare here)

U3 Bristle bent grassland (rare here)

U4 dominated by sheep's fescue, common bent and heath bedstraw (occasional here)

U5 dominated by mat-grass and heath bedstraw (very rare here)

Acid grassland also occurs in association with stands of bracken and other woodland plants, mostly bluebells.

### Other species associated with acid grassland

Acid grasslands on the Isle of Wight provide habitat for many species of national or local importance. There are 4 national priority BAP species Chamomile, Annual Knawel, Pale Dog Violet and Adder, together 20 species of local conservation concern including Sneezewort, Blue Fleabane, Small Cudweed,

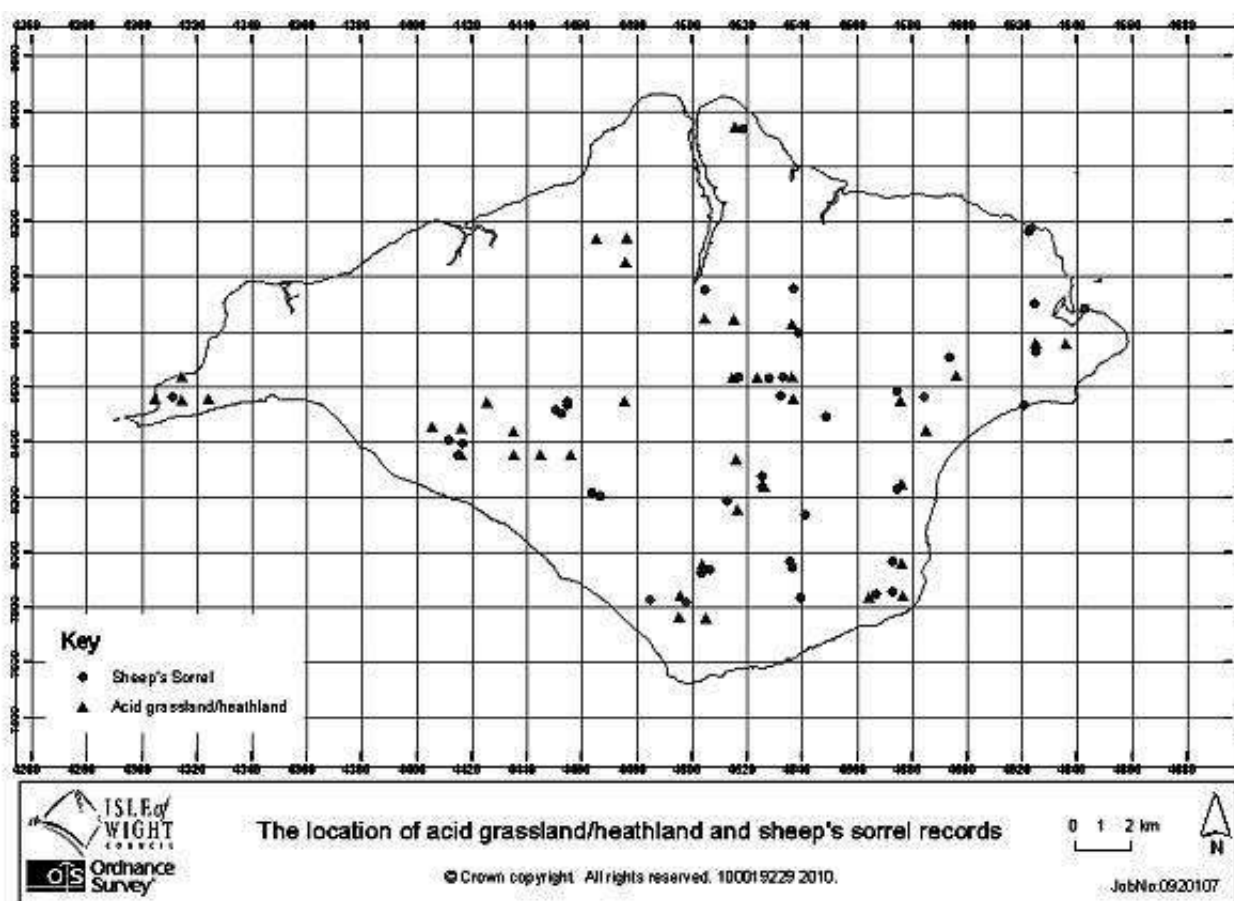
Smooth Catsear, Sheepsbit Scabious, Slender Birdsfoot Trefoil, Toothed Medick, Upright Chickweed, Yarrow Broomrape, Greater Broomrape and Suffocated Clover.

Many of the invertebrates are specialist species, which do not occur in other types of grassland. The open parched acid grasslands can support a considerable number of ground-dwelling and burrowing invertebrates such as solitary bees and wasps. The bird fauna is similar to that of other dry grassland with Nightjar, Skylark and Green Woodpecker utilising it for breeding or feeding.

### Recording species on acid grassland

Although generally rather species-poor, acid grassland is proving to be a good habitat to record, particularly for flowering plants, lichens, fungi and invertebrates. Paul Stanley and Geoff Toone have both found interesting and unexpected plants in recent years. Dry sandy soils warm up quickly in the spring and provide suitable habitats for newly colonising species. There are certain to be new and exciting finds in the coming years. You don't have to be a specialist to make useful records. For instance, Sheep's Sorrel and Small Copper butterflies are two examples, which are under-recorded. If you see either of these, make a note of the date, the quantity and the precise location and send in the information to [lrc@iow.gov.uk](mailto:lrc@iow.gov.uk), or by post to IW Local Records Centre, Parks and Countryside, Enterprise House, St Cross Business Park, Newport PO30 5WB and we will pass the records to the appropriate recorder.

Anne Marston



## Quotations

### William Blake

"The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity, and some see nature scarcely at all. But to the eye of the man with imagination, nature is imagination itself."

### The Thrush

"O fret not after knowledge. I have none - yet all the world listens".

Bill Shepard

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### In Combley Wood

There was no bird song in the wood that day  
As I stood  
And waited and wanted to be fed  
With music.  
Instead,  
Only an aircraft's droning  
Above the still trees and the clearing.  
No song of a bird  
As the sun shone pale  
- And then I heard  
Other Sounds  
From slight movements in the breeze  
- Voices of bough on bough,  
Rustling of brown beech leaves,  
Tinkling water in the stream:  
Notes, probably unheard  
Had there been the song of a bird.

Poem by the late Revd. Dennis A. Cox

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## Reports of General Meetings

### 11<sup>th</sup> July

### Corfe Castle & Studland Bay

We came upon it quite suddenly. As our coach rounded a bend and slowed, two hills reared up before us. And on the very top of one teetered the ruins of a castle keep, piercing the sky. I stared at it in disbelief.

We met our guide, Nancy Grace, the Resident Archaeologist, at the National Trust Visitor Centre. She led us along the Nature Trail that winds around the base of the hill and crosses the river, eventually reaching the village and the castle entrance. A fine drizzle descended as we crossed the Outer Bridge over the great ditch and walked through the Outer Gatehouse into the Outer Bailey. This wide open space is bounded by ruined towers, and the first thing you notice is how these towers are concentrated on the western side of the hill. Invasion was more likely to come from this side, as the ascent is less precipitous than on the eastern side. As we climbed the slope, we were confronted by the dramatically split-

level South-West Gatehouse. One of its towers has broken away from the other and slipped downhill.

The ruinous state of Corfe Castle is not due to neglect, but to a deliberate attempt to destroy it in 1646, during the English Civil War, by order of Parliament. The Royalist garrison had surrendered to the Parliamentarians, after a long siege. Yet Corfe was too well defended to be taken by force; the garrison was overpowered by treachery from within. When reinforcements were sent for to defend the castle, Parliamentary 'turncoats' were brought in instead.

For five hundred years Corfe had been an important royal stronghold, but in 1572 Queen Elizabeth sold it. In 1646 it was owned by the Lord Chief Justice, Sir John Bankes, and it remained part of the Bankes Estate until 1981, when it was bequeathed to the National Trust. Most of the castle we see today was built by three English kings. Henry I, son of William the Conqueror, built the Keep, John, the 'Gloriette', or royal palace, and most of the defences of the Outer Bailey, and Henry III, both gatehouses. It is hard to imagine how the castle worked, as over the centuries it has served very different purposes: as a military garrison, a royal residence and a family home. Nowadays the general impression is of a spectacular ruin.

Beyond the South-West Gatehouse we came upon the remains of the oldest part of the castle. One wall of herringbone masonry is all that is left of a Norman hall and buttery, built by William I in 1086. It is situated in the West Bailey and its towers afford fine views over the surrounding countryside. Yet overshadowing it all looms the great tower of the Keep, perched precariously on the very summit of the hill. A steep climb brought us to its base. Apart from being the last line of defence, the Keep was the ceremonial centre of the early medieval castle. The Keep at Corfe, built in the early twelfth century, was where the King stayed, surrounded by his courtiers, when he visited the castle. That was until the new palace, the 'Gloriette', was built in the adjacent courtyard a hundred years later by King John. He was particularly fond of Corfe, as the surrounding royal forest provided good hunting. He spent a lot of money on modernising the castle for greater comfort and on strengthening its fortifications, and so did his son, Henry III.

Our Guide described the conservation work that the National Trust has carried out on the castle in recent years. A series of surveys took place in 2006. A helium balloon with a high resolution digital camera attached was used to photograph the high areas. Abseiling stone conservators also inspected the high areas and raked out and re-pointed the stonework on the Keep's South Annexe, where scaffolding could not be erected. The 74 blocks of masonry, known as 'tumble', which fell when the castle was blown up in 1646 were carefully drawn to scale, and the first complete archaeological survey of the castle was undertaken. A lichen survey identified 102 species growing on the castle walls, of which four are nationally rare and eleven nationally scarce. A horticulturalist identified the wild plants growing on the tumble and advised on those which could be retained for turf capping.

Once the extent of the damage was known, restoration work could begin. The castle is built from local limestone. The original lime mortar was analysed so that it could be matched, as lime mortar allows moisture absorbed by the limestone to evaporate from the surface. Wind and rain have been eroding the lime plaster for the past 360 years and mortar had to be syringed into cavities behind the plaster to preserve it for the next hundred years. Finally, turf was laid on top of some of the walls and tumble, as research has shown that 60% less water is absorbed by masonry capped with turf consisting of grasses and herbs with a short matted root system. These include the fescue grasses, wild thyme, harebell and hedge bedstraw. They also create a colourful and fragrant wild garden beneath the gaunt walls of the ruined Keep.

After a quick cup of tea in the picturesque village nestling below the castle, to warm those who were chilled by exposure to the drizzle, we walked back to the coach and headed for Studland Bay. Four miles of fine white sand backed by dunes: we must be in Paradise! Even the drizzle had stopped. Studland beach was almost deserted as we shuffled through the sand behind National Trust Warden, Roland Hughes. The dunes in Studland Bay are eroding at one end and extending at the other, he told us. To the west, where Old Harry Rocks dominate the landscape, a café and beach huts are getting closer and closer to the sea.

A very different landscape greeted us as we turned into the dunes. A variety of plants, including three kinds of heather, gorse and marram grass help to stabilise the dunes and attract wildlife. The scent of Bog Myrtle wafted towards us as we explored one of the depressions between the hillocks of sand. From

the bushes spiders' webs hung like baskets laden with captive raindrops sparkling like diamonds. The National Trust has created numbered wooden platforms on the dunes, connected by boardwalks and wooden staircases. These 'Dune Stations' serve as viewpoints and rendezvous points for groups like ours. Roland gave us ten minutes to explore each area in turn. We found red and green fairy cups, round-leaved sundew, heath-land lichen, soft and pale green, known as reindeer moss, and reeking of fungi. We also found pieces of rusty iron and wondered whether they were fragments from the D-Day exercises held here.

The National Trust owns large tracts of land in the Isle of Purbeck and employs a warden for each of three areas: Corfe, Studland and another stretch of coast. It employs thirty full-time staff and also relies on volunteers and contractors. The beach and castle are run by three Visitors Service Teams, and an Estate Ecologist specialises in habitat management. Too much scrub is encroaching on the heath-land and small pine trees are spreading rapidly. The heath-land plants need plenty of light and nutrients. The landscape here is in constant flux. Little Sea, now a freshwater lake, was once a saltwater inlet and then a lagoon.

Roland led us down behind the dunes and along the Heather Walk, bordered by tiny blue scabious flowers, to the Woodland trail. The predominant trees here are English oak, silver birch, grey willow and holly. Honeysuckle twines up through the branches and bracken fronds cover the ground. The path led us to a bird hide on the lake where we watched a sika deer feeding and herons fishing.

We returned to the huge, but almost deserted car park in the woods where our coach was waiting to take us back to Southampton. There we boarded a Red Jet and were thrilled to catch up with two cruise liners leaving Southampton Water, one a giant of the new breed. Thanks to Lynda Snaith's careful planning, our trip had gone smoothly and we had not let the weather spoil our enjoyment.

Margaret Nelves

## **22<sup>nd</sup> August**

### **Strolling up to Tennyson Down**

What lovelier place could you wish to be on a warm, sunny day than Alfred Lord Tennyson's adopted home, Freshwater Bay? To mark the bicentenary of the Victorian Poet Laureate's birth, Richard Smout led some thirty-five members through the village and along lesser known footpaths up to Tennyson Down.

There are two large hotels in the bay. The Freshwater Bay Hotel and The Albion. The former has expanded enormously since the late nineteenth century, when the Tennysons lived at nearby Farringford, probably due to the arrival of the railway in the 1880s. Ironically, Alfred and Emily Tennyson moved to Farringford House in 1853 because it was secluded, but shortly afterwards, to their horror, Freshwater began to develop. And so they had a house built at Aldworth, near Haslemere in Surrey, in 1868, as a summer retreat. Tennyson dreaded meeting sightseers, who lay in wait for him when he left Farringford to take his daily walk up to the cliff top. That is why he had the rustic footbridge built over the sunken lane behind his house.

We followed the coast road through the village, past Dimbola Lodge, where the pioneer art photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, lived with her husband from 1860 until they returned to their tea plantations in Ceylon. When, in 1864, Garibaldi, the Italian freedom fighter, visited the Tennysons at Farringford, Julia allegedly knelt beside him to demonstrate how important he was, but he mistook her for a beggar. The late nineteenth century villas lining the opposite side of the road were mostly lodging houses. Visitors to the Island tended to stay much longer than holiday makers do nowadays.

Beyond Dimbola we came to Baker's Farm, with its fine brick front and unusual roof, and the picturesque church of St Agnes. Although this church is only a hundred years old, it was built from recycled stone believed to come from a nearby seventeenth century farmhouse. Besides, it is the only thatched church on the Island and one of only a handful in the whole of the country. **(Picture, page 18 )**The land was donated by the Tennyson family. Orchard's, formerly the Post Office and grocer's shop, founded in 1865, is still trading as a grocery store and retains its Victorian character. There is now a separate Post Office just along the road.

From a narrow footpath between the farmhouse and the church we eventually emerged into an enormous field rising above the village, which opened up views of the bay. Some of us remember the famous

Arch Rock that collapsed in 1992. All we could see of Farringford was the Cedar of Lebanon and other trees that screen the house. This field was only enclosed between 1863 and 1866, and before that strip farming was practised here. This was the last land on the Island to be enclosed. Not much enclosure took place on the Island because there was little pressure for land here in the nineteenth century. Richard pointed out how the Edwardians had no scruples about building in scenic areas, such as the eastern cliff, where a large blot on the landscape is now being replaced by an equally prominent block of flats.

Emily Tennyson suffered from poor health and had to be conveyed by cart up the quarry track behind Farringford. Her diary contains many references to the wildlife the Tennysons observed on these outings. The birds they most frequently heard were Nightingales, followed by Stock Doves, and Nightjars and Redwings are also mentioned. In the short turf on the quarry edge we found tiny Harebells, Autumn Gentian, Clustered Bellflower, Common Centaury and Lady's Tresses. Chalk and lime were quarried here for local farmers. This is a fine chalk turf habitat, as it is situated at the foot of the Down, sheltered by steep wooded slopes from the winds that sweep over the cliff top.

Now we began the long climb up to Tennyson Down, with its superb panoramic views of the West Wight and the mainland. Once part of the High Down, this land was conveyed to the National Trust by the Tennysons in 1926, with the exception of the beacon which, as a viewpoint, was probably the responsibility of Trinity House. A new toposcope, placed next to the Tennyson memorial, on land 482 feet above sea level, was unveiled on 6 August 2009 to mark the bicentenary of Tennyson's birth. Made of black granite, it gives the distance and direction of many different places, from Old Harry Rocks, just across the Solent, to the Azores nearly 1500 miles away, and even the North Pole. This diversity is surely what makes toposcopes such fun. Around the edges is engraved a quotation from Tennyson's famous poem 'Crossing the Bar', written after a long period of illness when he was contemplating death:

*'Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me.  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,'*

Richard marked the occasion by reading us the poem 'To the Reverend FD Maurice', in which Tennyson urges his friend, godfather to his infant son, Hallam, to come to Farringford:

*'Your presence will be sun in winter,  
Making the little one leap for joy.'*

In 1853 Maurice, who was professor of English Literature and History for thirteen years, was thrown out of King's College, London for forming a breakaway Christian Socialist movement and claiming that God denied eternal damnation. In January 1854, soon after the Tennysons came to live at Freshwater, Alfred, concerned for his friend's welfare, invites him to come and stay at Farringford House in Spring, or later in the year, as often and for as long as he likes:

*'Where, far from noise and smoke of town,  
I watch the twilight falling brown  
All round a careless-order'd garden  
Close to the ridge of a noble down.  
  
You'll have no scandal while you dine,  
But honest talk and wholesome wine,  
And only hear the magpie gossip  
Garrulous under a roof of pine.'*

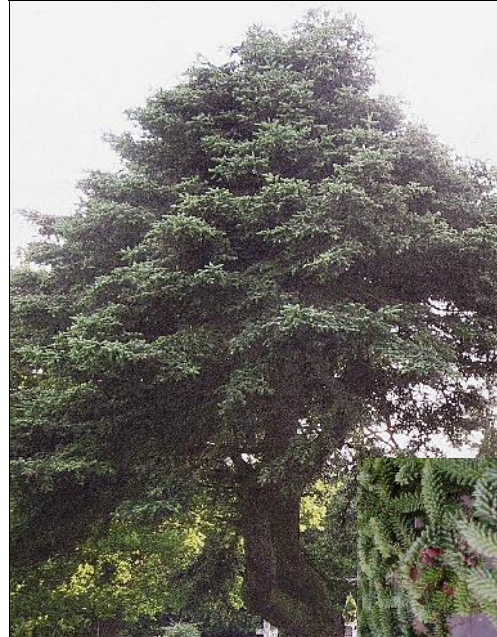
He suggests they might discuss the far-distant Russo-Turkish war, that would lead to British involvement in the Crimea, before turning to matters closer to Maurice's heart: how to help the poor.

We saw Ravens on this high cliff top. Tennyson was concerned about the welfare of the Peregrine Falcons taken from here to give to a Maharajah in India and offered to buy them back if the Maharajah





*1st yr Flower. Chile Pine. 2nd yr Flower*  
Bill's Country Notes, page 3



*Spanish Fir Flower*  
Bill's Country Notes, page 3



*Disorientated Wasps.*  
Bill's Country Notes, page 3



*Western Conifer Seed Bug*  
page 5



*Alder Bolete, Fungi,* page 33



*Neuroterus saliens* (Actual size) →  
Gall Wasp Invader, page 4





Archaeology Activities , HWTMA,  
Page 27



Archaeology Activities, Limerstone Down.  
Page 27



Brading Big Dig 2009  
Page 8



General Meeting to Tennyson Down,  
page 15



Andy`s Nature Notebook  
Pages 5 & 6



Twaite Shad



Heron,



Silver washed Fritillary



Adonis Blue



Neolithic-style pottery ,  
Page 28



Archaeological Activities, Below The Ground' project,  
Page 27



Archaeological Activities Whale Chine,  
Page 28



could not cope with them. Among the flowers we found growing close to the ground in the short turf were Harebells, Gentian and Yellow-wort, and there was also a tiny Robin's Pincushion. We saw Chalk-hill Blue butterflies, the male a chalky blue colour, but the female drabber. They are bigger than the Common Blue.

Returning down the long slope of the Down, we came to a Neolithic mortuary platform, where bodies were laid out for ravens to pick clean the bones, and the weather to bleach them. Beside this lies a ditch, dug in the First World War to prevent gliders from landing and a subsequent German invasion. At this point a Vulcan bomber roared into view, hugging the Solent coast below us as it headed for the Bournemouth Air Show. The Red Arrows were already there, frenetically weaving and diving, leaving red trails in their wake. Fortunately too far away to shatter the peace, they reminded us that now we must leave Tennyson's world behind and return to the twenty-first century.

Margaret Nelmes

## **17<sup>th</sup> October**

### **Darwin & his Isle of Wight Connections**

Amid celebrations this year to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his revolutionary work 'On the Origin of Species', Charles Darwin's associations with the Isle of Wight have been overlooked, asserts Dr. Paul Bingham. And so he has decided to put the record straight. Together with researchers, Kris Swiger, of the North Carolina Medical School, Gerry Crombie, Dr. Colin Pope, and Drs. Martin Munt, Gerry Hooker and Pip Brewer from the Natural History Museum, he presented his findings in our Society's Proceedings. He also gave a presentation at this General Meeting, held in the Education Room at Dinosaur Isle, to an audience of some fifty members.

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Dr. Paul Bingham spoke about his research into Darwin's family connections with the Isle of Wight.

Much of the information about Darwin's life came from letters he wrote to fellow scientists and friends, and from letters written by other members of his family. Extracts from these letters were read out at the meeting, providing some entertainment, as well as insights, and some sample facsimiles were on display.

When, in July 1858, Charles Darwin and his family fled the outbreak of scarlet fever in Downe, the Kent village where they lived, they came to stay on the Isle of Wight, first at Sandown and then at Shanklin, two rapidly expanding Victorian seaside resorts. Charles was deeply affected by the recent death of his youngest son, and a further shock came from the arrival of an essay sent to him by Alfred Wallace, who had independently produced a theory of evolution. Leaving his scientist friends Charles Lyell and Joseph D Hooker to present his and Wallace's findings to the Linnean Society, Charles was forced to set to work at once on an abstract of his theory, which was published the following year as 'On the Origin of Species'. He completed the first chapter during his stay at Norfolk House, on Shanklin Esplanade.

It was two family members who provided Charles Darwin with connections to the Isle of Wight. Both were called William. The first was William Darwin Fox, Charles's second cousin, who had fallen in love with the Island on numerous childhood holidays spent at the Georgian seaside resort of Ryde. Charles followed him to Cambridge to study for a BA in The Classics, with a view to becoming a clergyman. Both men were interested in entomology and William introduced Charles to the Reverend Professor Henslow, who recommended Charles for the voyage of the Beagle. In early 1832, soon after Charles set sail on the Beagle, William's health broke down and he had to resign from his curacy near Nottingham. He spent two winters on the Island and then fell in love with and married a young woman from Ryde. A year after Charles returned from his voyage, William at last persuaded him to visit. He only stayed a few days, but was intrigued by some fossils from a quarry in Binstead that William had acquired. In 1838 William became Rector of Delamere in Cheshire, but he and his wife still visited the Island. Four years later she died of lung disease. He eventually remarried and had twelve more children, before retiring to Sandown in 1873.

One of their sons, Reginald Henry Fox, was an amateur expert in ornithology who wrote a chapter in Morey's Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight. In 1919, at the inauguration of our Society, he was elected Vice-President, and he held this office until he died, in 1933, apart from a three-year term as President. He wrote annual bird notes for the Proceedings for some six years and regularly led

'excursions'. After he died, his brothers presented his large natural history collection to the Sandown Museum, opened in 1935 and run by the local council. The collection constituted the major part of the museum's exhibits. Unfortunately the museum was damaged by bombing during the Second World War and exhibits were then exposed to damp and vandalised by soldiers. Darwinian exhibits removed for safe-keeping were sold at auction after the curator became ill and died, and their whereabouts are unknown. However, one item, a letter from Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox has been found recently on the Internet.

The second William connecting Charles Darwin with the Isle of Wight was his eldest son, William Erasmus Darwin. Charles bought him the partnership in a Southampton bank and William made a number of trips to the Island, at his father's request, to obtain natural history specimens and make observations that featured in three of his books. From 1891 to 1892 William was President of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society. He married a New Yorker, but they had no children. He lost a leg in a hunting accident in 1902 and his wife died in the same year. His bank was taken over by Lloyds the following year and he moved to London to be with his brother Leonard and his family.

Charles himself is known to have visited the Island on three occasions, the third in 1868. He also corresponded with a number of naturalists living here, mainly with Alexander More, a botanist who lived at Bembridge.

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Dr Colin Pope gave an illustrated talk about Darwin's studies of flowers from the Isle of Wight. The publication of 'The Origin of the Species' was by no means the end of Charles Darwin's research. His next publication was 'The Fertilisation of Orchids' in 1862. He was fascinated by orchids and believed that they evolved according to the ability of insects to pollinate them. He noticed that the Fly Orchid attracts a particular fly, and only the male of the species. The flower resembles the female of the fly species and produces pheromones to attract the male.

Darwin wanted to study a range of other orchids. So he wrote to a lot of people asking them to send him specimens. One of these was the botanist Alexander More at Bembridge, who sent him some Bee Orchids. Darwin observed that the Bee Orchid has to pollinate itself in this country, as the bee that pollinates the many species of bee orchid in the Mediterranean is not found here. He also requested Marsh Helleborine, which is very rare on the Isle of Wight, found only at Totland and Luccombe Chine, and asked which insects pollinate these flowers. But Alexander More was unwell and did not reply. He then moved to Ireland where he became a distinguished botanist. So Darwin wrote to his son William, who came to the Island to study Marsh Helleborines and the insects that pollinate them.

The subject of Darwin's next book was different forms of flower. Some plants have both male and female flowers for pollination. William discovered Narrow-leaved Lungwort and sent his father some seeds. Asa Grey, an influential American biologist, told Darwin that American Buckthorn was dimorphic. As Darwin could not obtain a specimen from his friend Hooker, Director of Kew Gardens, he had to study the only British variety, the Purging Buckthorn. He asked his son to find specimens on the Island. In 1856 William Bromfield had written in 'Flora Vectensis' that although this plant was rare, it could be found in woodland on Gatcombe Down.

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Dr Martin Munt spoke about "'That Lower Jaw" and the Contribution of William Darwin Fox to the Discovery of Eocene Mammals from the Isle of Wight'.

Charles Darwin asked his cousin William to loan the lower jaw he had obtained from a quarry near Ryde to Richard Owen, who recognised it as similar to that of mammals from the Paris Basin. Although Fox was not the first person to find parts of fossilised mammals from the Island's Eocene Freshwater formations, his discovery confirmed a correlation between the Island's rock strata and those of the Paris Basin. The age of William's lower jaw remains uncertain, as he did not know exactly where it was found. Nowadays an isotope could be done to date it, but this would be very costly.

Soon after Fox's fossils were discovered, quarrying ceased at Binstead, and extraction switched to the much richer Lower Hamstead beds.

Owen recognised the significance of the Island finds. He decided that the jaw represented a new species and named it *Chaeropotamus Cuvieri*, from the Greek for pig and river, and in recognition of Cuvier's discoveries in the Paris Basin.

This was an afternoon to remember, packed with fascinating insights into the lives of Charles Darwin and the relatives who helped him to collect specimens for his studies, and presented in a lively manner. Throughout the talks the emphasis was on the significant role played by the Isle of Wight in Darwin's research into diversity and the evolution of species. Much of the information about Darwin's life comes from his correspondence. He was a prolific letter writer. Had he been born some two centuries later, he would have sent all his messages and queries to fellow scientists by email. This would have spared him the frustration of waiting so long for a reply. On the other hand, this correspondence would not have survived to be enjoyed by posterity.

Margaret Nelves

## **14<sup>th</sup> November**

### **British Divers' Marine Life Rescue**

Gale force winds and squalls of heavy rain did not deter twenty intrepid members from attending a fascinating talk by Nigel Dove about his voluntary work in marine wildlife rescue. The British Divers' Marine Life Rescue is a registered charity operated entirely by volunteers, with units all around our coasts. It was founded in 1988, when three divers out in their RIB off the north-east coast of England saw several seals in distress. The seals had Parvo distemper virus that blows the skin up and causes respiratory problems. The divers managed to take the seals out to sandbanks where they received treatment.

Nowadays the BDMLR keeps inflation pontoons in key locations all around the British coastline. Their rescue teams are trained divers, boat handlers and medics. They are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and this emergency service is funded entirely by public donations. If you see a marine animal in distress, you should dial 999 and ask for the coastguard service, who will call out the BDMLR. This organisation runs practical courses, using an inflatable dolphin and whale as training apparatus. Each training animal costs £400 and a set of pontoons £2000. The training courses are open to everyone and the next course on the Isle of Wight is scheduled for March or April 2010. The training animal is filled with water and compressed air is pumped in to make it heavy. The largest of the dolphins, the Killer Whale, can weigh ten tonnes!

How can you tell whether a marine mammal is alive? Humans take twelve to sixteen breaths a minute, but dolphins take only two to five. When frightened, a dolphin may hold its breath, like a child. A sperm whale, being a very deep diver, only has to breathe once an hour. So how else can you tell if it's alive? Test for palpable reflexes: touch it near its eye, or very gently tug on a pectoral fin and look for a reaction.

If the animal is alive, cover it with a sheet, but don't cover the eyes, or it will panic, and don't cover the blowhole. Keep it out of the wind and sun. Don't handle the whale's skin with diving gloves. Their grip surface may puncture it. Try to calm the animal down. Talk to it. Reassure it. Touch it. But keep clear of the blowhole or you will get a faceful of smelly and unhygienic water. To rescue marine animals, you need to understand the anatomy of each species and their different needs. Well meaning people seeing a stranded dolphin may well try to put it back into the sea. But having lost its sense of balance and developed muscle fatigue, it will only beach again. The correct procedure is to put it on a flotation mat and rock it back and forth. This may take hours, but a small dolphin can stay out of the water for up to twelve hours, provided that it is cared for properly. Dolphins breathe oxygen. Keep it calm. Cover it with a sheet and keep it damp. Whales are different. They can only stay out of the water for five or six hours. There is not much you can do for a large whale. It is crushed on land and toxins build up in the blood. Injecting it with barbiturate stops it from getting agitated by making it drowsy.

Marine mammals are surprisingly similar to us. They are warm blooded and have the same body temperature as us. They also have body hair, and their anatomy is similar to ours. Dolphins have an umbilicus or belly button. Their genitalia are kept inside the body for streamlining. They are *Ordontocets*, having one blowhole on top of the head, and teeth. Some whales are *Mystocetes* and have two blowholes and baleen plates instead of teeth. When these whale takes a mouthful of water, the plates act as filters to discard the water and hold back the krill. They are made of pure keratin, like our finger and toe nails. The dolphin's dorsal fins, used for steering, are made of pure cartilage. Its tail is horizontal and moves up and down. The first third of its back is fused, not flexible. A vet takes blood samples from the dolphin's tail. BDMLR medics, like Nigel, carry blood sampling kits. On land dolphins get sand in their eyes and the blowhole gets clogged. The dolphin may have to be turned on its side for medical checks and care must be taken not to damage the eyes. A medic cleans a wound first with saline solution and

then with an antiseptic spray. A biodegradable tape mark is put on a stranded animal to recognise it if it strands again.

Dolphins and whales vary greatly in size. Dolphins range from the harbour porpoise, the smallest, at 1.2 to 1.5 metres long, to the striped dolphin, the common dolphin, the Atlantic bottlenose, up to 4 metres, and finally the Orca, or Killer Whale, up to 9 metres. Whales range from the long-finned pilot whale to the blue whale, the biggest animal on Earth. There are 83 species of whale and dolphin in the world. The Bay of Biscay in the Atlantic Ocean is a very important area for whales and dolphins, but the number of sightings is dropping. Another very important area is the Azores. The reason for this is algae growth. Algae are the bottom of the food chain.

Two species of seal live around the coasts of Britain: the Grey and the Common Seal. The Grey, at 400kg, is the larger. For seals, medics use webbed matting with loops to attach rods to make a stretcher. Seals have huge teeth and will bite humans when cornered. Their teeth carry anti-coagulants resulting in 'seal finger' which should be treated immediately with a fast-acting anti-biotic. There is a resident colony of common seals at Langstone Harbour, near the Isle of Wight. You should be aware that mothers leave their pups on land for ten to fifteen minutes at a time to hunt for food. The BDMLR rescues hundreds of seals each year and has a seal rehabilitation unit in Scotland.

And finally, this charity has played a crucial role in rescuing wildlife from the 'Braer' and 'Sea Empress' oil spill disasters, developing the first effective way to rescue oiled birds from the open seas. The BBC's Autumnwatch programme this week featured the BDMLR, and at one of their local training sessions presenter Kate Humble helped rock an inflatable dolphin to restore its balance. More information can be found on the charity's website.

Margaret Nelmes

## **5<sup>th</sup> December                      Frank Morey's Guide and the Early Years of the Society**

During research for our recent exhibition, Richard Smout had discovered Morey's *Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight* to be even more interesting than he had realised: it told us much more about the Island as well as of the early Society and some of its colourful personalities than could possibly be used in the exhibition, and these were to be the subject of today's lecture.

Frank Morey became aware by 1906 of the difficult task he had undertaken in recording every aspect of the Island's natural history. His contributors responded well to his appeal for help and specialists came forward in every field, though not everyone turned out to be a star and when they let him down he didn't try to cover up for them. The volume was published by the IW County Press in April 1909 and sold at eight shillings and sixpence; running to just under 600 pages it described 6982 species, including 1434 beetles and 1032 flowering plants and ferns – every conceivable group of species was covered to some extent. Morey was himself aware that the book was something of a curiosity, and acknowledged that some might find the lists of species "dry and uninteresting". The black-and-white pictures of animals are inevitably all of stuffed creatures: for their day photographs in the wild would have required long exposures, which at that period could never have been achieved.

Remaining very much a polymath throughout, Morey produced more text than anyone else, and filled in on anything where there were gaps. He showed wonderment at the beauty and design of nature, constantly observing the ordinary – things like waste heaps – and feeling compelled to quantify them. He collected 2033 molluscs alone, and even at school he had avoided games in favour of going out with a butterfly net. He also addressed the question of taking life for examining as specimens. It was Morey who first made the oft-quoted observation that if everybody in the world stood together, they would all fit on the Isle of Wight – if it were ever true then, it is certainly no longer so today. A partner in the well-known firm of timber merchants, Morey was also a key figure in the Newport Literary Society based in Quay Street, which is where the Isle of Wight Natural History Society – as it then was – had its first home.

All of the 25 authors bar one were men, all led busy lives whether as lawyers, businessmen and so on, and several lived quite close to each other in Newport. Some extraordinary flashes of personality shine through the contributors. The entomologist Claude Morley, who caught typhus investigating Ryde seashore, refused to have anything to do with 'modern' utilities such as electricity or telephone, nor did



he recognise British summertime. He even wrote poetry under the pseudonym Maude Clorley!

Percy Frank Wadham – another name familiar to Islanders in connection with his family’s furniture empire – ran a business in taxidermy from Holyrood Street. He was described as “the Island Naturalist to Queen Victoria and Edward VII”, and his specialities included fish and reptiles. His description of the stingray, ‘occasionally netted’ and requiring ‘handling with caution’, was certainly proven when it plunged its spine through a contemporary’s waterboots into his leg, as a result of which the patient was on crutches for some time. Wadham also kept a pet cobra in his conservatory, and with what spare time he had left over made various inventions, including a life-saving collapsible armchair!

The sole woman author, Miss Mary Gibson, contributed an article on meteorology; she worked at the Royal National Hospital at Ventnor, where she recorded the weather. Her successor there was Miss Abercrombie, and it was their original copy of the *Guide* that Richard had borrowed from the County Library for his research! Several other women however contributed information, for example on seaweed, seen as a suitably aesthetic occupation for ladies in its day. How such attitudes and gender roles have (thankfully) changed today!

Frederick Stratton, a solicitor, produced a section on plants, where there is no hesitation in saying that he “plucks the flowers”: there was no question then of not making a collection. George Colenutt, a keen geologist, was also well known for his antiques and glass walking-sticks. He held many strong opinions and was to be observed marching forth in his hiking-boots. Both he and his wife had their ashes scattered at Borthwood, which Morey had by then donated to the National Trust. Reginald Fox wrote about birds and even called his house ‘Nuthatch’. His articles for the early Proceedings were the treat that people looked forward to, especially the quips. In 1929 he launched a devastating attack on golfcourses and the harm they did to the bird population, despite being an avid golfer himself! In particular, he rued the demise of nightjars on Pan Common, which would nowadays seem the most unlikely place to see them.

The Society was founded soon after World War One, with a debate over whether it should include archaeology. Morey was strongly against, on the grounds that members would always plump for excursions to historic houses over the serious business of recording. It was only following his death in 1925, coincident with the discovery of Newport Roman Villa, that archaeology was included and a flurry of articles appeared on the subject.

The first display was held in 1919, comprising birds’ eggs, seaweeds and suchlike, and the first excursion – to Bowcombe Down – took place in April 1920. Another excursion, from Newport to Gurnard, would present major organisational problems today and be inconceivable as a group outing. Early natural history notes included three jellyfish sent through the post, a weasel in church, and a Parkhurst prisoner who adopted a bat! And there was even a lecture on Einstein’s theory of relativity.

The story is full of remarkable characters and incidents, with many continuities as well as contrasts with the Society today. They were all busy people who were also busy in their spare time, much like members today. At the end of the talk Richard issued a challenge: the work is ongoing and these experts are still needed; which of these batons will each of us pick up in the coming year?

Alan Phillips

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## Reports of Section Meetings

### Access

#### 17<sup>th</sup> July

Glow-worm Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Night. 19 Society members and parishioners assembled at St Helens Churchyard car park for the annual Glow Worm count. The weather was fine after a wet morning.

Chris Lipscombe gave an introduction talk about Glow Worms, explaining they were beetles not worms. Several books were on display. These explained their habitat, food, and the mating ritual. The males fly, looking for the light emitted by the female.

Colin Black then explained the method of counting. The churchyard had been marked out in 20 meter squares, so a more accurate count could take place. Maps were issued to those who wanted them with another explanation on how to record. Then the recorders set off, having been warned about the rough

ground and asked to take great care.

The count worked well, many maps were returned and a rough count indicated between 33 and 40.

### **18<sup>th</sup> July**

Glow-worm Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> Night. The weather was good again and this time 24 people attended, with more IWNHAS members than parishioners. Chris was on hand again with her books, as new people attended, and maps were again issued with the same explanations and warnings. The count was about 43.

A few surprising facts were noticed about the distribution of the Glow Worms. None were seen in the short grass. The medium grass, where graves and tombstones were in place, the numbers were up as there was an abundance of food for the larvae, snails in and around the tomb stones.

The long grass and rough areas were not so good, most were found on the edges by the paths in the shorter grass. Glow-worms were found on gravel and tombstones as well as at different heights in the grass.

The Vicar had noticed that later in the night the lights were further up the grass stems, this raises the question as to what time is right for a count.

The final tally was taken from 6 designated people who did an accurate survey as to the location and numbers on both nights. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, 46 were recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 44. The figures were arrived at after studying the returned maps.

Our thanks to Mary, the Vicar, for allowing us to carry out the survey and the parishioners for their interest in the project - it makes it all worthwhile.

### **20<sup>th</sup> August**

Four members waited at the bus stop at Freshwater Bay for the bus from Newport to Alum Bay service and found that a further two members were already aboard from Newport.

We alighted at Alum Bay Leisure Park for the start of the walk, led by Molly Kenyon, back to Freshwater Bay.

The weather was kind to us after a very unsettled period, the sun was shining, it was warm and the visibility was good, all the ingredients for an enjoyable walk. Heading out of the car park towards the Needles we turned off the road, past the cottage with all the garden bits and bobs in aid of the RNLI and on to a footpath. We crossed over our first stile and walked east along the bottom of the Down, heading for the replica beacon, before the climb to Tennyson monument at the top of High Down. We stopped here for a short rest and to look at the views to Blackgang in the east and Yarmouth to the north with its river. Many yachts were sailing in the Solent and the Lymington car ferry was just leaving Yarmouth.

Now we had an easy walk down to Freshwater Bay, and a welcome cup of coffee by the sea.

### **18<sup>th</sup> September**

11 Access members assembled at the car park by the river on a cold but a dry morning, for a walk along the Medina to Dicksons Copse. Burdock, Butchers Broom, and Guelder Rose were abundant also Sea Asters were seen. Water Lilies, and Common Reed were seen in the freshwater ponds. On the Medina River, Little Egret, Mallard, Coot and Moorhens were seen.

The return walk was along the old railway line to the car park.

### **15<sup>th</sup> October**

Perfect walking weather was the order of the day, for seven members who mustered at St Helens car park for this months walk. The group opted for the anti-clockwise route and we were 'waved off' by Chris Lipscombe, who later, on our return past her house, invited us into her garden to view her Holly tree, which was heavily laden with berries.

We proceeded in a northerly direction passing the primary school and the now redundant trig point by the old vicarage, thence crossing the Eddington Road and progressed towards the Priory Bay Hotel. Fine views of the eastern Solent were had and of interest was the 'tree disguised' mobile phone mast.

The group continued westward by way of Ferniclose and Gully Road towards Nettlestone. We crossed the main road and followed the footpath towards Park Farm, before turning south to connect with Attrill's Lane. Again from here, panoramas of the mainland were evident, looking towards Hill

Head, Stokes Bay and beyond, with of course the Spinnaker Tower dominating.

Our return brought us back into St Helens via West Green, from where we made our way to Chris's home and here we all admired her splendid picture postcard Holly tree.

### **24<sup>th</sup> November**

A stormy day, with heavy rain over night. Gale force winds blowing at the start by Carisbrooke Castle was not encouraging for a walk. Nobody arrived at the start time and I can't say I blame them, so the walk was cancelled. We were pleased to get back in the car and head for home.

### **10<sup>th</sup> December**

A brilliant morning, a clear blue sky and sunshine. 15 members assembled at the scout hall in Brightstone for the mince pies and coffee annual event.

Eight members elected to go on a short walk, before the meeting, on footpaths around the village and towards the mill by the side of the brook. The rainfall over the past week made a normal babbling brook into a torrent of rushing water. The footpath was impassable a few days previous, but the level had dropped a bit allowing us to walk the muddy footpath. A Red Admiral butterfly, Wood Pigeon and a small flock of Starlings were seen. We walked past the Mill Pond, no ducks today, then down to where the old mill house was. This area has been developed into modern dwellings, but a caricature of the old buildings has been retained. Now a short walk to the recreation ground and past a children's play area to the modern scout hall.

The committee served coffee and mince pies.

Colin thanked the committee and walk leaders for their support over the past year. Colin said he was disappointed at the support for the walks in the summer, also today's attendance. We have tried longer and shorter walks but it makes no difference to the attendance.

Colin Black  
& Tad Dubicki

## **Archaeology**

### **Archaeology Activities 2009**

As well as the meetings listed in the Society programme, members with interest in archaeology meet frequently and informally for a range of activities. Most meetings take place on Wednesday mornings but are occasionally at weekends,

We have, of course, focussed in our geophysics training and practice for the 'Below The Ground' project. ( **Photo**, page 20 ). We have been given permission by RSPB to survey Gander Down near Yaverland (the site of the Time Team excavation). This is particularly useful as we can compare our results with those from Time Team and work will continue here next year.

We have also continued to support the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology (HWTMA) with follow-up work from the diving in the Solent off Bouldnor. We have worked in Delian's back garden and have travelled across to their base at the Oceanography Centre in Southampton. ( **Photo**, page 18 ) We have sieved and excavated material, washed and sorted finds. Gary Momber has shown us how our work fits into the bigger picture and how the story of this rare and important Mesolithic site is developing. For me, a highlight was the three beautiful worked flints I found in a block of unprepossessing mud.

Another ongoing project has been to explore an eroding midden site near Binnel Bay. Finds of broken and burnt shell, wood, charcoal, bone and pottery sherds indicate an occupation site spanning a considerable time, probably late Neolithic to early Bronze Age. Work on the finds is still ongoing and will lead to a fuller report in due course.

Other visits have included:

- Freshwater to investigate an earthwork enclosure seen from an aerial view.
- Limerstone Farm, courtesy of Geoff and Mary Case, to look at earthworks and across to the site of Rock Roman Villa. ( **Photo**, page 18 )
- Priory Bay where some of the oldest stone tools on the Island have been found in the past.
- Yaverland and Redcliff to search for worked flints and other evidence.

- Whale Chine to look at the landscape and the ancient sand dunes. ( **Photo**, page 20 )
- Brook and Hannover point to monitor changes in the cliffs and evidence of prehistoric hearths.
- Fieldwalking near the Longstone at Strawberry Lane.
- Neolithic-style pottery making, courtesy of Rebecca Mitchelmore. ( **Photo**, page 20 )

Whilst geophysics will demand much of our attention in 2010, we will continue to respond to suggestions as they arise or as the changing landscape requires.

Any member interested in taking part should consult the following website for information:  
[www.iwarch.roselake.co.uk](http://www.iwarch.roselake.co.uk)

Helen Jackson

### 13<sup>th</sup> September

### Art as a Tool in Understanding Coastal Change

This fascinating talk by Dr Robin McInnes was based on research carried out for the Crown Estate with additional funding by the National Maritime Museum. Its aim was to highlight the value of landscape paintings and drawings between 1770 and 1920 for understanding long-term change along the Solent shoreline, covering an area from Hurst Spit in the west to Selsey Bill in the east and including the whole of the Isle of Wight coast. By so doing and in tandem with the standard tools for monitoring the coastline, lessons can be learnt from the past to aid wise decision-making for the future, especially with the increasing risks faced as a result of climate change.

Armed with a list of known artists, Robin had made a thorough search of national and local museums, galleries and archives; it had also been necessary to develop a ranking system for the wide variety of styles and media. So, owing to their realistic depictions of local scenery the Pre-Raphaelites emerged as most important for accuracy of artistic style; watercolours, engravings and aquatints as more reliable media than oil paintings; general views of the beach and cliffs and a detailed appreciation of geology most useful in terms of subject-matter; and the Victorian and Edwardian periods of greater use than the earlier study periods. A total of 1500 paintings by 350 artists were reviewed in all, from which a shortlist of over 400 paintings was drawn up: among the most prolific and of most use were John Brett, Miles Birkett Foster and Edward William Cooke.

Some fascinating illustrations showed us how, for instance, art could assist our understanding of geomorphology, e.g. a view of the Undercliff revealed how it was once heavily grazed, in contrast to the heavy tree cover which has grown up since grazing stopped in the early 1900s. An illustration of Horse-shoe Bay by contrast provided a comparison of former beach levels and what coastal protection looked like then. Other illustrations allowed a comparison of coastal erosion rates: an 1809 watercolour of the Atherfield coast showed coastal erosion taking place, then as now; whilst an 1855 engraving of old tree trunks killed off by salt penetration on the foreshore at Osborne Bay provided further graphic evidence of long-term coastal change.

Art can also illustrate coastal defence chronology: in a watercolour of Seagrove Bay c.1900/15 the seawall looked in good condition, yet the prominent villas behind it were destroyed 20 to 30 years later with coastal landslip: what promoted the instability, too much development and drainage run-off? Old paintings can be crucial in assessing estuary and harbour evolution, most notably in the case of Brading Harbour before the building of the embankment in 1880; they can also assist in interpreting environmental change, as at Hallett Shute, Yarmouth, where in the 1890s it is possible to see the full extent of the saltmarsh and compare with its subsequent loss.

By the end of the talk we were certainly convinced of the value of art as an additional tool for understanding coastal change, and Robin was hopeful that this pilot study could act as a model for other parts of the coastline round the country. He added that, in the difficult decisions that may lie ahead about which areas of the Island's coast to defend and which to let go, paintings from the past which illustrate these points could play a valuable role in convincing a sceptical public, who might be more willing to accept the evidence from paintings than simply what Council officers may say!

The full report is available by registering at the following website:-

[http://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/mrf\\_general\\_studies](http://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/mrf_general_studies)

Alan Phillips

## **7<sup>th</sup> November**

### **Visit to Cadbury Castle**

Little did we know when we set out on our trip to Cadbury Castle that our guide, Don Bryan, had been closely involved in the archaeology of that site for the last 50 years, from the age of 14. Add to that his extensive knowledge of Arthurian and Dark Age legend and we had a great opportunity to learn more about the archaeology and mystery of this area of Somerset.

After meeting us from the Red Jet, Don took us on a scenic route through the New Forest where we were delighted to see deer darting across the road in front of us.

The ancient track leading up to the castle was muddy and treacherous, but we were rewarded with stunning views on a perfect autumn morning. We learnt about 3 main phases of this ancient site.

### **Iron Age**

We entered via the gateways through the massive eight-century embankments. There are up to 5 layers of ramparts and, on the opposite side of the hill, Don showed us the Southwest entrance, with its snake-like trackway similar to that at Maiden Castle. Evidence suggests that this was where the Romans attacked and broke through the defences and burnt the gateposts. A pit contained about 37 skeletons - men, women and children, decapitated and with limbs missing.

Evidence for two trackways and buildings from this period have also been found. Looking across to the surrounding hills, trackways, lynchets and enclosures gave an indication of the widespread farming in the area.

The Romans do not seem to have used the site as a settlement but did build a small temple inside the enclosure.

### **Dark Ages**

Over the years Don had worked with some of the great names of archaeology exploring the dark ages activity at Cadbury, Glastonbury Tor and Tintagel. The 3 sites are linked by finds of similar pottery imported from the Mediterranean.

At Cadbury a wall was constructed on top of the Iron Age bank, consisting of upright timbers at intervals, with stone walling in-between, up to about 10 feet high and with a trench outside. The visual impact of this must have been staggering. Quarry pits inside the site show where some of the building stone came from. On the high level ground inside the enclosure Don used us as human markers to show the outline of the Great Hall. This was surrounded by an inner stockade. Evidence for a very early church was found and there are other buildings from this era still unexcavated,

### **Anglo- Saxon**

Archaeology seems to support the legends that this area resisted Saxon incursion for a considerable time before eventually succumbing. The site was used as a Royal palace by Ethelred the Unready and we saw some of the defensive stone wall remaining from that time.

It seems that the site was then abandoned; there is no evidence for a medieval settlement in the immediate vicinity,

Of course, the landscape is one of the most significant aspects of this site with stunning views in all directions from Dorset and across the Somerset levels to Glastonbury Tor and beyond to the Quantocks. In the past the levels were flooded as the tide poured in from Bridgewater Bay, with a causeway linking Cadbury with Glastonbury. 12 miles away, until the land was drained in the middle ages.

One cannot visit this area without thinking of King Arthur. Whether or not he existed in any way, relevant to the legends and whether the battle of Camlan and his death happened in this area. The area was clearly central to the battle for dominance between the native tribes and the incoming North Europeans. The invaders were for some time prevented from moving west of the Oxford to Southampton area and Don is well versed in the mythology of the area. Conversations with the locals during the early excavations led to the finding of a tunnel inside the site, leading at a 30 degree angle into the limestone. Very early geophysics by Leslie Alcock at Cadbury and Glastonbury Tor confirmed the tunnels, presumably formed aeons ago by water powering through the oolitic limestone, but possibly later used by humans and now lending support to the ancient tales.

There are still secrets to be uncovered. Only a fraction of the site has been excavated and Lord Cadbury will not allow further work. As we headed back via Stonehenge we all agreed that a visit to Glastonbury is a must.

A fascinating site, the perfect guide, stunning views, a sunny autumn day, scenic drives through beautiful and historic countryside, congenial company – society outings can't get much better than this!

Helen Jackson

## Botany

### 19<sup>th</sup> July

#### Sibden Hill

On a bright and blustery afternoon we climbed up Sibden Hill from Joseph's Way to an unimproved meadow overlooking Sandown Bay. The grasses were still able to be identified but were past their best. Plants with yellow daisy-like flowers always give rise to much close examination, using hand lenses and reference to keys, as we try to get to grips with the finer points of identification. In particular we looked at the distinction between Cat's Ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) and Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), which is related to the hairiness of the stems.

We also investigated the floor of the adjacent Carter's Quarry where two horses were grazing. They showed a commendable interest in our activities, although eating the specimen under identification was not judged to be particularly helpful! The pale pink flowers of Musk Mallow *Malva moschata* were quite noticeable, creeping through the brambles. The most interesting find here was a tall lemon flowered bedstraw *Galium x pomeranicum* which is a hybrid between Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and Hedge Bedstraw (*G. mollugo*). This is a relatively uncommon species but it has been found at several locations on the Island this summer

### 8<sup>th</sup> August

#### Wight Salads

This meeting was a follow up to the General Meeting held in May 2008, to allow us to look more closely at some of the specialist plants of the light sandy soils around the greenhouses. Water storage reservoirs have been constructed leading to some spoil heaps colonised by vigorously growing thistle, docks and mayweed but where the soil has been left undisturbed for some time, plants characteristic of acid grassland were found.

On our previous visit we had recorded 76 species; this time we re-found 44 of these and added another 54 making a total for the site of 130 over the two visits.

In these nutrient-poor soils, plants which can fix atmospheric nitrogen via symbiotic bacteria in their root nodules have an advantage. Examples of these included Lesser Trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*) Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Spotted Medick (*Medicago arabica*) and Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*).

Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*) was found growing in its characteristic lines - a result of aerial shoots being produced at evenly-spaced intervals along the length of its rhizomes. Small Cudweed (*Filago minima*) was also seen in addition to the Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*) recorded last year. The best find of the afternoon was Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*). This is an uncommon plant on the Island and had not previously been recorded in this 1km grid square.

### 12<sup>th</sup> September

#### St George's Down

Colourful tents on the horizon and the strains of music on the wind reminded us that this was the Bestival weekend. Richard Grogan of the Hampshire and Isle Of Wight Wildlife Trust guided us round this site on top of St George's Down, adjacent to Newport Golf course. The site is being restored to acid grassland as part of the Wight Quarries project. A dense covering of Common Gorse (*Ulex europaea*) developed when gravel extraction ceased, shading out lower-growing species. Now the Gorse has been largely cleared back, these plants have been able to flourish once more.

The acid grassland species we recorded included Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*). Dwarf Gorse, which flowers in late summer, has its flowers clustered nearer

to the tip of the stem than common gorse, and the spines are only faintly furrowed.

Dwarf Cudweed (*Filago minima*) previously found on our meeting at the Wight Salads site was also recorded and Water Purslane (*Lythrum portula*) was found at the edge of a shallow scrape that has standing water for much of the year.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> October**

#### **Bouldnor Forest**

This meeting to look for galls, leaf miners and microfungi proved remarkably productive with 30 gall causers, 22 leaf miners and 26 species of microfungi being found by the group.

Fourteen species of plant were found to have galled parts, with Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) having ten and four kinds of gall respectively. Nineteen of the galls had not been seen during our April meeting because they develop on leaves. Examples of these on the underside of oak leaves included Smooth Spangle Gall (*Neuroterus albipes*), Common Spangle Gall (*N. quercusbaccharum*) and Silk Button Spangle (*N. numismalis*) on the leaf blade and Oyster Galls (*N. anthracinus*) on the midribs. The only new gall causer for the site was *Jaapiella veronicae*, which causes the terminal shoot of Speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*) to grow a dense covering of greyish hairs.

Seventeen different species showed damage from leaf miner activity, with oak having three species of moth caterpillar and one species of sawfly caterpillar identified. Seven of the leaf miners recorded were new for the site.

#### **31<sup>st</sup> October**

#### **Los Altos Park Sandown**

This park, which has views to the south and west over Shanklin, is tucked behind the main road between Sandown and Lake. It was once the garden of the large private house formerly owned by the Drabble family, and now a hotel. The name Los Altos means The Heights in Spanish. Some features remain from the original garden including two clumps of large Corsican Pines (*Pinus nigra*) and very striking lines of Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) alongside Mansion Path. This path is a sunken track, dug out to prevent overlooking of the house from the garden. The Holm Oaks were originally planted as hedges, but between Mrs Drabble's death in 1955 and the acquisition of the land by Sandown and Shanklin Urban District Council as a public park in 1958, they had grown to such a size that they were left to grow up as trees.

Bill Shepard was our guide, with contributions from Dave Trevan, as we tried to identify the ornamental trees and shrubs planted here. In total we were able to name 29 species within the park and a further three just outside. The autumn colours were developing well, particularly in the Cockspur Thorn (*Crataegus crus-gallii*), which had large reddish-orange berries, and Liquidambar or Sweet Gum Tree (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), whose lower leaves were still green but becoming suffused with crimson, orange and deep yellow.

Many of the trees had a good crop of fruit including an Almond (*Prunus dulcis*), which proved attractive to one of the group preparing to make a Christmas cake. A Willow-leaved Pear (*Pyrus salicifolia*) was also fruiting well. It has small green pear-shaped fruits and silvery leaves which are lanceolate in shape.

The final tree, over which there was some debate, had many small round green fruits that were rolling down the hill. We concluded that it was a Pear-apple *Pyrus nivalis* – its globular fruits were tasted by one of the more intrepid members of the group who described them as having the consistency of pears rather than apples. This tree has very attractive blossom in Spring, so a return visit to the Los Altos Park is recommended in mid-April.

Anne Marston

### **Entomology**

#### **6<sup>th</sup> July**

#### **Alverstone**

This meeting recorded species by the railway line south of Alverstone Mead, in Skinners Meadow, and in Alverstone Lynch in preparation for a public access walk to the area as part of the Summer Walks programme, on the following Saturday. Five members and two young visitors attended. Unfortunately the later meeting was held in much worse weather, and so many of the best finds on this day were not

visible at the later meeting.

The greatest success was the number of butterflies to be seen, including Purple Hairstreak at the edge of Skinners Meadow, and a fine group of four Comma, a Red Admiral and at least three White Admirals in a glade in the Lynch. A number of Speckled Bush-crickets were seen in the meadow, and a Swallow-tailed Moth and another moth, the Small Rivulet, were seen as we moved from the meadow and towards the woodland. We were shown the mines of the Nut-leaf Blister moth, *Phyllonorycter coryli* which make the upper side of the leaf of the Hazel a parchment-like opaque grey, and which, many centuries ago, could cause sufficient damage to the hazel crop to lead to serious food shortages.

Other finds included Blue-tailed and Azure Damselflies, as well as the Banded Demoiselles for which this stretch of the Yar Valley is well known.

Richard Smout

### **17th Sept.**

### **Totland**

On the first of two National Moth nights, eight of us met at my cottage for the evening, where I ran two Robinson Moth traps. It was a warm evening with the temperature only dropping overnight to 14deg.C, with a very slight North-easterly wind. Nothing of great note was recorded, although when I counted the catch the following morning there were forty-two species of macros and ten micros, which is very good for the time of year. The three most abundant species were the Large Yellow-Underwing with 163, the Square-spot Rustic with 114 and the Setaceous Hebrew Character with 61 examples. The best migrant was the Convolvulus Hawk.

On Sept 17<sup>th</sup>, Ian & Cathy Fletcher recorded the rare migrant the Clifden Nonpareil, at their home at Cranmore and I recorded one on Sept.16th.& 19th.here at Totland.

We imbibed on tea, wine & biscuits and a most enjoyable evening was had by all.

Sam Knill-Jones

### **8<sup>th</sup> October**

### **Ningwood Common**

Three members met on a sunny afternoon, to look for a range of autumn species at this Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust reserve. Thirteen new galls and three new leaf-mining records were found for the site. However the most interesting record of the day was the discovery of the Mirid Bug *Lygus pratensis*. This is a Red Data book species with only one previous authenticated record from the Island. The Red Data citation states that woodland management should aim to retain rides and clearings, broad, open and sunny, and it was in an area where the ride had recently been broadened out where this species was found.

Among the butterflies seen were Speckled Wood, Comma and a single Clouded Yellow. Two old egg cases of the Wasp Spider were observed on gorse. Other species included the 16-spot Ladybird, the Gorse Shield-bug and the Squash-bug *Coreus marginatus*. A Common Groundhopper was also seen and studied. Few birds were seen but Buzzard, Jay and Linnet were all heard and a Sparrowhawk passed through the reserve.

Richard Smout

## **Fungi**

### **Fungi meetings 2009**

We held six well-attended field meetings during the main fungi season. The first one was at Parkhurst Forest on 26<sup>th</sup> September on a warm, sunny morning. Conditions were not good for finding fungi as the ground was very dry. Colin Pope returned from holiday that day and was unable to attend although some fungi were taken to him for identification later. Despite the conditions David Biggs, Beth Dollery and Leslie Howard identified 38 species in all including a lovely specimen of *Sparassis crispa*, Cauliflower Fungus.

A fortnight later our Annual Foray was held at Jersey Camp at Porchfield where we welcomed seven members of the Hampshire Fungi Group. Alan Outen, the Hertfordshire Recorder for Fungi, again led us and despite the very dry conditions we had a very successful meeting. The morning was spent in Locks Copse with a few searching Burnt Wood, a small wood nearby. During the afternoon some visited Robin Wood on the MOD land and some searched Walters Copse. Unfortunately, Alan has been inundated with work which he has had to prioritise, and at the time of writing his report has not been received. On the Sunday a small group visited Combley Great Wood, and for Alan, the highlight of the weekend was



the finding of a very rare Bolete growing along an Alder spring line. He has only seen it once before and we have never seen it – the Alder Bolete, *Gyrodontia livida*. ( **Photo**, page 17 ) It appears on the Red Data list.

Our third meeting was at Fatteningpark Copse on 24<sup>th</sup> October. By this time the rains had arrived and 14 people met in heavy rain. The conditions made it difficult for us to consult the reference books in the field and many specimens were taken home by Jillie and Colin to identify later. 40 species altogether, which was not bad considering that at the beginning of the week the weather was still dry and very few fungi were seen there. An unusual Pipe Club, *Macrotiophyllum fistulosum* was seen popping up through the fallen leaves. A purple toadstool was found which rather looked like a Wood Blewit but was, in fact, *Cortinarius purpurascens*, Bruising Webcap. A Collared Earthstar, *Geastrum triplex*, was seen along the hedgerow opposite the crematorium.

By the next meeting, at Firestone Copse on 7<sup>th</sup> November, conditions were perfect for fungi forays. Although in normal years this would have been rather late in the season, the ground was wet, and the temperatures mild which encouraged the fungi to fruit. 24 attended on a beautiful and sunny morning. This venue very rarely fails us and this time we found 82 species. On this occasion we did indeed find a Wood Blewit, *Lepista nuda* as well as the *Cortinarius purpurascens*. Six varieties of Amanita were spotted: The False Deathcap, *Amanita citrina*, and the white variant, Fly Agaric, *Amanita muscaria*, Panther Cap, *Amanita pantherina*, the Blusher *Amanita rubescens*, and Grey Spotted Amanita, *Amanita spissa*. We also had seven types of *Lactarius*, the Milkcaps.

On 21<sup>st</sup> November 17 people attended the delightful National Trust wood at Borthwood on a damp and overcast morning. The mix of trees were Hazel, Oak, Beech, Sweet Chestnut and conifer which all helped us in finding 67 species. The Pipe Club, *Macrotiophyllum fistulosum*, was again seen. Previous to this year we had only two records, in Centurion's Copse in November 1994 and at Firestone in October 1982. For the first time this season the Jelly Ear, *Auricularia auricula-judae*, was seen. A red fungus was spotted growing on another very decayed fungus which could possibly have been *Meripilus giganteus*. This was identified as *Hypomyces rosellus*. For the first time this year we saw *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis*, The Goblet, a late season fungus.

Our last field meeting was held at Ventnor Botanic Gardens on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Last year when we met here at the same time, we had very heavy rain but this time it held off for the morning. 20 people attended and we were rewarded with a very respectable list of 63 species. There is a mixture of habitats: trees, grassland and woodchips on the flowerbeds. Our list reflects this with a bias towards grassland and woodchip fungi: *Clavulina rugosa*, Wrinkled Club, *Clavulinopsis corniculata*, Meadow Coral, *Clavulinopsis fusiformis*, Golden Spindles, *Clavulinopsis helvola*, Yellow Club, *Coprinus atramentarius*, Common Inkcap, *Coprinus disseminatus*, Fairy Inkcap, *Galarina pumila*, Dwarf Bell, *Hygrocybe chlorophana*, *Hygrocybe coccinea*, Scarlet Waxcap, *Hygrocybe psittacina*, Parrot Cap, *Hygrocybe virginea*, Snowy Waxcap, *Lepista saeva*, Field Blewit, *Pleurotus ostreatus*, Oyster Mushroom, *Stropharia aurantiaca*, Redlead Roundhead, *Volvariella gloiocephala* and *Geoglossum fallax*, Earth Tongue.

To round off, we held an indoor meeting at our offices in Dudley Road, Ventnor on 12<sup>th</sup> December. This was to see photographs taken of some of the fungi seen at our meetings. This included Mike Cotterill's very good photograph of the Alder Bolete found at Combley Great Wood and Colin showed us two of the *Cordyceps militaris*, Scarlet Caterpillarclub, seen at Locks Copse on our Annual Foray.

Jackie Hart

## Geology

### 6<sup>th</sup> September

### Geology Walk in Totland Bay

Leaving the dinosaur bones and ammonites of the Isle of Wight's oldest rocks behind, we ventured into newer, younger territory on this walk at Totland Bay. During the past year we have explored the *Wealden* rocks at Chale Bay and at Yaverland, with our guides from the Geological Society of the Isle of Wight. These rocks were laid down in the *Cretaceous* period, the youngest part of the *Mesozoic*, or Middle, era. At the end of this period some momentous event happened that wiped out some two-thirds of the species that inhabited the Earth. That was sixty-five million years ago.

Our guide for this afternoon, Paul Newton, told our group of seven members how the rocks exposed

on the cliffs at Headon Hill, the magnificent green headland rising at right-angles to Totland seafront, belong to the *Tertiary*, or Third, era which began immediately after that catastrophic event. These rocks were laid down some thirty-seven to thirty-eight million years ago. This western corner of the Island's Solent coast represents the younger part of the *Eocene*, or Older, period of this era. Further east, beyond Yarmouth, the rocks are even younger, the youngest on the island.

Part-way up the cliff side, among a thick covering of trees and bushes, we could see an outcrop of limestone. These rocks are remarkable because they were laid down in fresh water. This is an extremely rare occurrence. In shallow lakes, clays are usually formed, but here, at that time, there were enough minerals in the water to form limestone. Some of it is *Bembridge* limestone, well known on the Island as building material. To the east, the *Hamstead* beds, consisting of the newest rocks, are marine again.

Limestones are almost entirely made up of shells. Along the shore some of the rocks we found were soft, which made them crumble when Paul split them open with hammer and chisel. And so the tiny shells inside tended to break. So we searched for harder rocks.

Paul told us that occasionally in the bright green clay there are tiny *gastropods*, or mollusc-like snails, called *Theodoxus*, one of the few fossils in the world that shows evidence of colour. We can't see what the colours were, but they have lighter zigzags around the shell. They are found in clusters in the clay. In the black clay turtle shell is sometimes found, and occasionally even whole turtles. Evidence of crocodiles living here is also occasionally found in the form of *skutes*, being the lumps on the crocodile's back.

We were content to find a variety of tiny fossilised shells, including the spiral shell of a member of the *galbus* genus, that is still alive today. According to official consensus, the process of fossilisation takes about a hundred thousand years. To find these shells, some thirty-eight million years old, in rocks liberally strewn about the beach, is truly awe-inspiring.

Margaret Nelves

## Ornithology

### 23<sup>rd</sup> August,

#### Mottistone Down

Eight members met on a sunny, breezy morning, with some clouds, for a walk on Mottistone Down to the Long Stone and return to the Jubilee Car Park by way of Strawberry Lane. At the start of the walk we had good views of at least four Redstart, one of which had a speckled breast. A Willow Warbler was heard in the car park and a Buzzard was seen hanging in the air. Other migrants seen or heard during the course of the morning were Barn Swallows and Common Whitethroat and several Willow/Chiffs. Three Ravens flew by and two Kestrel were seen hovering. Whilst walking up the Down we noticed quite a few Fox Moth caterpillars crawling on the track. Four Meadow Pipits were seen and Green Woodpecker heard. In the woodland at the base of the Down on our way to the Long Stone we came across a number of Wild Cherry trees which provided us all with ripe fruit to eat. Along the hedgerow we saw a pair of Yellowhammer. Butterflies seen were Gatekeeper, Painted Lady, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Chalkhill Blue and quite a number of Adonis Blue – both male and female. David Biggs had just asked Toni Goodley whether she had seen the Jersey Tiger in Ryde and the writer was envisaging a huge beast when a colourful moth fluttered by and landed on a leaf - a delightful Jersey Tiger moth and no one had a camera! In all 20 species of birds were seen, but a good natural history walk altogether.

### 19<sup>th</sup> September.

#### West High Down

Eight members met on a warm still autumn morning, for a walk from the chalk-pit car park along the top of West High Down. Several Chiffchaffs and a single Willow Warbler were seen in the hedgerow along the lane as were some very bright Comma butterflies on the blackberries. Two Dartford Warblers were putting on a good display in the gorse near the Beacon. This was encouraging as the Down has been devoid of the species since the harsh weather of the previous winter. In the same area of gorse, we saw two Whinchats, a Redstart, a male Great Spotted Woodpecker and a single Wheatear. There was a good movement of Meadow Pipits flying east overhead and of Swallows and House Martins heading south. A Peregrine was seen along the cliff edge. A search for the Shore Lark that had been present from mid-August into early September proved unfruitful.

**3<sup>rd</sup> October,****Culver Down.**

Eleven members met on a cold and overcast morning at the far eastern end car park for a walk in the area with a view to seeing birds on migrations. Barn Swallows flew overhead and small flocks of House Martins flew along the cliff edge. A flock of Goldfinches, a Chiff Chaff heard, a Whinchat and two male and two female Stonechat also seen as were nine Meadow Pipits, two Kestrel and two Ravens. Using the telescope we looked at Dynamite Pool field on Brading Marshes and saw flocks of Canada Geese and Lapwing. In all 26 species noted.

**28<sup>th</sup> November,****Ryde.**

Nine members met on the seaward side of Ryde Canoe Lake for a sea watch and walk to Appley Park. Although it was about two hours after high tide only Oystercatchers were seen on the sands. We did see several Great Crested Grebe with one quite close in. There were Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull and Mediterranean Gull. We had a wonderful display from the Black-headed Gulls as they flew around after bread being thrown by someone. We counted at least 16 Mediterranean Gulls and had good views through the telescope. One of these gulls had rings on the legs and Elaine Rice took the details. In amongst the flock of Brent Geese one stood out as different from the rest and was a Pale Bellied Brent Goose. Before walking off down the esplanade, 66 Mute Swan were counted on the Canoe Lake, a Moorhen and Mallard were also seen. A walk round Appley Park produced approximately 60 Redwing both in the trees and flying over as well as a Mistle Thrush. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was heard as well as a Raven. 28 species altogether with some of the common birds missing from the list.

**20<sup>th</sup> December,****Newtown.**

14 members met at the National Trust Visitors car park for a walk on the National Nature Reserve. Although freezing we had lovely blue sky all morning. Our first stop was in the main hide where we overlooked the Scrape where we saw: Grey Heron, Little Egret, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Cormorant, Wigeon and Teal. A Merlin was spotted sitting on a low post on the far bank of the Scrape and remained there all the time enabling everyone to have good views through a telescope. On the handrail of the bridge leading to the old seawall perched a Meadow Pipit and Rock Pipit and we were able to compare the differences. We then walked over the bridge, passed the Salt Pans to Black Hut where we were closer to the exposed mud of main marsh and also the Estuary. Here we noted besides the above: Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Shelduck, Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Knot, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Red Breasted Merganser, Goldeneye, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Curlew, Brent Geese, Mute Swan and two Bar Tailed Godwits which were with some Oystercatchers on the Shalfleet side of the Estuary. Whilst looking over the Estuary a Kingfisher flew into the Salt Pans where it stayed a short while. We walked down passed the Salt Pans to the meadow looking for Pintail. We eventually found them in their usual spot in Causeway Lake. In all 45 species were seen.

Jackie Hart  
& Caroline Dudley

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## **Next Bulletin**

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The closing date for acceptance of articles and reports will be 12th July 2010