Bulletin

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President's Address

Learning from the lost road

Last month I took the chance to explore parts of the lost Blackgang road, an area of the Island I had somehow never been to. The old road finally collapsed in 1994 after many years of gradually getting closer to the sea, cutting off much of the undercliff area between Blackgang Chine and Niton, including several dwellings and a holiday park. The area is now all but inaccessible except on foot, via some quite hazardous and intricate routes. My advice to anyone considering the trip themselves is to go in fine, dry weather, and take a guide who knows the way.

One thing that I was interested to see on my exploration was just how quickly the natural world was able to reclaim the land, when human disturbance is reduced. Here in comfortable south-east England we rarely encounter wilderness or anything close to it, but deep on Blackgang undercliff I got an insight into what it must be like. My route was only a few hundred metres from the well-tamed landscape further inland, but the steep inner cliff means that this little part of the Island gets very few visitors. Nearly thirty years of abandonment is enough to erase almost all signs of civilisation to casual inspection. Another century or so and I would expect the occasional unexpected bit of tarmacked roadway that you can still see, and even more occasional ruined chalets, to disappear entirely.

One cannot assume that all human impacts upon our environment are so ephemeral. We know all too well that human activity is making changes to the atmosphere, the climate and to the whole planet's ecology. It will take far more than a few decades for the planet to recover its equilibrium, if indeed it ever can. We can easily feel overwhelmed by the scale of this challenge, but one thing we can do is to learn the lessons of Blackgang undercliff when making choices about what to do with land. I've spent much of my career actively managing habitats and species for conservation, but sometimes I can't help thinking the best management in the long term is simply to leave completely alone. With enough time, many areas of natural and semi-natural habitat will stabilise and turn into landscapes that may or may not be what we want to see, but which are nonetheless the product of the species that can naturally survive there.

This is not a new concept at all, even if few in 1994 would have even considered that the loss of Blackgang Old Road might lead to benefits for wildlife - and they definitely would not have used the modern term 'rewilding' back then. However, this principle then and now can be useful in gardening, in agriculture and in any kind of land management. Whatever you are doing to your land, take the opportunity to leave some bits alone to find their own way. Then watch and learn as you see what happens to them.

Matthew Chatfield

Strategic Stone Study:
A Building Stone Atlas of the Isle of Wight

England's rich architectural heritage owes much to the great variety of stones used in buildings and other structures. Stone buildings commonly reflect the local geology, imparting local distinctiveness to historic towns, villages and rural landscapes. Stone is the major building material in many of the half-a-million listed buildings and 9,500 conservation areas in England.
If the character of these buildings and areas is to be maintained, supplies of new matching stone are needed for repair and for new construction. In many cases however, the source of the original stone is not known and even if it is known, it is not unusual to find that the quarry has long-since closed. This makes it difficult to obtain suitable stone for repairs or for new-build projects. By identifying the most significant building stones used in the past and by establishing where they came from and potential alternative sources, the Strategic Stone Study attempts to address these problems.
(From the British Geological Survey Strategic Stone Study introductory webpage, reference below)

For much of this country's inhabited history, the dwellings of most people were made of ephemeral natural materials gathered locally. Wooden frames, with wattle and daub were common-place unless you could afford cut stone or brick from local quarries. Nationally this pattern of locally obtained, often organic, materials led to the establishment of local construction techniques. This localisation was not only driven by the constraints on what materials were available, but also on the costs of turning wood into frames, the costs of transport, and limitations on how far a skilled carpenter or builder could travel. Until the late medieval the main building materials would have been organic in origin.

This established a mosaic of recognized patterns of construction that can still be seen in places around the country. Fast forward to about four centuries ago and the pattern of construction on the Isle of Wight began its slow transition into buildings made from local sources of natural stone. Construction continued to form locally recognised patterns, not only in the form of the building, but in the internal layout, and of such features as window framing, and the positioning of the stones in walls. Due to the heavy weight of stone; the time taken to cut, create and face blocks; and the costs of transport, many stone-built vernacular buildings were built from stone hewn from local small quarries. Some individual properties may actually sit in the levelled floor of a quarry cut specifically for that site.

Stone buildings can therefore become markers or identifiers for the local underlying geology, and can give a built-area a character that is almost uniquely recognizable. The Greensand villages of the southern half of the Isle of Wight gradually give way to the Chalk-built workers cottages nearer the central Downs, while in the north Wight the use of the Bembridge Limestone, and the local limestones from around Binstead become the common stone. Cobbles of beach-rolled flint faced walls close to the sea.

The Solent acted for a while as a barrier keeping our diamond of an Isle free from too much mainland influence. The expansion of the railway network during the nineteenth century, and mechanised ferries brought with it another transition into streets of buildings constructed in red brick, and immediately after World War II of pre-fab houses, built from concrete slabs. More recently the use of metal sheeting and stapled-together wood and plastic cladding not just for industrial units and shops, but also for the outer parts of new-build domestic dwellings has made parts of the Island indistinguishable from areas on the mainland; and the sense of local identity has begun to be lost, especially in our town centres and new developments (both large and small).

However, the localised character of our towns and villages can still sometimes be revealed in older buildings and from isolated sections of perimeter walls. For some 'new builds' a character wall may be built from some of the salvaged stone from the demolition of a former building on the site, and some new constructions may use a lot of local recycled cut blocks. Much of our demolished heritage has, however, been simply bulldozed into landfill to be covered over by bland and homogeneous boxes.

The stone of older buildings has provided for another benefit that helps amongst other things to give character. The softer sedimentary rock of the Isle of Wight can also be host to organisms that thrive on it including not only plants but more mobile creatures like insects and wall-lizards. A building becomes a haven for wildlife, and natural stone can act like a cliff face attracting its own bio-community. Progressively replacing old stone with brick, metal, plastic and wood cladding introduces fundamental changes to the natural 'living' heritage that also relies on these older buildings to survive. Lose the stone

and lime mortar and you lose not just the character of the stone environment but you make fundamental changes to the flora and fauna as well.

To record the rich diversity of locally-hewn building stone used across the country Historic England commissioned a set of studies that would progressively collect and record the different types of stone used, their geological data, the likely source of the quarries, and examples of buildings where this stone could be seen.

Work was broken up into a series of county-based building stone atlases. Historic England commissioned the studies, with the results being progressively made available online from the British Geological Survey website.

For each area a text Atlas was supplemented by three spreadsheets. These contained lists of

- Known building stones within the county
- Representative examples of stone buildings and villages constructed from those stones
- Known building stone quarries

Brick-making sites were not included.

All of these documents can be downloaded (see references at the end of this article).

From 2010 Geckoella Limited, in Somerset, became involved in carrying out research work across the country, and by 2015 had completed the Strategic Stone Studies for East and West Sussex. I was fortunate enough to have been recommended by Historic England as the local geological specialist for the report for the Isle of Wight (carried out in 2016). Work for the Isle of Wight resulted in its Atlas being published in September 2016.

My contribution to the Island's Atlas, included the following input.

- Reviewed rock types and stratigraphy
- Checked to ensure each building stone type was assigned to the correct stratigraphic unit
- Identified a number of additional rock types used for building that were not previously listed
- Provided further information on some of the stone quarried from around Binstead
- Updated stratigraphic names and terms
- Provided further references

So why is this important? Without re-use of local stone, we need to import and use new materials. All of this has an environmental cost that can be reduced by the sustainable use of re-using existing stone wherever we can. We stand to dilute or lose the heritage character of our Island when we use new modern materials. Without re-use or maintenance, we also lose the building skills of centuries of experience as the surviving artisans / masons retire without passing their knowledge onto new apprentices. Stone is generally fire-proof as well, so why not use it on outside walls.

Perhaps one can hope that it isn't just feature walls that may be retained when an old building is torn down, but that the character of our Island buildings, seen in the stone from the geology that lies below will begin to be re-used in any new local building, and follow the original course-work construction pattern.

New-builds using salvaged stone already exist on the Island. In Figure 1 we can see an agricultural building, just over 20 years old. Its girder frame and blockwork / brick interior has external walls of Isle of Wight stone, with corners reinforced by red brick. The construction has been careful to expose an original mason's mark, see Figure 2.

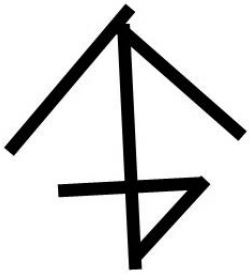


Figure 1 (left) External wall of an agricultural building, constructed in 2000.
Figure 2 (right) Original mason's marks on one of the stones in the building shown in Fig 1.

I would recommend reading the Isle of Wight Strategic Stone Study and its supplements; and if you can, to keep a watch for the retention of old stone builds as part of our Islands heritage. And if a building cannot be saved then help to ensure its stone is re-used in the right place as part of a restoration or new build rather than be used as landfill.

Many thanks must go to Historic England (Clara Willett), The Natural Environment Research Council, The British Geological Survey, Geckoella Limited (Dr Andy King), Richard Smout and others for undertaking this project and making its results available.

You may also find it interesting (as I have done) to read the studies for other parts of the country.
Further reading can be found in the excellent book 'Farmhouses and Cottages of the Isle of Wight, 1987, compiled by Marion Brinton, produced by the Isle of Wight County Council Cultural Services Dept. ISBN 0-906328-38-1'

Webpages:
Start from here …
https://www2.bgs.ac.uk/mineralsUK/buildingStones/StrategicStoneStudy/EH_project.html
and then for the atlases and spreadsheets
…https://www2.bgs.ac.uk/mineralsuk/buildingStones/StrategicStoneStudy/EH_atlases.html

and for an interactive map …https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/buildingStone/BuildingStone.html

Trevor Price

What's in a name?

Lady's Bedstraw, *Galium verum* and other Bedstraws

As a generic name, *Galium* is derived from *gala*, the Greek word for milk. Historically, flowers from Lady's Bedstraw were used as rennet to curdle milk when making cheese. The tiny flowers of our native *Galium* species are white or whitish with the exception of *Galium verum,* the flowers of which are bright yellow. According to European folklore, bedstraw plants grew in the stable at Bethlehem and were laid upon by the Virgin Mary during her labour. On the birth of the baby boy, the tiny flowers changed from white to gold in celebration of the foretold joyous nativity. In centuries past, *Galium verum* was referred to as Our Lady's Bedstraw, hence *verum,* Latin for truth or honesty, in honour of the Virgin Mother. Lady's Bedstraw is said to smell of new-mown hay so is aptly named from its historical use as additional stuffing to freshen mattresses made of straw or bracken, particularly during a lady's birthing time.

Sweet Woodruff, *Galium odoratum,* also has a pleasant smell likened to that of new-mown hay. Hedge Bedstraw, *Galium mollugo* is named from *molle,* the Latin for soft. Stems of this hedgerow plant are smooth whilst stems of other bedstraws are rough. This plant has recently been renamed *Galium album.*

Marsh Bedstraw, *Galium palustre,* and Fen Bedstraw, *Galium uliginosum,* are named after the habitat where they grow. The Latin *palus* is a marsh whilst *uligo* relates to the wetness of the ground. The Latin name of Heath Bedstraw, *Galium saxatile,* refers to *saxa,* Latin for rock. This species grows mainly on dry heaths and rocky or stony ground.

Cleavers or Goosegrass, *Galium aparine,* derives from *aparine* meaning cleaving to or clinging to, from the Greek verb *aparo* to seize. The whole plant is very rough and will cleave or cling to the fur of passing animals or to people's clothing. The alternative name of Goosegrass refers to the plants being used as supplementary food-stuff for geese and goslings.

The Wall Bedstraw, *Galium parisiense,* appears to be a misnomer as *parisiensis* means from Paris. The Latin word for the wall of a house is *paries,* and *parietalis* means borne on a wall, so maybe a clerical error or mis-translation had occurred at sometime in the past. There is a plant called *Galium murale,* Small Cleavers. *Murus* or *muralis* are the latin words for a city wall/ of a city wall.

Sue Blackwell

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) News

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

The survey closed at the end of June. Many thanks to all of you who have taken part and those of you who have already submitted your data for the two visits in 2022. Please can I remind those who have yet to submit data that the deadline for online submission is the end of August 2022.

At the time of writing, it is hoped that a total of 26 1-km squares has been covered in the Isle of Wight in 2022 which represents a 27% increase in comparison to 2021 and would be a record for participation. There will be a full summary of the survey in the next Bulletin.

Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP)

The Seabird Monitoring Programme monitors the population changes of our internationally important breeding seabird species at coastal and inland colonies across the UK.
Britain and Ireland are home to the majority of Europe's breeding seabirds, so our seabird breeding colonies - both coastal and inland - are of international importance. It is vital, therefore, that we have up to date information on their status and health. This is particularly pertinent with reports of avian flu having an adverse effect on seabird colonies during the breeding season in the UK.

The BTO are delighted to be partnering with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee & Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to coordinate the Seabird Monitoring Programme. The Seabird Monitoring Programme will be funded jointly by BTO and JNCC, in association with RSPB, with fieldwork conducted by both non-professional and professional surveyors. We formally signed the agreement on 1 July and will be working to transition participants from JNCC to BTO over the coming weeks. The BTO will be working with our partners to discuss the future of the scheme and it is possible that there will be a requirement for volunteers to monitor sites. No doubt there will be further details about this survey in future editions of the Bulletin. There is more information online at www.bto.org/smp and you can follow us on Twitter @smp_seabirds.

Sarah Harris has been appointed as the SMP Organiser, starting on 1 July. We are very sorry to be losing Sarah from BBS/WBBS where she has been an excellent National Organiser since April 2014, however, we are very pleased she will be able to use her considerable skills and experience to take SMP forwards.

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

Like the Breeding Bird Survey, the WeBS reporting year ended in June 2022. Our 16 sites appear to have received good coverage for the 2021/22 year, many thanks to all of the counters who have taken part. A reminder to those who have not entered their data that the deadline is the end of August 2022 please. There will be a summary of the reporting year in the next Bulletin.

Medina Estuary has been selected as a Low Tide Count site for 2022/23 reporting year. Keith Marston will be organizing the counts which will take place between November and February. The site has not been monitored for Low Tide Counts since 2009/10 so it will be interesting to compare the data.

BirdTrack

A reminder that when you are entering your summer records that you can make them more valuable by adding any breeding evidence as well as additional counts of juvenile birds via the Plumage/Age options.

During the last couple of months, a new BirdTrack app has been developed that will bring with it many of the features you already know and love but also some new features alongside an improved layout and styling. A lot of the feedback we receive from you has been taken into account and the new app will bring some of these to fruition and will provide a good base on which to build and bring even more features to your mobile device. With testing progressing well we plan to release the new app to the public in the

autumn and will be providing more information over the coming weeks detailing what to expect and how you can update to the latest version.

Garden Bird Watch (GBW)

Latest news from the Garden Bird Watch national organisers is that the number of records of Blue, Coal and Great Tits received from survey participants in June suggests that these species has had an improved breeding season in comparison to 2021 although still lower than average. All three species align their breeding with the emergence of caterpillars. The wet and cold spring in 2021 meant caterpillars were in short supply which resulted in a serious impact on the tits breeding success. Thankfully, the spring of 2022 was drier and warmer overall which is likely to have resulted in a better breeding record.

You can take part in the free Garden Bird Watch survey at any time of the year. For further details, please look online at https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw

If you have any questions regarding any of the above surveys or interested in taking part, please contact me.

Jim Baldwin (BTO Regional Representative)
Tel. 07528 586683, email: wightbto@hotmail.com

A 'new' site for Purging Buckthorn

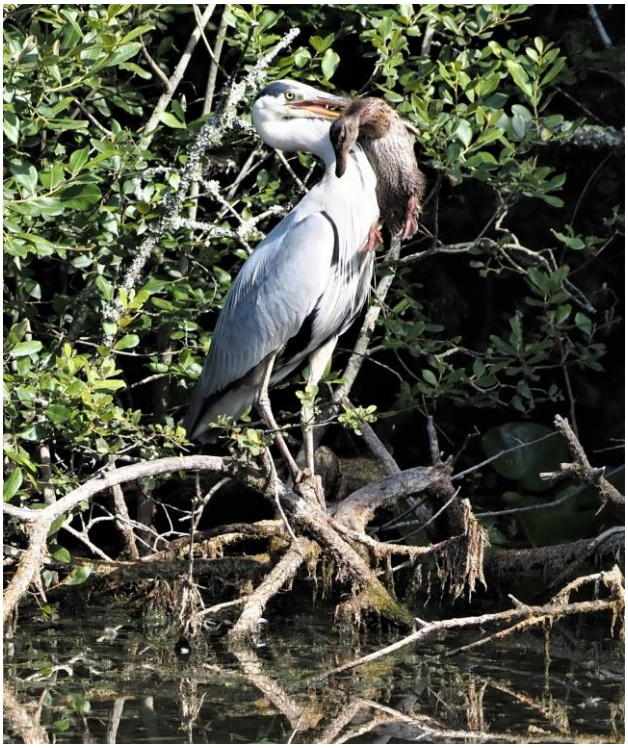
Tony Tutton mentioned to me that he had seen several bushes of Purging Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) growing in an old hedgerow on the Wydcombe Estate, near Whitwell. Purging Buckthorn is a rarity on the Island. The Victorian botanist, Dr William Bromfield, described it as being found sparingly in woods, copses and hedgerows, principally on the chalk in West Wight. Today, it is known from a small handful of sites, mostly scrubby areas, and not at all from the south of the Island.

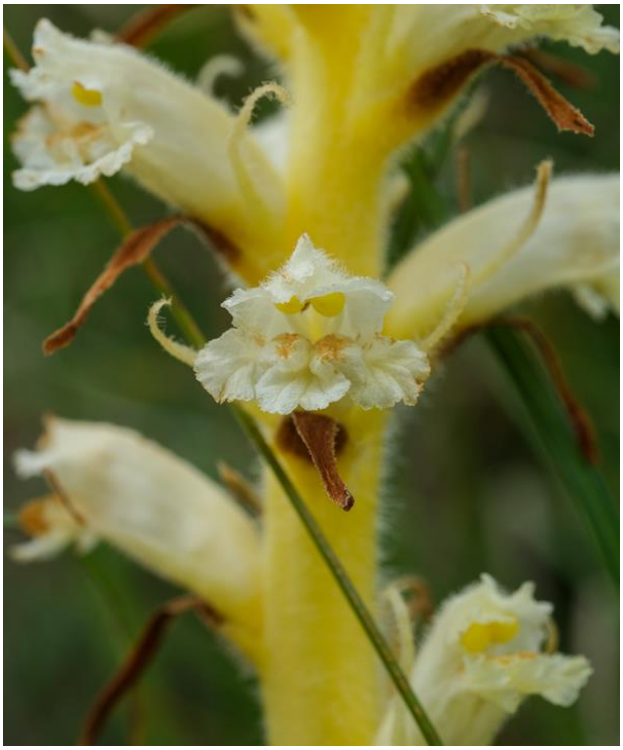
I visited the site described to me by Tony and found that it was an ancient sunken lane leading from Moorhills up onto St Catherine's Down. It is likely to have been the track used to drive livestock up onto the down for summer grazing. The banks of the lane were lined by species-rich hedgerows, unusual for this part of the Island where hedgerows are predominantly hawthorn and blackthorn or elm. These particular hedges had eleven native species including Spindle and Guelder Rose, uncommon in old hedgerows south of the chalk. There were a remarkable total of seven large old bushes of Purging Buckthorn. On a subsequent visit, I found an additional large bush in the nearby hedgerow of the old trackway to Sibbecks Farm.

Left: Hedgerow with large Purging Buckthorn bushes. Right: Purging Buckthorn, *Rhamnus cathartica*, in flower

These species-rich hedgerows, full of Hazel, are quite unlike other hedgerows in the Wydcombe area and indeed in general in farmland south of the chalk and suggest that the trackways must have had a particularly interesting history to allow this diversity of species to survive. **Colin Pope**

Photos from Mike Cotterill, Keith Marston & Roger Powley





Top left: Brent Geese at Newtown, MC; Top right: Immature male Broad-bodied Chaser, Parkhurst, KM; Middle left: Heron with immature mallard, Dickson's Copse, KM; Middle right: Striking yellow form of the rare Oxtongue Broomrape, Afton Down, RP; Bottom: Stranded young Grey Seal, Compton beach, MC

Andy's yarns, continued!

Oh No! Not him again - afraid so. I blame Colin, or Covid. See, this collecting lark's not a lot of skill, it's mostly down to luck. The luck of being in the right place at the right time. Here's how it works out:

Let's go back to May 1987. I was working for W.H.Brading of Cowes. They asked me to work over the weekend, 30th and 31st May. "You're joking" I say, "nice weather, good tides – no chance!" But they kept on at me; pay double time, - still not keen but I did go in. "I'm going to want Monday and Tuesday off" I say. Anyway, that's how I came to be on the shore at Fishbourne on a slightly overcast Tuesday on June 2nd.

Now generally I'd go out there on a weekend and on the weekend you'd get cars parked down by shore. Wightlink customers who don't want to sit in that waste of space car park at the Wightlink Terminal. Yes, well they would get out of the cars and stand on the shingle and look at the sea and me? Well, I like to be off on me own, so I tend to go along to where it's too muddy for anyone who ain't got wellies- out on exposed clay beds in front of Quarr Wood.

But on this day June 2nd, no one but me down there – so I figure I'd take a look at clay exposures at the near end. I start off down shingle bank when I spy this grey silty mud – I'd met that silty stuff before, way out in Thorness Bay and out there I'd seen animal bones, bits of wood (small branches) soft to the touch and I'd found one or two pieces of Roman and Iron Age pot out there. So, no one about to say what you doing- Bait digging? I'll take a look. Yes well, small soggy bits of wood (branches) half burned tree trunks – bark on – looks like oaks. I see jaw of cow? And I see bits of pottery. Not tiny bits like I see out Thorness, but curved bits – hand sized - some black, some buff coloured - just sticking out of the mud. I gathered up ten pieces and carefully bag them and took them home. That evening, I wander up to Frank Basford's house to show him the pot shards. He says he'll take them to Clatterford Archaeological Centre next day.

Thursday evening, I get a phone call from Frank – all those bits of pot were ~Roman or Romano British. "Oh!" I say. The black pieces made on the Island – the buff-coloured bits from the New Forest. Now, he says, can I go to Fishbourne on Saturday and show to the archaeologists where I'd found them. "Sure" I say.

So, Saturday 11.30 Frank drives me out Fishbourne where several people wait to see site. Dave Tomlin only one I knew. "Well" I say leading the way over shingle bank – "Ah out here" I say. Bit of a fiasco really – on Tuesday we were at the back of Spring tides which exposed the silt but today were into Neeps. So there we are stuck on shingle like six Canuts with the sea refusing to obey. "Ah" I said "we can wait for the Ferry" – see when Wightlink Ferry comes steaming into the terminal it sort of sucks the tide out it's a bit like just before a tsunami – the sea disappears then comes rushing back in – only on a smaller scale. Sure enough Ferry arrives, sea leaves and Archaeologists dash out onto silt – like a small flock of waders feeding. When the sea comes back in, they all dash back onto the shingle and wait for the ferry to go back to Portsmouth.

I think this kick started a big Archaeological study along there – well it was somewhere else for me to look and over the next few months I find loads of stuff; lots of pot finds some lovely things – a couple of bits of Samian ware. There were pieces of half-baked clay sausages about the size of a swiss roll but all twisted somehow. You could see finger marks in them. Apparently, something to do with kilns. Cow skulls I see, I found a leather sole of a shoe and one cold November afternoon, I'd taken an afternoon off work- I found part of a Roman glass bowl – a pale green/blue sort of colour – very delicate. I dug it from the silt clay side a big rock, had it been out in the open I reckon it would have been trodden on before it was uncovered and crushed.

I've yet to see the results of the study they did on the site, so if anyone has a copy, I'd sort of like to see it.

Andy Yule

In issue no 74 of The Bulletin (August 2020), Mike Cotterill wrote an article entitled 'Why are Plants Green'. He returns to the subject here with a few further thoughts.

Why Are Plants Green? – Revisited

Previously, while examining why plants are green, a typing error caused the absence of one important word in the explanation of photosynthesis. Since then, I have become aware of a surprising claim made by physicists about photosynthesis. Also, why we actually see the colour green deserves a brief mention.

Something about the biochemical processes of photosynthesis

In the photosynthesis reaction-centre of leaves, where manganese atoms split water and release oxygen, the word "lost" should have been present in the sentence: "When all four manganese atoms have lost an electron, the cluster has enough positive charge to pull four electrons off two molecules of water". Proof that the oxygen released by plants does not come from splitting carbon dioxide molecules was obtained in the 1940s using radioactive carbon-14 in the gas supplied to algae. Analysis showed that the whole carbon dioxide molecule reacted with the enzyme rubisco and entered the metabolic cycle. Nevertheless, some late 20th century palaeontology textbooks perpetuated the misconception about carbon dioxide providing atmospheric oxygen, as did the eminent physicist Richard Feynman on a B.B.C. science programme in 1983.

Within the chloroplasts of a green leaf, built into the membranes are groups of chlorophyll pigment molecules which function together as an antenna to capture photons of sunlight and funnel the captured energy to a nearby reaction-centre to facilitate photosynthesis. The single magnesium atom in each large pigment molecule can absorb one photon of light and thereby has one outermost electron boosted into a higher orbital by the energy acquired. The negatively charged electron is still attracted to the magnesium atom, and physicists regard the electron together with the positively charged "hole" left behind as being a quantum particle called an "exciton".

Moving the captured energy to the reaction centre was originally thought to be a "random walk" of resonance-transfer through intervening antenna molecules. But the antennae have too many molecules for this to be possible without more energy being lost as heat than is compatible with the observed high efficiency. Experiments on spinach by Graham Fleming in 2009, using very short duration laser pulses showed an oscillation pattern which matches the well-known 'double slit experiment' used in quantum physics to prove wave-particle duality. Jim Al-Khalili and Johnjoe McFadden explain the implications in *Life on the Edge – The Coming Age of Quantum Biology* (2014). The "exciton" takes a "quantum walk" through the antenna, simultaneously testing all possible routes and transferring the energy by the shortest possible route. The oscillating "exciton" is able to maintain quantum coherence long enough to arrive, because a protein scaffold holds the antenna molecules in positions which produce vibrational frequencies of "coloured noise". This is in harmony with the "exciton" and protects it from harmful interaction with external random "white noise".

Why do we see the colour green?

We see plants as green because of the way our eyes work. Marine biologist Andrew Parker has explained the sophistication of colour vision and use of colour by animals in *Seven Deadly Colours – The Genius of Nature's Palette* (Natural History Museum 2016). He has been researching colour since 1993 and examined the importance of vision to Cambrian animals 540 million years ago, *In The Blink of an Eye* (2003). There are three types of cone cells in the retina of human eyes which allow colour vision. Each type has a different visual pigment (rhodopsin) which absorbs wavelengths of light over a restricted spectrum. 'Blue Cones' detect wavelengths from 400 to 500 nanometres (nm), but work best at 425 nm. 'Green Cones' detect from 455 to 605 nm. and work best at 530 nm. which is green. 'Red Cones' detect from 485 to 700 nm. and work best at 560 nm. which is yellow.

Plants reflect different combinations of light wavelengths, which enter the eye. Each cone cell contains a chromophore (retinal molecule) attached to a membrane molecule of rhodopsin. When a photon of light is absorbed, the chromophore changes shape causing the cone to send an electrical signal through its dedicated nerve cell into the brain, The brain gives each wavelength its own colour, to construct images in its visual cortex. Most mammals only have 'green' and 'blue' cone cells, so cannot easily

distinguish unripe green fruit from ripe red fruit. The 'red' cone cells evolved in monkeys and are now found in apes and the monkeys of Asia and Africa, but not in the monkeys of South America.

Mike Cotterill

Andy's Nature Notes

JANUARY

5th. Went over to Brading early morning to look for the Glossy Ibis but didn't see them. Returned in the afternoon with Pete Campbell and still didn't see them; we left at 15.00 and they came in at 15.50! We did see 2 Russian White-front geese though, plus Eagles, Redwing, Snipe and Marsh Harriers.
8th. A few Gannets diving off the bay in front of my house. At this time of year they are probably after Sprats. In the afternoon Pete and I went over to Kingston for a reported Great-grey Shrike but failed to see it.
9th. Back to Kingston but no sign of the shrike. Moved on to Yarmouth and spotted the resident Spotted Redshank with its Greenshank companion and then to Newtown to log 8 Common Turnstones in close under the harbour wall plus Knot, Golden Plover etc. Back home, Dave Nordell recorded a Silver Y moth along the revetment.
10th. A Chiffchaff in my garden. Over to Seaview this morning with Pete. Razorbill, 3 Shag, 5 Sandwich Terns, one Black-throated diver, 2 Red-throated Divers, 8 Great-crested Grebes and a Rock Pipit. On to Laundry Lane and had 12 Glossy Ibis (at last!) late pm.
11th. Fulmar Petrel off home.
12th. Kingfisher still at Bonchurch Pond (*right below*). Sweet Violets in bloom in my garden.
13th. The resident Fox by the skateboard park appears to be blind in one eye but seems to be ok otherwise. Geoff Blake, Ventnor fisherman, said that he had a pod of Common Dolphins round his boat in the dark as he was heading out mid-channel (he fishes about 25 miles out). They were attracted by the deck lights. He also said that there were huge shoals of Sprats, Shad and Bass all through the Channel. Sea watching from home there were many Auks on the move in flocks of about 25.
14th. Red Admiral at Bonchurch Pond.
15th. 6 Greylag Geese at Atherfield.
20th. 5 Bottle-nosed Dolphins heading west a long way out. 2 ladies in swimming in the bay in front of my house. Sat out in the garden this morning in the sunshine, didn't need a coat. Very nice! It is my 80th. birthday today and I have decided to give up my car as I rarely use it. It has gone to the youngest step-granddaughter.
21st. Ladies in swimming again.
22nd. Little Egret flying across the bay. Chiffchaff in the garden.
26th. Male Blackcap in the garden. 2 Mute Swans off Bonchurch.
27th. A Seal in the bay briefly this morning. Probably Ron (seal)
28th. 2 Fulmars off home.
30th. A Holly Blue in the garden, the earliest I've ever seen one.
31st. A massive movement of Auks off home, c.1500 in a short time (*left below*) plus Gannets, Kittiwakes and a few Divers all heading west. Ron close in off the revetment.

FEBRUARY

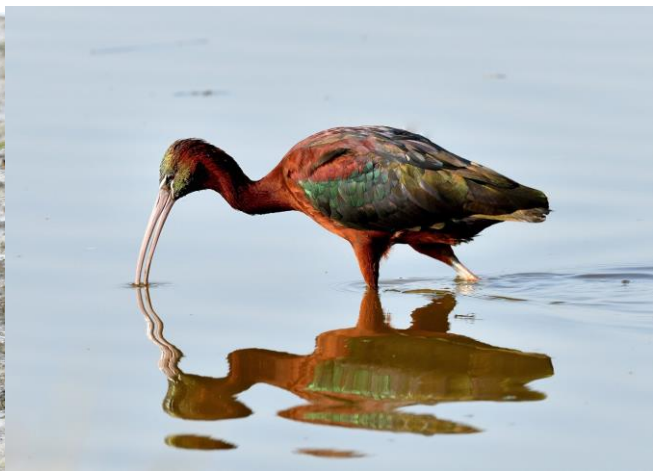
1st. Female Blackcap and 2 Long-tailed tits in the garden.
3rd. Red Admiral in the garden.
4th. A female Sparrowhawk in a tree in the garden (*left below*).
5th. A Great-crested Grebe heading west off home, close in.
7th. Kingfisher still at Bonchurch Pond.
11th. Went to Compton with Pete. Good views of a male Hen Harrier plus 2 Sparrowhawks.
14th. The naturalised Wallflowers along the revetment are coming into bloom.
17th. My son David saw 2 Male Hen Harriers and a Ringtail at Compton this afternoon.
20th. Hoary Stock in full bloom along the revetment.
25th. Kingfisher and a Buzzard up at the Pond today. Peacock butterfly in the garden.
26th. Pete, David and I went to Compton to see the Harriers. Good views. (*right below, photo David Butler*)
27th. A Little Egret in Monk's Bay.

MARCH

5th. Chiffchaff and female Blackcap in the garden. 2 Little Egrets in Monk's Bay.
9th. Male Brimstone butterfly at Bonchurch Pond and the Kingfisher is still there. A Small Tortoiseshell and a Grey Wagtail at Monk's Bay.
12th. 11 Glossy Ibis in a field at Laundry Lane (*left opposite*).
13th. White-tailed Eagle over my house drifting east mobbed by a Buzzard. Black Redstart up in the car park.
15th. A Kestrel on the boathouse roof eating a Wall Lizard. A pod of 6/8 Dolphins heading west off home.
17th. A Beefly, *Bombylius major*, in the garden. Also, a female Brimstone, a Comma, a Large White and a Holly Blue. A migrant Chiffchaff later in the garden. 8 Mute Swans heading east early in the morning.
18th. 'Ron' seal off Monk's Bay.
21st. Dave and I saw a Clouded Yellow along the revetment .
22nd. 2 Clouded Yellow today. These will be a local emergence and not immigrants. A Small White in the garden. 2 Adders along at Monk's Bay. Lots of Beeflies about, many more than usual.
23rd. Went to Yarmouth with Pete. 2 Garganey, the Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwits etc. A Ringtail Harrier at Compton.
24th. Up to Stenbury Down,Wroxall, early am with Pete. We had 4 black Redstarts and superb views of a Red Kite overhead (*right opposite*). Over to Bouldnor in the afternoon and saw 10+ Crossbills and 7 Brimstones. Also lots of Beeflies including Dotted, *B. discolour*. Clouded Yellows still along the revetment.
26th. A Rusty-dot Pearl immigrant moth by day along the revetment.

APRIL

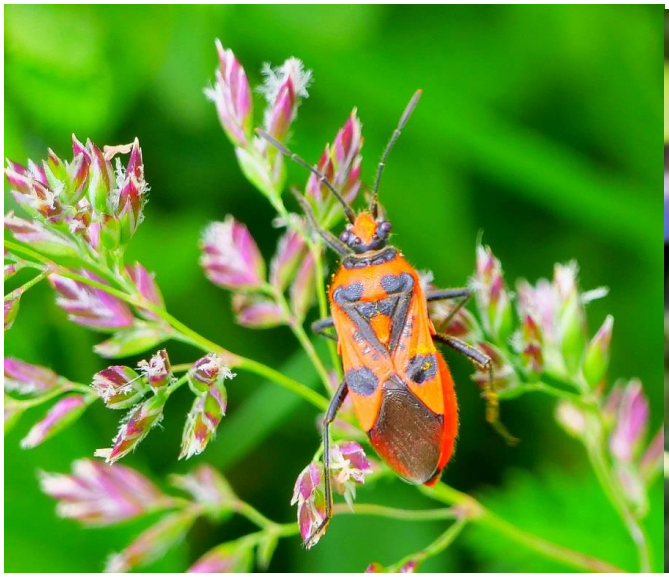
1st. Green-veined White in the garden. A Turnstone on the sea wall along Bonchurch front, took no notice of people walking by.
2nd. The first Humming-bird Hawkmoth (HBHM) of the year in my garden.
3rd. 'Ron' along the revetment. Clouded Yellows still about.
4th. 2 Oystercatchers in the bay.
5th. First Orange Tip, a male, in the garden. A Little Egret on the rocks in the bay harassed by 2 Herring gulls. A Double-striped Pug moth on the window.
10th. Laundry Lane. The Glossy Ibis are in their full breeding plumage and look spectacular (*right below*).
11th. A pair of Porpoises seen most days off Dunnose Point by a Bonchurch fisherman.
13th. 3 Wheatears in Monk's Bay. A male Blackcap in the garden.
14th. Yarmouth with Pete. The Spotted Redshank is now in its summer plumage and still in company with the Greenshank most of the time. Summer plumage Black-tailed Godwits (*left below*)
15th. First Common Blue along the revetment.
16th. The last sighting of the Clouded Yellow today.
18th. Newtown with Pete. c. 300 Mediterranean Gulls.
20th. Orange Tips and Holly Blues in the garden.
21st. The first Glanville Fritillaries (2) seen by Dave and myself along the revetment. Plus 5 Common Blues and 2 Dingy Skippers. The pair of Porpoises seen off Dunnose now have a new calve with them. An old Grey Seal in the bay at home (not 'Ron'!).
22nd. A large clump of Bladder Campion along at Monk's Bay. Not seen it there before.
23rd. 4 Glanvilles, 4 Common Blues along the revetment.
26th. 12 Glanvilles, 11 Common Blues and 5 Dingy Skippers along the revetment. 4 Holly Blues and 4 Orange tips in the garden.
29th. Laundry Lane with Pete. We saw 2 Hairy Dragonflies and 3 Spoonbills.



Left: Spotted Redshank in summer plumage, Yarmouth. Right: Spoonbills from Laundry Lane

MAY

2nd. 2 Common Sandpipers on the rocks and esplanade in front of my house.
3rd. Willow Warbler in the garden. A Small Blue, a Wall, 27 Common Blues, 13 Glanvilles and 2 Orange tips all along the revetment.
4th. A Common Sandpiper in Monk's bay. 'Ron' seal in bay off home.
5th. Went up to Watcombe Bottom to find the site for Small Blue (possibly one of the best in the UK) and for Glanvilles totally destroyed by the Ventnor Rugby Club. Apparently, they were hosting a two day competition and wanted parking and viewing space. This is an IW Council owned site so how this could be allowed to happen beggars belief. Makes a mockery of their ecology department.
8th. Pete and I went to Blackgang Chine car park for a Wood Warbler. We had brief views only.
9th. 24 Glanvilles, 2 Small Blue, 4 Dingy Skipper and a single Rusty-dot Pearl immigrant moth. Large shoals of Bass off Bonchurch with Gannets diving into them.
14th. A Greenland Wheatear on the rocks in front of my house. Went up to Bonchurch Down and walked along the lower slope eastward. 68 Common Blue, 26 Adonis Blue, 18 Brown Argus, 8 Glanvilles, 11 Dingy Skipper, 3 Wall and one Small Heath.
16th. A Glanville in my garden.
17th. Walked out to Castle Cove in the morning. Only 8 Glanvilles, 3 Small Tortoiseshell and 4 Silver y moths.
18th. 5 Oystercatchers past home early on. 27 Glanvilles, 16 Common Blue, 4 Small Blue,6 Dingy Skippers, one Painted Lady, one Red Admiral, 3 Silver y, one Rush Veneer and one Straw Dot all along the revetment.
19th. Laundry Lane with Pete. 6 Hobbies, 5 Hairy Dragonflies and one Painted Lady.
21st. 31Glanvilles (best count of the year here) and a Bordered Straw immigrant moth all along the revetment.
22nd. Whale Chine with Pete. 23 Small Heath,4 Glanvilles, one Common Blue and one Meadow Brown. Moved on to Chilton Chine: 39 Glanvilles, 8 Painted Lady, 10 Common Blue, 3 Wall, one Small Skipper, 2 Male Emperor and one Broad-bodied Chaser (BBC) dragonflies. A Lesser Whitethroat by the steps.
24th. One *Eurydema ornata* shield bug along the revetment.
26th. A Bloxworth Snout moth in the garden and the Squash Bug, *Corizus hyoscyami* or Cinnamon bug as well (*left opposite*). The Shield bug *Enoplops scapha* or Boat Bug along the revetment.
27th. Pete and I went along to Forelands, Bembridge, in the morning. 14 Glanville, 3 Painted Lady, one Wall, one Broad-bodied Chaser (BBC) and one Black-tailed Skimmer.
28th. Brook Down with Pete. 48 Glanvilles, 3 Painted Lady, one Adonis Blue, 2 Small Copper, one Small Skipper, 5 Brown Argus, 70+ Small Blue, 80+ Dingy Skipper, 80+ Small Heath, 40+ Grizzled Skipper, 5 Burnet Companion, 3 Mother Shipton moths, one Southern Hawker dragonfly and one BBC. Also, a ringed Dartford Warbler. A Striped Hawkmoth caught in the trap (*right opposite*). All in all, a very good day!




JUNE

2nd. Atherfield Reservoir. 8 Hares in adjoining field. One Black-tailed Skimmer on the Reservoir. One Glanville in Shepherd's Chine.
4th. 3 Oystercatchers across the Bay early am.
6th. First Marbled White along the revetment (with Dave Nordell). Plus 2 Glanvilles, one Small Tortoiseshell and 3 Silver y.
9th. Ran my moth trap for the first time this year last night. Not much: 3 Privet Hawkmoths, 2 Large Elephant Hawkmoth, one Rusty-dot Pearl, 3 Silver y (one was the pale form *pallida insularia*).
10th. A Large Tabby in the kitchen this am. This is a moth, I hasten to add, not a cat and very difficult to catch and put outside! They scuttle about on the floor instead of flying off.
12th. There are seven Pyramidal Orchids in flower in my garden, the most ever.
13th. A Clouded Yellow along the revetment, probably an immigrant, plus a male Emperor Dragonfly. A pair of fresh Glanvilles in the garden. Also, unusually, a Black Redstart on the boathouse roof late afternoon.
14th. HBHM at Monk's Bay and 'Ron' seal.
16th. HBHM in the garden. Pete and I had a look along the Sandown Levels this morning. One Kingfisher, 23 Scarce Chaser, one Hairy and 2 Emperor dragonflies. 50+ Banded Demoiselle, 15 Small Tortoishells and 2 Treble Line moths.
17th. 7 Privet Hawkmoth in the trap.
18th. Atherfield with Pete, one Red-veined Darter dragonfly plus seven singing male Reed Warblers.
20th. 8 Painted Lady in the garden.
22nd. 8 Privet HM in the trap.
23rd. 6 Bottle-nosed Dolphins heading east off home being harassed by idiots in a speed boat.
26th. A fresh Dark-green Fritillary on the bank at the back of my house and 2 Ringlets in the garden.
28th. An adult Mediterranean Gull in Monk's Bay.
29th. A Bloxworth Snout moth in the garden.
30th. One HBHM along the revetment.

Top left: Bloxworth Snout in garden 29th June; Top right: Privet and Pine Hawkmoths in garden 17th June; Bottom left: Bottle-nosed Dolphin being harassed by speedboat 23rd June; Bottom right: Mediterranean Gull, Monks Bay 28th June

Andy Butler

General Meetings

Sunday 9th January Bonchurch Village Walk

This walk was scheduled for Saturday 8 January, but had to be postponed to the following day, due to heavy rain. As booking was requested, it was easy to contact everyone who had booked and ask if they could come on the Sunday instead, and only one could not. Luckily the forecast for the Sunday was good. Twelve members gathered at the picturesque pond for a stroll around the village, looking at some of its fine Victorian villas, mixed in with older cottages, and two churches, very different in style and built some eight hundred years apart. I promised to tell them about writers and artists who lived and stayed there, attracted by its dramatic landscape, and about some local personalities in Victorian times, made famous by Charles Dickens.

The pond used to be a withy bed, until it was drained in the early nineteenth century. The writer Henry de Vere Stacpoole, author of The Blue Lagoon and other works, gave the pond to the people of Bonchurch in memory of his first wife, who died in 1934. Beside the pond, there is an attractive pictorial map of the village, featuring buildings and memorials of particular historic and architectural interest, with brief historical notes. This is a good starting point for a tour of the village.

We walked in an easterly direction, passing the stone pyramid, set in the high wall beside the pavement in 1773 to showcase the local stone from the quarry known as the Bonchurch Pitts. And beyond this was the Huish Memorial Fountain, once spring-fed, which has long since dried up, the course of the

spring having diverted. The former village school, and later the church hall, towered above us on its rock. It and the adjacent church house had to be sold not long ago to pay for damp and rot treatment in the eleventh century Old Church. The upkeep of two churches is a challenge these days, but in the mid nineteenth century, when the larger church was built, the village was wealthy enough to support both. In most places, a church as old and small as the Old Church would have been demolished centuries ago and a medieval church built in its stead, but Bonchurch was tiny, poor and isolated until wealthy Victorians 'discovered' it and built fine villas there. They needed a much larger church, as the population grew rapidly to some 500 by 1848, when it and the school were built. They could afford to keep the tiny church as well, but if the rector of the time had got his way, it would have been demolished or extended. Fortunately, the Reverend James White, whose wife inherited land from Bonchurch Manor, on which most of the villas were built, donated land for a new church and Captain Swinburne contributed six hundred pounds.

We passed the entrance to East Dene, once the childhood home of the famous Victorian poet, Algernon Swinburne. When novelist Charles Dickens spent a long summer at Bonchurch in 1849, the Swinburne family were his nearest neighbours and part of his social circle. The Dickens family rented Winterbourne, a large villa whose grounds extended past the Old Church to the cliff edge and through which a stream flowed, and still does. There Charles wrote the fifth and sixth installments of David Copperfield, chapters thirteen to eighteen, from mid-July until early October. He was already well respected for his six previous novels, but the first installments of David Copperfield, published in 1849, were met with even greater acclaim. The completed novel was considered a masterpiece for its humour, empathy and realism. Charles had learned writing discipline as a journalist, and at Winterbourne he sat down to write at his desk in a room on the first floor, overlooking the sea, from 9 am to 2 pm every day, but sometimes for longer. When he had finished a difficult chapter, he would be exhausted. For the first two weeks of the month, he worked himself hard, but for the second two weeks, he threw himself into various distracting activities with his friends: parties, dances, outings, picnics and theatricals. He enjoyed playing parlour games, performing conjuring tricks and playing rounders. The Dickens family were often invited to high tea with Captain and Lady Swinburne at East Dene. Charles's sons played with their twelve-year-old son, Algernon, who was on his first summer holidays from Eton. He was to admire Charles's stories all his life.

The stream that flowed through the gardens of Winterbourne fell over the cliff in a dramatic waterfall. Then there were no houses along the shore. Charles thought of an ingenious plan to turn the waterfall into his private shower. In letters to his wife and a friend, Charles wrote:
"We have made all visitors in search of the picturesque mad, by putting up an immense caravan on the beach, to shut in a noble waterfall and turn it into a shower bath with some five hundred feet of fall, which we take every morning, to the unbounded astonishment of the aboriginal inhabitants."
Five hundred feet, indeed! A sketch appeared in *Punch* of Dickens peering out of the door of the shower-bath, entitled 'Domestic Bliss'. A maid is telling him that the butcher has called and Mrs Dickens is asking what he would like for dinner. Mrs Dickens was writing a cookery book at the time.

We continued our walk down the lane to the Old Church, which we visited before taking the path down to the shore. The path was barricaded. A culvert through which the stream passed to reach the cliff had collapsed and the stream had diverted its course. We managed to get through to see where Charles's shower-bath once stood. On the shore, as well as at the gates to Winterbourne, and scattered about the village, there are blue plaques in memory of well-known painters, writers and other important people who were attracted to the dramatic landscape of Bonchurch and the Undercliff.

We returned to the pond via Shore Road and passed Woodlynch, unfortunately hidden from view, where Charles's landlord and friend, the Reverend James White lived. By chance, he also knew the great poet, Tennyson, and the great novelist, Thackeray, who was a distant relative of Rosa, his wife. He befriended Carlyle and his close friend John Sterling and entertained these and other talented writers and artists at his home. White wrote history books and tragedies and contributed to *Punch* and *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Beyond the pond we passed Uppermount, later renamed Coombe Wood, and then The Peacock Vane, where celebrities used to stay when the Wolfendens ran it as a hotel several decades ago. James and Rosa White first lived here, and the Dick family occupied it when Dickens was staying in Bonchurch. Mr Dick was the name of Aunt Betsey Trotwood's lodger in David Copperfield. He was delightful, but deranged, due to ill-treatment, and Aunt Betsey was taking care of him. He was writing his memorial and

believed that King Charles 1's troubled head had got into his own. It is possible, but not substantiated, that Dickens heard of the jilting of a member of the Dick family, Margaret Catherine, at the altar and used her as a model for Miss Haversham in Great Expectations. She lived at Madeira Hall and never went out in daylight for the rest of her life.

We finished our walk at the parish church, where we found the Swinburne family graves.
Most of the information for this walk, I researched from Richard J Hutchings' excellent booklet: *Notes from Dickens On An Island, a biographical study of Charles Dickens in the Isle of Wight (1970)*

Maggie Nelmes

Saturday 12th February – St Lawrence walk

Nine members met at the entrance to St Lawrence Village Hall for a walk to explore this attractive Undercliff village with its mixture of old stone cottages and grand Victorian villas, tiny rustic eleventh-century church and Victorian church with Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass windows. I had promised to tell them about some famous former residents and take them through a woodland nature reserve.

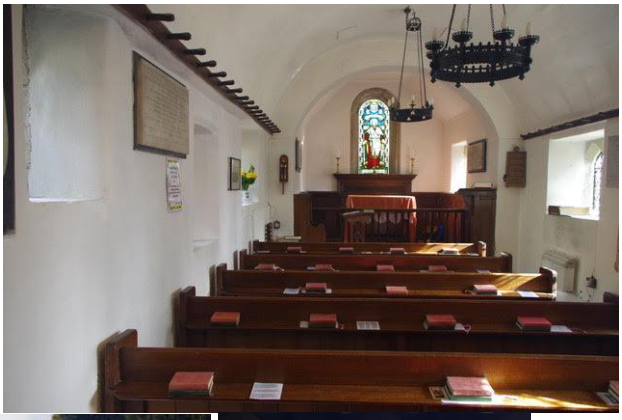
We set off past Spring Cottage, once The Duck Inn, a haunt of smugglers. It was named from a legend that a duck disappeared through a hole in the ground at a farm high up on the downs and ended up at the spring that emerges beside the cottage. We crossed the road and followed the old highway to the Marine Villa, an attractive, gabled house with tall chimneys, built for Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldurcombe at the end of the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, the Duke and Duchess of Kent, and a few years later, the Duchess of Kent with the Princess Victoria, visited the Earl of Yarborough, by landing at St Lawrence from their yacht. And later, this was a favourite destination for Prince Philip, accompanied by the Queen and their children.

We moved on to St Lawrence Well, with a little Gothic shrine, enclosed in a wellhouse. This was once fed by a spring that issued from the common (now a wood) and ran across the pathway, until the Undercliff Drive was diverted in 1864. The road here was very steep and narrow and, with the increased traffic of carriages, had become dangerous. The water was then piped under the new section of highway and flowed from a dolphin's mouth into a wide shell, before continuing down to the cliffs and falling in a cascade to the sea. This is just one of many natural springs to emerge in the Undercliff. A short distance along the highway took us to Lisle Combe, built in 1815 for Lord Yarborough's brother, Captain Pelham, as a country retreat. The celebrated poet, Alfred Noyes, bought the house in 1930 and lived here for twenty-eight years.

We returned to the village hall through the pretty Pelham Wood nature reserve, with its boardwalk and bridge, and followed the narrow, winding Seven Sisters Road, up to St Lawrence Old Church. The village hall, set high above the road, was built, and served briefly, as the village school. The lovely thatched cottage next door was the school house. This lane was at the centre of the old village and contains some delightful old cottages. The name Seven Sisters derives from seven elm trees that once grew on the bank beside the Home Farm. This is believed to be the site of the manor house where the de Aula family lived seven or more centuries ago.

We visited the Old Church, originally probably the chapel to the manor house. Until the chancel was added in 1842, it was ecclesiastically noted as being the smallest parish church in England, being only twenty feet long and twelve feet wide, and its height to the eaves scarcely six feet. It existed before 1201 and may have some Saxon features. The interior is attractive in its simplicity. The windows in the north wall are ancient. Above them, there is a row of Georgian hat pegs, an unusual feature. There is a fifteenth century font, a five-hundred-year-old stoup and a piscina niche that is about as old as the church itself. As at Bonchurch, the wealthy Victorians who settled in big villas here could afford to keep this picturesque church when they built a new one to accommodate a fast-growing population.

We ate our packed lunches in the Peace Garden, planted on church land by villagers not long ago, and then continued up the road to the old railway station. The line was opened in 1897, as part of the Newport, Godshill and St Lawrence Railway and was extended to Ventnor in 1900, only to be closed down in 1952. It was a scenic railway, but not commercially viable. It entered the village via a 566-metre-long tunnel.

Top: St Lawrence old church; Bottom: Craigie Ledge & St Lawrence parish church window Photos Pat Barber

We walked down Spindler's Road, named after William Spindler, the German philanthropist, who made his wealth as a chemist in Berlin from the manufacture of indigo dye. He settled at Old Park, a mansion down on the coast. In the 1880s, he tried to create a resort there to rival Ventnor, building a sea wall at Binnel Bay for a promenade that he planned to extend to Ventnor, a number of houses, a windmill and a harbour. He was outspoken, and angered Ventnor residents by publishing a booklet which was highly critical of their conduct in constructing the town: *A Few Remarks About Ventnor and The Isle of Wight, Bournemouth, Torquay, Brighton, Weymouth, Jersey and Guernsey* (1877), a copy of which is still on loan from Ventnor Library. Here he compared Ventnor unfavourably with these other seaside resorts he had visited in the South of England and the Channel Isles. He criticized the lack of order in the construction of the town, and the destruction of the headland known as Collins Point. In 1863, two timber piers, infilled with stones and earth, were built at the nearby eastern end of the Esplanade, in an attempt to construct a harbour. The stones and earth were taken from Collins Point when it was blown up. It had acted as a massive groyne, keeping the shingle beach in the cove, and Spindler feared that its loss as a breakwater would lead to the undermining of the sea wall. He described how Brighton was saved from winter storms by the construction of groynes, a few being massive stone walls. When the piers were dismantled and sold, the Ventnor Board was offered some fifty yards of the east pier for eighty pounds, less than its value, to keep as a groyne to protect the shingle, but they refused. It was only when the wall at the western end of the cove collapsed that the Board spent thousands of pounds on buttresses and groynes.
Here is a typical extract:
"Never was I more disgusted with the dirty and wretched state of the Esplanade, which year after year presents nothing but half-intended, half-finished and half-left-undone works, never more angry with a town, for which nature has done so very much, and for which the inhabitants in their narrow-minded blindness will do so very little."

No wonder Spindler's reputation is still not good, and his legacy of philanthropic works in St Lawrence and Whitwell is sometimes under-appreciated. He employed local men to plant a million trees in the Undercliff to stabilize the land, and he donated most of the money needed to deliver clean water to these villages. Hydrants, decorated with lions' heads and painted red, are still dotted about Whitwell.

At The Carfax, or cross-roads, we admired Craigie Lodge, built for Spindler in 1889, whose artist son remodelled the interior for the novelist and dramatist Pearl Craigie, daughter of John Morgan Richards, the wealthy American tobacco magnate who owned Steephill Castle. She wrote under the pseudonym of John Oliver Hobbes.

We turned down Old Park Road, pass some grand villas, and reached The Bunker, a home and artist's studio constructed from a Second World War radar station, with fine views over the coast. Then we followed Wolverton Road that passes the old manor house below, while imposing Wolverton House, owned by members of the Twinings Tea family, commands the hill above us, its lower lawns covered in snowdrops and dotted with crocuses and daffodils.

We returned to the main road and visited the Victorian parish church, much enhanced by beautiful Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass windows, removed from the nearby Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, when it was demolished in 1969, and installed here. The huge West Window, by Sir Willian Reynolds-Stephens, is especially striking when the late-afternoon sunshine streams through it. It depicts angels playing musical instruments and doctors tending the sick. Side windows, depicting Saints John, Luke and Peter, were painted by Edward Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown around 1870. In a light box are panels depicting New Testament scenes of Jesus healing the sick, by William Morris and Ford Madox Brown. There are other lovely windows in this church. My favourite of these is The Sower, illustrating the Parable of the Sower with a romantic scene of cornfield, flowers and wild birds.

Maggie Nelmes

Saturday 23rd April Shanklin

A group of ten members met at Shanklin railway station for a three mile circular walk to America Woods in bright sunny weather. The leader, Maggie Nelmes was indisposed so the walk was led by Colin Pope with assistance from Jim Baldwin. We walked along the old railway track before crossing into America Woods where the leader gave an introduction to the history and ecology of America Woods, a property now owned by the Woodland Trust. As we explored the wood, we admired ancient oak trees, carpets of bluebells and deep sandy ravines. We saw Jays and Orange-tip and Peacock butterflies. We saw what is probably the Island's largest population of Great Woodrush which was looking its best. We proceed out of America Woods down the Ninham valley, passing Ninham Farm before turning back towards Shanklin.

Colin Pope

Saturday 21st May Walk through Martin's Wood to Newchurch Moors Nature Reserve

Twelve members set off from Newchurch public car park with our leader, Jamie Marsh, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's senior officer on the Island, to visit one of the Trust's newest acquisitions. We passed through Martin's Wood, a Jigsaw project to join up woodlands, funded by the Forestry Commission. The wood was planted in 2000, on the hilltop behind the churchyard, in memory of Martin Boswell, who farmed there, and given to the Trust by his widow, Nora, in 2014. When Nora died, the Trust bought 124 acres of her land, which joins up with former Wight Nature Fund reserves.

Jamie pointed out a very young ash tree showing distinct signs of ash die-back disease: discoloured branches, bare of leaves, together with lesions on the trunk that other fungus species, especially honey fungus, can exploit. He snapped off the ends of two branches to show how brittle they are. This disease affects young trees most, but eventually 95 per cent of all ash trees will succumb to it. The fungal spores are mostly spread by the wind. "There is no direct replacement for ash woodland", says Jamie, only a mixture of sycamore, alder and aspen, as found in Eaglehead and Bloodstone Copses near Ashey Down.
Martin's Wood consists of a wide range of native deciduous and coniferous trees, but they were planted too close together and are growing up too tall and thin. Now the wood has to be coppiced to create an understorey, give the trees more space and let in some light. HIWWT has its own saw mill and can use the

wood to make benches and signs. They also make charcoal, but this is very labour-intensive, and they sell timber.

We emerged from the wood and Jamie unlocked a gate across a path leading into the Newchurch Moors Nature Reserve. A steep ascent brought us down to the Eastern Yar floodplain, with its wide vistas of meadows, woods, and hills beyond. You could be forgiven for missing the river altogether, it being trapped in a deep and narrow ditch, the result of too much dredging. “The Eastern Yar has been messed with for so long”, says Jamie. “The river can’t work as flood plain; the water just barrels along. Dredging can be useful to relieve flooding at road bridges”, he concedes, “but here we need a shallower water course”, and this will prevent flash flooding further down the river, at Alverstone and Sandown.


Left: Descending to Eastern Yar; Right: Yellow Water Lily or Brandy Bottle Photos Dave Trevan

That is where beavers come in. They can help create a functioning ecosystem here. Beavers dam to manipulate water levels to suit their lifestyle. They can cause localized flooding which benefits other species. The dams they construct slow the water flow and widen and deepen the river. Leading Beaver experts deemed this part of the Eastern Yar the best place on the Island for Beaver release, where deep water in the peat extraction pits, surrounded by willows, Beavers’ favourite food source, creates the ideal habitat.

There is a lot of evidence of Beavers doing good in rivers across Britain. They are now living freely in the Rivers Otter, Tay, Stour and Wye. Although they can cause problems, they are easy to manage. The Island can only support a certain number, but Beavers are good at managing their own population size, as they breed according to the availability of food and suitable territory. “They are fiercely territorial so we’d need to scatter them - a pair here, a pair at Alverstone Mead”, says Jamie.

There is currently a moratorium on importing Beavers from the rest of Europe, on the grounds that they are host to a certain parasite, but Jamie thinks this may be a politically motivated decision. If HIWWT obtains a licence, it will get as wide a gene pool as possible to keep the population healthy.

Should there be farming in a flood plain? The run-off of nitrates pollutes waterways. “Farmers should be rewarded for leaving wide margins under a stewardship scheme”, says Jamie. In Eastern Europe, Beavers have always been present and can exist with intensive farming. In Britain, beavers were hunted to extinction for their fur. When Beavers are established, the land can be grazed, but there is a conflict of interests – commercial versus conservation. The Wildlife Trust wants cattle that overwinter on the downs to be turned out later onto the marshes to prevent damage to ground-nesting birds. Grazing is important to wildlife conservation, and conservation organisations provide land for farmers to graze their animals on, both in winter and summer. But farmers are going to have to manage without EU subsidies from now on.

The HIWWT is holding guided walks and talks to raise public awareness of its Beaver release plan, while it waits to hear from Natural England and the Environment Agency if it can go ahead. These government bodies are dragging their heels. A public survey conducted by the Trust found that eighty to ninety per cent of respondents on the Island were in favour of beaver reintroduction.

We walked in a westerly direction to Martin’s Lake, dug in 1974 for peat extraction, which is fished by a local group. The lake was dotted with beautiful Brandy-bottle or Yellow Water-lilies (*Nuphar lutea*). We watched a Downy Emerald dragonfly and found a cluster of Southern Marsh-orchids. This is also a site of importance for the Scarce Chaser.

Beavers are crepuscular. They live for seven or eight years, but are sometimes road casualties of attacked by dogs. They co-exist with otters, signs of which have been found in the lower Eastern Yar, except in the breeding season, when Otters will predate Beaver kits. Beavers have two to six kits a year. They will chase the young away when they are fully grown, at two years old, to make them fend for themselves.

We turned back at the far end of the lake and walked through grassland, on past the spot where we first arrived on the floodplain, in an easterly direction. The Trust plans to restore a natural meander in the river in the next two years. Above the plain rises Hill Heath wood pasture, a wonderful wildlife habitat, and Jamie hopes that beavers will help to clear the willow scrub. This is a connective landscape of 300 acres. The Trust owns land on both sides of the old railway line/cycle track, which we can now glimpse through the trees, as cyclists whizz past. We spot a Banded Demoiselle among the reeds. And Jamie points out the Poplars, whose trunks they will coat in special paint to stop the beavers from felling them.
We thank Jamie for a fascinating walk and talk.

Maggie Nelmes

Saturday 11 June – Walk at Corf to see an ambitious land regeneration project

When Val Gwynn invited our Society to visit her latest regeneration project, I leapt at the chance. Some years ago, she showed us some lovely wildflower meadows she had planted near her home in Shalfleet, but this is on a grander scale. She planned to show us her thirty acres of Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier Management land with a mosaic of different wildlife habitats, some restored from arable land, which include extensive wildflower meadows, a two-hundred-year-old wood, a 1994 plantation, Jigsaw tree planting, funded by the Forestry Commission, from 2011, and a large pond. The land is home to a great diversity of wildlife, including birds of prey, and all top mammal predators, various species of dragonfly and butterfly, including Silver-washed Fritillaries, and orchids.

Val was joined on the day of our visit by her friend and naturalist, Eileen Hughes, and Mark Larter from Natural England, who together agreed to lead one of the two groups that the sixteen members of our Society divided into on arrival. Val was the other leader, and she had planned for the groups to change leaders halfway through the tour.

As we set off along the track between the old wood and a meadow, a Kestrel was hovering overhead. It was a lovely sunny afternoon. Val warned me in advance of biting insects, but luckily the wind kept them at bay. In a few weeks, the hay would be cut, but now the meadows were at their best, a rich canvas with splashes of colour from many species of wild flowers and flowering grasses.

Val told us how this land was part of Shalfleet Manor Farm and was used for shooting in the last thirty years. In 1979 the stubble was burned and the field was sprayed from the air. When Val bought the land, she told us: “My whole ambition was to improve the habitat.” She described herself as a “generalist ecologist who has learned from people with knowledge”, but this does her no credit for her amazing drive and dedication to wildlife which has led her, at an age when most people are taking it easy, to undertake such an ambitious project.

Corf North Meadow with Val

With Mark Larter’s help, Val resowed the land here and in the Corf South meadow with an organic seed- clay mix. The National Trust instead allowed their land to regenerate naturally. Val says it would be interesting to compare results. She has studied the geology of the area, and the make-up of the soil has informed her land management practices and choice of species to sow. She planted some Chicory here to break up the clay pan, and it also has medicinal properties for sheep and cattle, but after four years it had almost all vanished, out-competed by other plants. Cutting the hay at the appropriate time, and in the right weather conditions, and after-grazing with Hebridean sheep, which helps to fertilize the soil naturally, are both important meadow management practices. Val leaves a margin of two metres for butterflies, bees and other pollinators when the hay is cut.

Farmers used to lime the fields to encourage grass growth. Corf North meadow was once planted with Italian rye grass and commercial clover. Val has planted an organic seed mix, especially selected for clay soils, which includes some thirty native wildflower species and grasses, but the rare, deep pink, Grass

Vetchling, Corky-fruited Water Dropwort, Common Spotted orchid, French Oat-grass and Meadow Barley have appeared naturally, as the seeds were lying dormant in the soil. Cattle prefer Timothy Grass, she says, as it is highly nutritious. The hay goes to feed calves. Last year Val had this meadow re-limed to prevent the pH of the soil from changing to a bit more acidic. Dyers' Green-weed is an indicator of this. Liming has to be done every so many years and is a traditional farming practice.
Val says her next project is to improve the soil quality.

Corf Wood with Val

Val decided to open up just half of this 200-year-old woodland, on Richard Grogan's advice, creating a circular path through it. The rest she has left undisturbed. Tall Marsh Thistles grow beside the ride, which Val had cut for our visit. They and Rosebay Willow-herb are indicators of wetland. We passed a magnificent veteran oak, where Val has placed a camera to find out what animal species live here. They include Dormice, Stoats, Red Squirrels and Slowworms, breeding warblers, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Scorpion Fly. Later in the year there will be Snipe and Woodcock. Afternoons are a quiet time in the wood, while wildlife is resting. Sixty per cent of the work here is done by hand. Val has planted Hazel as an understory, but has had trouble removing the tree-guards. No grants are available for managing woodland.

The Pond with Val, Mark and Eileen

The two groups met up at the pond, where we watched several species of damselfly and Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies, and a Crab Spider lurking in the centre of an Oxeye Daisy. This is the hunting ground of a Marsh Harrier and Grey Heron, which together wiped out all the Mallard, Moorhen and Little Grebe young last year. Mark picked a variety of grasses from Corf South meadow that he and Eileen have just led their group through, and he gives us a lesson in how to identify each species: Meadow Foxtail, Timothy, Dog's tail, Fescue, Meadow Fescue and Yorkshire Fog.

The Plantation with Mark and Eileen

The groups changed leaders at the pond and my group followed a ride between the plantation and a hedgerow, where huge birdboxes were lashed to some trees. These were built for Barn Owls. Eileen told us about the Barn Owl who had young in the nest box on an old oak, but her mate died last year and her new partner is an inexperienced forager, not conducive to successful breeding. The sign that a female has young in the nest is a dirty face from breaking up pellets. On this sunny, enclosed, ride, we saw Speckled Wood butterflies, and Common or Azure Blue Damselflies, which Mark taught us to identify. They have escaped from the competitive pond environment and are feeding on other insects. Several years ago, this was canopy, but now it attracts maximum diversity. This is a good example of tall-herb edge species habitat, of which we have lost a lot, Mark told us. Walters Copse at Newtown is a good example of management for diversity.

On the edge of the plantation, planted in 1994, we saw signs of Ash Die-back disease. It takes five generations to get complete resistance to the disease, Mark told us, but we will lose nearly all of the native Ash. Field Maple could become a canopy-dominant species. Mark remarked on the "fantastic structural diversity" of the plantation, with its different layers. When a mature tree dies, younger trees in the sub-canopy get the opportunity to grow towards the light in the vacated space. We enter the edge of the plantation to see the Common Spotted Orchids. Mark helped us to distinguish this species from the Early Purple Orchid, which flowers earlier in spring. When the 28-year-old trees here were thinned, the orchids spread.

South Corf Meadow with Mark and Eileen

This meadow, like the first, stretched away into the distance. I notice the Yellow Rattle at once. The grass is sparser here, as Yellow Rattle parasites fine grasses, preventing them from out-competing wild flowering plants. The meadow of some five to six hectares was sown in 2016 at a cost of twenty thousand pounds. It is species-rich. With Mark's help, we identified Oxeye Daisy, Red Clover, White Clover, Meadow Buttercup, Self-heal, Knapweed, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Fleabane, Hairy Tare, Smooth Tare and Common Vetch. There are no more than ten thousand hectares of wildflower meadows left in lowland Britain, he told us. There are great chalk grasslands on the Island's downs, but this kind of meadow is much rarer. Fifteen species of flowering plants to the square metre is good meadow grassland. This meadow has taken only six years to develop. It is traditionally managed and a nationally important meadow.

"Val stands alone in creating lovely meadows that still produce hay and are worth grazing Hebridean sheep on. This meadow is hard to earn a living from, but Val is trying to show that it is productive, though

she won't get her investment back", says Mark. This was Italian Rye grassland when Val took it over. It only lasts a few years. The seed was very expensive – ten thousand pounds – because Val wanted 'gold-plated'. Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil cultivar has a long flower so insects cannot get right down to pollinate, but the plants in this meadow are insect-pollinator-friendly. A brush seed harvester is used to sow a wildflower meadow and Week Farm at Ventnor has one which is available to anyone who wishes to create one. Smooth Brome Grass only grows at the edge of this meadow and it needs to be encouraged out into the open. French Oat Grass is very rare, but is now spreading. It is co-dominant on Mottistone Common, where there has been a population explosion. This could be due to climate change. The theory is that it was accidentally brought back from the First World War, or even the Napoleonic wars, in horse dung or feed, but it could have existed here for centuries. Burnet moths were just emerging from their chrysalises attached to grass stalks.

I am relieved to hear there is no public right-of-way to this land, leaving it undisturbed by human activity. Mark said that Natural England had invested a lot of money in seeding these meadows and he will protect them. We met Val back at the entrance to her land and thanked her, Eileen and Mark for a truly amazing experience.


Photos: Pat Luckett

Maggie Nelmes

Section Meetings

Archaeology

Saturday June 25th 'Estates, Settlement and Use in the Undercliff' Vicky Basford

Vicky is well known for her thorough research and clear explanations and this talk, to more than 25 members, was no exception. Vicky explained that she would be covering the period from Anglo-Saxon times to about the end of the eighteenth century. She has used a number of sources, including Clifford Webster's notes on the 1559 Royal Survey, Chris Curry's surveys for the National Trust, paintings and early OS maps, much of this summarized in the Historic Environment Action Plan for the Undercliff (available at Archaeology - Service Details (iow.gov.uk)) but feels there are still gaps in available information.

Vicky started in the Anglo-Saxon period, when some of the existing estates may have formed the original parochial units which became divided into smaller parishes in the medieval period. Documentation from before the Norman Conquest is, unsurprisingly, sparse but the charter for Wroxall, dating from 1043/44 includes parts of the Ventnor Undercliff.

Bonchurch is the only manor from the Undercliff mentioned in the Domesday Book, which implies it existed before 1066 and it has long been thought there was an Anglo-Saxon church on the site of the old St. Boniface church. But the tradition of the church's foundation by 8th century monks is not proven and the name Bonchurch more likely comes from the personal name 'Bona' with the 'St. Boniface' appellation coming later.

The only other medieval parish church within the Undercliff was at St. Lawrence, but seven parishes held land in the area. Vicky took us systematically to each of these parishes, mainly using the 1793 and 1866 maps for evidence of change. En route she mentioned several oral traditions relating to place names and dispelled some popular misconceptions.

Medieval settlements were mainly manorial complexes and subsidiary farm holdings, but by 1793 the first OS map shows several small settlements. Many early names are still familiar to us, such as Knowles and Mirables. Steephill was recorded in 1272 but there is archaeological evidence of settlement from the late Saxon period onwards although the focus may have shifted following landslips. The distinct community at Steephill seems to have been lost when Steephill Castle and its grounds were established. The now familiar Steephill Cove was a later 19th century fishing community.

Vicky then moved on to boundaries and land use. Rough unenclosed land continued after enclosure elsewhere became the norm, although the 1793 map shows tiny, irregular fields in some areas and there is archaeological evidence of cultivation in unlikely places.

Access to the Undercliff was always challenging and the current paths up the cliff have been in use for centuries, again subject to mythical tales. The Cripple path, first recorded in 1608, takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon for a narrow passage; it has nothing to do with infirm pilgrims who are alleged to have struggled up the cliff to the holy well at Whitwell. St. Rhadegund's path, first documented 1285, also has an Anglo-Saxon origin – rhadegang means bridle path. The connection with the little-known saint to whom Whitwell church is dedicated was made at a later date.

Vicky's presentation ended in the late 18th century when marginal farming was starting to be eclipsed by burgeoning tourism and gentrification with the 19th century seeing further developments of 'cottages ornés' and larger homes, as well as much more woodland . So, the nature of the Undercliff changed dramatically, but it is still classed as merely Grade 5 agricultural land!

This talk encompassed far more detail than can be covered in this summary. It was afterwards suggested to me that here was the basis of an article for Wight Studies; maybe Vicky will oblige us at a future date?

Tuesday 24th & Wednesday 25th May Archaeology Training in Finds Identification

Members of the Archaeology section have long felt the need for training in identification of finds to support our fieldwalking. We received a grant from Vectis Archaeological Trust to support this and then waited in frustration throughout the pandemic until we felt it reasonable to plan indoor meetings.
We were then very fortunate to book Julian Richards to deliver the training. Julian's wealth of expertise includes a career centred around Dorset and Wiltshire; he has written several books, including The English Heritage guidebook for Stonehenge as well as the 'Pop-up Stonehenge' a delight for children and the young at heart. He is an excellent teacher and communicator, as witnessed by his many television appearances including as presenter on 'Meet the Ancestors', 'Stories from the Dark Earth' and 'Blood of the Vikings'.
My only regret is that a cap on numbers meant we had to limit places to regular participants in the Wednesday fieldwork meetings. Eighteen members gathered for the two-day course at Landguard Manor, Shanklin.

Day 1: Pottery

Julian started with some general points about fieldwalking. He pointed out that it is often regarded as non-destructive but by removing artefacts from the surface you may be removing the only evidence from, or altering, the archaeological record. Field walking should be planned and managed with care.
Some points to consider.

- Fields need to be weathered, not freshly ploughed, so that artefacts are more visible.
- Modern farming practices offer fewer opportunities. There is now less deep ploughing and a tendency to sow seed immediately after ploughing.
- It can be difficult to recognise artefacts when they are dirty.
- Consider what will happen to the finds ultimately.
- Collect and / or record everything as there may be clues to activities at different times.

- Record who walks each section as different approaches might affect results.
- Repeat visits can be useful.
- Topography should be noted as this can affect finds distribution. For example, on a slope soil slippage will bury items more deeply lower down the slope and affect surface collection.
- Lay transects down the slope.
- It can be useful to have a hand auger available to test soil depths.
- Stage 1: prospecting / surface scanning without collecting. This could cover the whole field or just a section. This requires experience and confidence but can help with planning a collecting method.
- Stage 2: Stage 1 might have identified productive areas needing more detailed collection and recording.

Ceramics

Pottery produced before the Bronze Age is very friable and has often been reduced to crumbs in the soil. Consequently it is not often found when fieldwalking. Cleaning can cause damage, leave scratches or remove decoration, so great care must be taken, perhaps using a paintbrush or leaving some of the dirt in place. If it has been wet then dried, do not re-wet it. It is important to clean the edges so that the fabric and inclusions can be seen. Many prehistoric sherds cannot be identified.

Julian has a large collection of samples and our first task was to sort a tableful of sherds according to age.

We then looked in more detail at the characteristics of different periods.

In the Roman period, industrial production created robust and varied wares which have survived well. Both building material and pottery from this period are frequently found.

From the middle ages onwards different glazes began to be introduced as well as more distinctive foreign imports. Lead glaze was first, then salt glaze was introduced in the 16th century, with tin glaze appearing in the 17th century.

It is a standing joke in the group that you haven't field-walked if you haven't found a piece of Verwood Ware. As the name implies, this was produced in Dorset, first in the 16th century but with the last pottery only closing in 1953 so it's not surprising it is so ubiquitous.

In the afternoon Julian also looked at some of our own collection and was particularly interested in Vectis ware, the local pot produced during the late Iron Age and Roman period.

Day 2: Flint

The key questions we are trying to answer are 'What were they trying to make and when?' For a beginner, distinguishing flint that has been worked from that damaged by weather or plough can be very difficult. Julian explained that the process of creating flint tools means that there will always be many more waste flakes than tools, but they can all have significance. To help us understand the process he demonstrated knapping a lump of flint, not to produce a finished item but to give us insight into the thought and working processes that can produce different flakes. In an area with a good local supply the knapper can afford to be wasteful compared to an area where the flint has been brought in from some distance away. The cortex (the outer layer) is generally useless so would often be discarded before carrying the flint away. Thus a large number of cortex flakes could indicate a flint extraction site.

The principles for identifying worked flint are the same for a waste flake or a worked tool. Julian says it is a fallacy to judge it by how it fits in the hand! Look and feel for the bulb of percussion then identify the striking surface and look for any pressure rings. He gave us each a pile of flints to sort and arrange with the bulb of percussion on the upper surface and the striking platform pointing away from us. This made me realise how many waste flakes I must have discarded in the past when I focused too much on shape. Added complications can be flake scars on the bulb of percussion or a rough surface resulting from an inept knapper's repeated attempts.

Julian then explained how the technology evolved. The Mesolithic hunter gatherers needed portable material and developed what we call 'blade technology'. They started by creating a suitable core from which they struck numerous blades, generally with a length / breadth ration of 5:2, often until there was only a tiny

core left. The core was distinctive as it had a series of ridges running down its length. This was also the period of tiny microliths for use on barbed arrowheads.

The early Neolithic is noted for leaf-shaped arrowheads and the ground (polished) axes. We need to recognise when we find part of a Neolithic axe – it will be unnaturally smooth and show striations caused by grinding. In the later Neolithic they developed the tranchet arrowhead and one like an inverted, lop-sided 'V'. There was a curious tool which has been called a fabricator, a bifacial, chunky tool showing signs of wear on one or both ends. Nobody has yet agreed on what it might have been used for!

During the transition to the Bronze Age a new toolkit developed with long-tailed arrowheads, followed by the barbed and tanged versions. Such fine tools were produced not by striking but by applying pressure with a softer object to produce finer flakes. Knapping skills were very highly developed before the gradual decline that came as metal tools replaced much of the older technology.


Left: Julian Richards flint napping, Mike Cotterill; Right: Studying flint, Helen Jackson

We then studied many examples of the different tools produced over millennia.

A few other points for field walking.

- Burnt flint, identified by the crazed surface but not by reddish colouring, might indicate Bronze Age activity. But there is still debate about how it was used. We should decide whether to collect it or just map it.
- Chert, such as that from Portland, is grey and fine-grained and was used to produce tools. The Island chert is much coarser and less useful for tool-making.
- Examples of natural breakages are 'pot-lids' and 'starch fractures' which are like rectangular rods. Look for the striking point!
- Look out for non-local stones.
- Worked flint lying in chalk can acquire a blueish, shiny surface.

Julian was very interested in our collection of Paleolithic hand axes, which were collected by the Cockburn family at Priory Bay in the years preceding World War 1. The different colours were caused by staining from minerals in the water; they would all have been black originally. He recommended further study and advised that drawing them would help us focus on the flake scars and the sequence of working.

This was an inspirational two days packed with information and insight. The group has already started to apply this knowledge by sorting artefacts we had collected before the pandemic prevented us from processing them.

Helen Jackson

Looking at the Countryside

Tuesday 25th January Carisbrooke

Sixteen members joined Vicky and Frank Basford in Carisbrooke High Street for a walk looking at the origins and development of Carisbrooke village, church and castle, much of it acknowledged by Vicky to be based on John Margham's research.

Stopping first in the churchyard, Vicky outlined the salient points of Carisbrooke's history from the Roman period onwards, including: the Roman buildings of the Bowcombe Valley, the early origins of Carisbrooke Castle; the importance of Bowcombe in the post-Roman period with its royal vill or estate and its own minster church (possibly located where Carisbrooke church is now); and the allocation of lands to William fitzOsbern, a close relative of William the Conqueror, following the Norman Conquest of 1066.

The nearby yew tree may be the one shown on a drawing of Carisbrooke Church in the 16th Century Newport 'Ligger' book. Also close by was the tomb of John Dennett (1780–1852), local antiquarian and inventor of a life-saving rocket for aiding ships in distress. We followed the churchyard wall along to the 'Hand of God' carving, a late Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture thought to be originally from within the church where it may have pointed down to a large stone cross. The tower at the western end of the church, dating from 1471, is the tallest tower on a medieval parish church in either Hampshire or the Island.

Advancing along Castle Street we arrived at the ford associated with the leet for Carisbrooke Mill, from where we could see the partly rebuilt mill building. We then followed the footpath up to the Castle across the area known as the Lynches, originally cultivation terraces or lynchets in the medieval period – difficult as it was to believe that land of this steepness was once being ploughed.

Reaching the Castle car park, the normally panoramic view up the Bowcombe Valley and its Roman sites was marred by heavy mist. Vicky prepared us for a walk around the outer defensive circuit of the Castle by describing its different historic phases: the earliest defensive phase represented by the so-called 'lower enclosure'; the medieval castle; and the Elizabethan artillery fortress. We walked along the north side of the outer moat, where some key features were pointed out – of particular note were: a medieval window of Isabella de Fortibus's private chamber c.1270; a barred window to a room where Charles I was held prisoner in the 17th century; and the outer bailey used by the king as a bowling green during his captivity. We could also see the mill pond of the former Priory Mill, now in the grounds of the Eight Bells public house.

Photos: Mike Cotterill

We continued along the east side of the moats and then came out onto an open field on the south side of the castle. A faint earthwork in the grass marked the east side of this field, which was recorded as 'the King's garden' in 1418: in 1560 it was described as 'Castell Gardens' but was no longer owned by the Castle by that date. As we reached the end of the next field, Vicky pointed out the site of the 18th century Clatterford paper mill close by.

We proceeded past Froglands Ford along Froglands Lane: the name 'Frogland' is first recorded in 1551 but 'Froglane' is recorded in 1395, and no doubt reflects the damp nature of the landscape in the area. We then swerved up a long, steep hollow way which used to be known as Legg's Hill. The first specific reference to this name occurs in 1571 but members of the Legg family are known to have held land in the area from as early as 1402.

This brought us back to the Castle car park, where we turned right to walk outside the east face of the late-sixteenth century artillery fortress. From this position we could see the remains of the flint rubble core of the 'lower enclosure' wall, part of the way up the bailey earthwork of the medieval castle. There was some discussion at this point clarifying the meaning of the 'lower enclosure'. The use of the term might lead one to believe that the castle had a lower enclosure and a higher enclosure, but this would be incorrect. The 'lower enclosure' simply refers to the original late Saxon – or possibly Roman – construction beneath the medieval castle itself. Vicky and Frank explained the history of the castle stonework and its construction in some detail, which everyone agreed was somewhat complex! Gianibelli's artillery fortress of 1597–1601 was an irregular pentagon with five bastions providing offensive fire. The recessed battery at the SW corner was excavated in 1978, and there is archaeological evidence that this battery was deliberately demolished and filled in shortly after 1620, as were the other batteries.

From the east end of the artillery fortress we passed onto the track leading to the exceptionally deep hollow way known as Clerken Lane, a name in use since the Middle Ages. Hollow ways are usually created by continual pedestrian and vehicular use over centuries but the depth of Clerken Lane is highly unusual. One possibility is that chalk was excavated along the line of the hollow way to provide building materials for the castle earthworks, but John Margham has suggested it may have been an Iron Age defensive ditch.

Following Clerken Lane we came out by Spring Lane and crossed the ford, stopping for the last time beside the Southern Water pumping station, which occupies the site of Priory Mill, owned and operated by the monks of Carisbrooke Priory in the medieval period. The house occupied by the mill owners stood on the site of what is now Carisbrooke medical centre.

We dispersed in the high street after thanking Vicky and Frank for another fascinating and informative historic landscape excursion.

Alan Phillips

Saturday 26th February A walk from Godshill to Appuldurcombe

Warm sunshine greeted us, as twelve members assembled in Godshill village car park and crossed the road to Hollow Lane. On its high banks, Snowdrops and Celandines were sheltering. It was shocking to see great gaps in the banks of this ancient feature of the landscape, just to access a modern housing estate. These holloways shelter a diversity of wildlife. They should be protected by law as an important habitat and an important part of our heritage.

The name 'holloway' derives from the Anglo-Saxon word for a sunken lane. They date from at least three hundred years ago, and many go back as far as the Iron Age. They were part of long routes through the landscape: drover routes for moving cattle and other farm animals to markets, routes to sea ports, or pilgrimage routes. Hundreds of years of constant use by cattle, carts and walkers gradually eroded the soft earth surface of level paths, forming a ditch which was gradually deepened and widen by more and more constant use, as well as from rainwater running off the fields above. Sometimes, the ditch became a temporary stream or river. Many holloways have become as deep as thirty feet, with mature trees growing on top, their branches arching overhead, forming a green roof in spring and summer, and their roots stabilizing the towering banks where shade-loving wild plants shelter, and Rabbits, Foxes and Badgers tunnel into them.

At the top of the hill, we paused to look at the landscape beyond, which Steve Hutt explained in geological terms. We followed Sheepwash Lane and took a turning off through woodland. What we were confronted with there was heart-breaking -a great swathe of trees had been felled by Storm Eunice the previous weekend. Already the paths had been cleared – I checked before I led the walk. In the fields beyond the wood, some veteran trees have had their tops and huge limbs ripped off. Storm Eunice set a new record for the fastest wind gust recorded in England – 122 miles per hour at the Needles. The storm was one of the most powerful to hit the south coast of England since the Great Storm of 1987.

Photos: Mike Cotterill

We passed through the Fremantle Gate, an imposing structure at the top of a hill and followed the track across fields to Appuldurcombe House. It was not open until 1 April, but we stood at the entrance while I told the story of a great scandal involving Lady Seymour and Sir Richard Worsley, the owner of this grand Palladian house in the late eighteenth century. They had an arranged marriage. She probably felt neglected by her husband, who was either protecting the Island from foreign invasion with his regiment, or away on government business. She threw herself into fashionable society, in the company of the Duchess of Devonshire. She seems to have had a reputation as a wild child, but the tedium of life for noblewomen at that time should be taken into account. She eventually fell in love with Captain Bisset of Knighton Gorges, below Ashey Down, a regimental friend of her husband, and eloped with him. She had given birth to a baby son four months earlier, and once an heir was born, a lady could have affairs, but leaving your husband was against the rules in high society. She and her lover were holed up in a London hotel, the gossip of the town, and her husband refused to let her baby son be brought to her. He paid the hotel staff to spy on her to get evidence for a prosecution. Seymour sacrificed her own reputation to save Captain Bisset's, but they couldn't be together because Sir Richard refused Seymour a divorce. She and their son were his property by law, and he had possession of her considerable fortune of fifty-two thousand pounds. At the trial, witnesses brought by the Defence confirmed Seymour's claim that Sir Richard had at least encouraged his wife to have sex with his military friends, including Captain Bisset, who counted himself the twenty-seventh, while he, Sir Richard, as a voyeur, spied on them. He was not awarded the two hundred thousand pounds in damages that he sought, which would have ruined the captain, but just one shilling. Utterly humiliated, Sir Richard made Seymour live in France for four years, just to receive a small allowance from him, while he went off on a grand tour of Europe. She was caught up in the French Revolution and possibly, as a friend of noblemen, imprisoned, but she eventually returned to England. She had no choice but to be a courtesan, in order to continue to live as a lady, but eventually, on Sir Richard's death, she got back her fortune. Shortly after, at age forty-seven, she married a twenty-six-year-old Frenchman. The couple returned to France, but not before her family, owners of Harewood House, had reconciled with her. This story is of historical importance, as it shows how, in the eighteenth century, even a woman from the noblest of families had no power or autonomy except through her husband, and if she couldn't bear living with him because she was abused, and left, she could be ostracized by high society and become destitute, even though she brought a huge fortune to the marriage.

Much has been written about this scandal over the years, including Seymour's own graphic verse about her sexual relations with Bisset, which was a late eighteenth century bestseller. In Sheridan's popular play *School for Scandal* (1777), Seymour was apparently the inspiration for naughty Lady Teazle. More recently, Isle of Wight local historian Adrian Searle wrote about it in his guidebook *Walking Isle of Wight History* (2004) and a few years later, Hallie Rubenhold wrote *Lady Worsley's Whim: An Eighteenth Century Tale of Sex, Scandal and Divorce*, which inspired the film *Lady in Red*, shown on television.

We returned to Godshill on the direct route, through the grand gateway and down the lane on the cycle route known as the Squirrel Path, reflecting on this.

Maggie Nelmes

Sunday 27th March Chilton Chine, Grammars Common and the Longstone

Eleven people gathered at Chilton Chine on a sunny morning for an historic landscape walk ascending via Grammar's Common to the Longstone, and it was encouraging to see a good number of new faces present. We began by considering the origin of 'chine' from Old English *cinu* or *cinan*, meaning 'a cleft or ravine', and noted the two Mesolithic hearths in the area where hunter-gatherers once lit fires and did some cooking over 6,000 years ago. Jumping forward, an Anglo-Saxon charter of 826 suggested that Chilton Chine was once known as *bican dæne*, or 'the Bitch's Mouth'. Then another leap forward to the 19th century, when the Military Road was first constructed as a feature specifically linked to the Palmerston defensive system of the 1860s.

At Chilton Farm we mused on the name's origin from the Domesday place-name *Celatune* (1086) – 'the farmstead or estate near the gorge or deep valley' – and its medieval owners.

This brought us to Pitt Place Lane, where John Margham's reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon landscape gives Chilton as the Western boundary of Calbourne parish when the latter stretched southward to incorporate the whole of Brighstone. This later became the Mottistone/Brighstone parish boundary, but is now just a lane in Brighstone parish! Pitt Place itself was recorded as *la Putte* in 1248, and the name simply referred to 'a pit or quarry'.

As we arrived at the footpath leading up to Grammar's Common, the origin of the name caused a certain amount of speculation, but it turns out to be simply a variant spelling of the local dialect version 'grammer' (grandmother), as in 'grammer and granfer'! The parish boundary between Mottistone and Brighstone passed through the middle of Grammar's Common and therefore tenants of one of the Brighstone manors as well as tenants of Mottistone Manor must once have had rights of common grazing here.

A steep climb took us through the wood and brought us close to the enigmatic Black Barrow, which despite being the largest and most unusual barrow on the Island with a shape not unlike Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, is nevertheless rarely visible as it is shrouded in woodland and in fact covered in dead and decaying trees. The site has never been excavated, and it is possible that it may in fact not be a barrow at all but a natural formation endowed with special significance by ancient residents and given this name. Similar 'Black Barrow' sites, mainly in southern England, will have attracted local stories now forgotten, and would have continued to stand out as significant monuments over many centuries.

Left: Close to Black Barrow; Right: At the Longstone

Arriving at the Longstone, we spent some time trying to disentangle the historical facts from some of the more fanciful accounts which have accrued to the monument, especially in modern times. Originally it would have been one of two surviving Neolithic long barrows on the Island (the other being at Afton Down, but with no stone associated with it). The barrow dates to around 3,600 BC. How many stones were there originally? The recumbent stone was formerly four feet south of the upright stone but moved to its present

position by the local landowner c.1856; and its present position has led to fanciful tales of its being a sacrificial altar stone.

We cannot say in detail what happened at the Longstone – or any other barrows for that matter – but we can be confident that these were all tombs for the ancestors, whether the family or the lineage. The Longstone was found to have only one burial in it, and there may well have been a wooden platform, or mortuary enclosure, close by where the dead person would have been left for birds and animals to pick the bone clean, before burial.

In any case, the stone was already 3,000 years old when it became an important meeting-place for judicial or official procedures during the Anglo-Saxon period, giving rise to the name *Modrestan* (1086) and *Mottistone* (1374), both a variation of 'moot stone': 'the stone of the speaker or speakers at a meeting'.

The most well-established old legend is of a contest between St Catherine and the Devil to see who should control the Isle of Wight. The Longstone's tall iron sandstone pillar was supposedly thrown by St Catherine (in person!) from St Catherine's Down. The Devil's smaller stone fell short and he lost the wager. The final resting place of the stones – with St Catherine's dominating the recumbent smaller stone – is said to symbolise the triumph of good over evil. What the Longstone is nothing to do with is the cult of Mithras by the Romans as often claimed and which gets repeated on various websites, but is completely without foundation and a piece of modern *invented* folklore.

With everyone's consent we then made a short detour up to the Castle Hill enclosure. The site is square in shape, with boundary ditches and banks, and generally thought to be associated with prehistoric stock-keeping, but opinions vary as to which period to date it. Vicky Basford in her *Vectis Report* (1980) suggested an Iron Age date, which is generally accepted in the wake of any more specific evidence – though no archaeological signs of huts have been found, which an Iron Age site is likely to have had. More recently, Andy Manning of Wessex Archaeology, who has a lot of experience of Roman sites, visited the Island and posited that the site was a Roman look-out post; and it is certainly true that Rock Roman villa as well as a native Romano-British settlement at Sudmoor are not far away.

From here we descended the hollow way known as Church Path into Mottistone itself; this path is probably of considerable antiquity, extending beyond Saxon times and even into prehistory. We stopped to consider a brief history of Mottistone Manor, from its Domesday mention in 1086, the Cheke family who were the owners when the present Manor house was created during the 15th and 16th centuries, its subsequent ownership by Sir John Leigh of Northcourt, and its purchase by Charles Seely in 1861, then finally passing to the National Trust in more recent times.

We completed the walk by following the winding Hoxall Lane – 'the spring or stream of the hawk' – which brought us back to our starting-point at Chilton, a round circuit of some five miles in all.

Alan Phillips

Tuesday 12th April Newchurch

Four members turned out for this walk, weather conditions were fine, with clear blue sky and a light easterly breeze. This was a repeat of a walk held in November 2021. The walk started from the car park in School Lane, and took footpath NC13 toward Skinner's Lane. A Yellowhammer was seen in a tree where the footpath meets the Lane. We then climbed up Skinners Lane towards Queens Bower, and a Pheasant's 'rasp' call was heard. A recently used badger sett was seen, so recent the badger's paw prints were still visible in the soil!


At Queen's Bower, we turned left into footpath NC42, where a Bumblebee and a Swallow were seen. Black Bryony were seen in the hedges and verge, not yet in leaf. Holly Blue butterfly were spotted. The footpath leads to the outskirts of Alverstone Garden Village, where we turned left into footpath NC12. This footpath skirts the Garden Village, and much 'garden escape' plants and flowers were seen. A Great Tit was heard nearby, and Speckled Wood butterfly spotted. After the garden village, we turned right into footpath NC11b, which leads past woodland and open fields to Hill Heath. Scots Pine trees lined the route, which were coming into flower. Shaking one of the flowers resulted in quite a spectacular pollen shower!

Half-way along the footpath, we stopped to admire the view along the eastern Yar valley, where the Yarborough monument could be seen on the top of Culver Down, and the sea in the distance. At Hill Heath, footpath NC11b meets NC11, which we took the left turn and headed into the woods. Bluebells carpeted the woodland floor.

A Red Squirrel was spotted high in the trees. The footpath crosses a small stream (a tributary of the Eastern Yar), which was full of red-brown deposits of the Ferruginous Sandstone. We carried on along footpath NC11 towards Martin's Wood, past the daffodils of the Field of Hope, now past their flowering best. A Red Admiral butterfly was seen. We continued through Martin's Wood, returning to the car park.

Al Blenkinsop

Saturday 21st May Alverstone

Six members joined Dave Fairlamb of Natural Links for a Looking at the Countryside event at Alverstone Mead on 21 May 2022. The nature-themed walk started in Alverstone village and we headed east along the cycle path, accompanied by bird song, with Blackcaps, Greenfinches, Song Thrushes. Wrens and Chiffchaffs in fine voice. A Common Whitethroat obligingly sang in full view on a telegraph wire, with Swallows feeding over the wetlands and a Buzzard soaring high in the sky.

Common Whitethroat

Blackcap

Masses of Comfrey and Cow Parsley brought colour to the riverbank and the path edges were adorned in the blues of Germander Speedwell, Forget-me-not and Green Alkanet. A male Banded Demoiselle settled on vegetation by the river and further down the track the reedbeds offered a chance to compare the songs of Sedge and Reed Warblers, with occasional loud bursts of Cetti's Warblers and a distant Reed Bunting. As we approached the pools near the Sandown Community Orchard, several other damselflies were on the wing including Common Blue, Azure and Large Red, fluttering amongst the Yellow Iris, Hemlock Water-dropwort and Gipsywort.

Banded Demoiselle

Large Red Damselfly

Several species of butterfly were active including Speckled Wood, Brimstone, Red Admiral, Peacock and Green-veined White. Looking out from the woodland hide, a Moorhen was seen with young near to the flowering beds of Bogbean and a Black-tailed Skimmer darted over the water. We had a close encounter with a Red Squirrel along the main woodland path, though not as close as the lady who was feeding the squirrel from her hand, also surrounded by Mallards and Great Tits.

Speckled Wood

Peacock

Both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard around the woodlands and Bluebells were still in bloom along with some other noteworthy plants including Climbing Cordylis, Marsh Cinquefoil and Lesser Spearwort. We completed the circular walk to the sound of Blackcaps, Common Whitethroats and Song Thrushes.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Bluebell*

For more information on Natural Links events on the Isle of Wight and Wildlife/Birdwatching Holidays across the UK and abroad contact Dave Fairlamb on natural.links@outlook.com

NATURAL LINKS www.natural-links.co.uk

Dave Fairlamb

Wednesday 15th June **Dark Lane, Garstons and the Bowcombe Valley**

Twenty members and guests assembled at Whitcombe Cross for Vicky Basford's second historic landscape walk this season. At the beginning of the hollow way known as Dark Lane (or Shepherds Trail), Vicky expounded on medieval land use and in particular the relationship between Dark Lane and Whitcombe Road. Both head in the general direction of Gatcombe but Dark Lane runs due south, whereas Whitcombe Road heads south-east. Since Whitcombe Road originally ran close to Gatcombe Church and Gatcombe Manor, Vicky believes it formed the main medieval route to Gatcombe.

Dark Lane is a hollow way only as far as its highest point to the east of Vayres Farm. From this point the track continues southward past old quarries, and Vicky contends that Dark Lane came into being as a route to and from these quarries. But what is its age? This can probably be established by its relationship with a former medieval common open field – i.e. one divided into narrow strips held by different peasant farmers – which it cuts through. The field seems to have been shared between the parishes of Carisbrooke and Gatcombe and created before the parish of Gatcombe was taken out of Carisbrooke Parish by the 12th century or earlier. Dark Lane seems to cut through the area of the common open field and therefore perhaps dates from the 12th century or later. Vicky suggests that the aforementioned quarries may have been a major source of stone for Carisbrooke Castle in the medieval period – in addition to the Elizabethan period as previously established – and it would therefore seem likely that Dark Lane was used mainly to service these quarries.

We emerged from the darkness of the hollow way to the light of day at the summit of the plateau, with open views over the Bowcombe Valley and Down. As the quarries were too overgrown to inspect, we veered off from the Shepherds Trail and followed a track to Garstons.

After a short distance the track runs between two hedges which represent a surviving section of the parish boundary between Gatcombe and Carisbrooke. The hedge contains hazel, field maple, dogwood, blackthorn and dog rose as well as other unrecorded species. From here we proceeded via a delightful path leading downhill to Garstons farmhouse in Gatcombe Parish. An unnamed building is marked on the 1793 OS drawing, possibly an outlying barn, and 'Gaston Down' is named on this drawing. Then 'Gaussons Barn' is shown on Nichols IW map of 1844, while 'Gaskins Cottage' appears on Weller's 1862 IW map.



Photos: Pat Luckett

However, on the 1st edition six-inch OS map surveyed in 1863 'Garstons' is shown as a named farmhouse: the name derives from the Garston family, local landowners at some earlier date.

We next turned north-west towards Bowcombe Farm before making a right-angled turn to walk through fields as far as Plaish. Roman tile can be noted at the junction of the two paths, associated with the nearby Roman building; while remarkably, on the walk a couple of flue tiles for underfloor heating were discovered at the edge of the field, originating most probably from the nearby building or from another known Roman building a short distance away.

From Plaish we followed the meadow path to the south-east of the Lukely Brook. Close to Plaish Farm Vicky pointed out the archaeological remains of fishponds, possibly of medieval date: there are no known records of these but they may have provided fish for either Bowcombe Manor or Carisbrooke Castle. Cattle are now being grazed between Plaish and Clatterford and this should improve the ecology of the area.

The trackway for much of this section had been newly laid with chalk, but the blocks were too large and this made the going somewhat arduous underfoot.

The last field before Clatterford Shute is actively managed as a meadow and botanically rich. Orchids include the Southern Marsh Orchid and the Pyramid Orchid but there do not seem to be as many this year as in 2021. Ragged Robin could be seen, typical of damp places.

At Clatterford Shute ford the group disbanded to make their own separate ways back to the starting-point, some following Froglands Lane, others cutting through the fields to the south of Carisbrooke Castle to finish the walk in the car park opposite Carisbrooke Priory. A four-mile route through contrasting landscapes on a warm, sunny morning – we were certainly feeling hot and tired by the end of the walk, but with Vicky's expert guidance maybe also a little wiser.

Alan Phillips

Botany Meetings

The winter twig identification meeting to be held at Ventnor park was cancelled due to heavy rain.

Sunday 24th April Saltern Wood, Yarmouth

This meeting was rescheduled from the previous weekend. Warm sunny weather meant for a pleasant walk through the woods courtesy of the owner, Helen Danby. A group of sixteen were treated to a feast of spring woodland flowers. We admired a very large old Wild Pear tree, *Pyrus pyraster,* which was looking at its best. We saw spectacular displays of Common Dog Violets along the rides and lots of Wood Anemones. A glade of Bluebells was at its best and the air was heavy with their perfume. Interestingly, there were some pink and white flowered Bluebells and one unusual bracteate specimen. These were all true native Bluebells, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta.* We saw some very fine Early Purple Orchids and we stopped by a Creekside Crab Apple to take measurements for a current national survey looking at the purity of Crab Apples in the countryside. Management of the woodland had led to a fine spring flora and this was a delight to see where so many woodland today are unmanaged and heavily shaded resulting in a rapid loss of woodland flora. We recorded 85 woodland species.

Photos: Group shot & measuring a crab apple Helen Danby; Bluebells, Wood Anemones and Early Purple orchids Keith Marston

Colin Pope

Saturday 7th May Carisbrooke Castle

Our group of thirteen met at Carisbrooke Castle carpark for an exploration of the flora of the inner ramparts courtesy of English Heritage. We had held a similar meeting here in 2000 although no one present today had been at that meeting. We immediately noticed the defoliated bushes of Spindle in the hedge around the carpark, the bare branches covered in the webs of Small Ermine moth larvae. Unfortunately, the outer banks of the Castle have become increasingly scrubbed over reducing the extent of species-rich chalk grassland. However, on our visit we found that some of the banks and terracettes around the bowling green still supported a rich chalk grassland flora, which we recorded. There were plenty of Cowslips and Rock Rose was just coming into flower but we were too early for the peak flowering. However, on our previous visit, a small rare plant, Hairy-fruited Cornsalad, native to Dorset and the Isle of Wight, was discovered. One of the objectives of our visit was to try to refind this plant, first recorded from here in 1913. Despite searching, we were unable to locate the plant. However, it is known to be a capricious species with numbers fluctuating considerably from year to year.


Photos: Inspecting the inner banks at the Castle; Common Cornsalad, *Valerianella locusta.* Colin Pope

Interesting finds from our visit included a large population of Hairy Rock-cress, *Arabis hirsuta*, on the south facing slopes. It has long been known from the Castle and is otherwise only found at Mount Joy cemetery and the downs at Freshwater. However, the size of the population we saw today is by far the largest of any of its sites. We also found several hundred plants of another cornsalad. This one was Common Cornsalad, *Valerianella locusta*, supposedly the commonest species in this country but with us it is rare (Our Cornsalads are invariably Keeled-fruited Cornsalad, *V. carinata*). The population of Common Cornsalad we found today was undoubtedly the largest known to date on the Island. An attractive find was a patch of Star-of-Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum umbellatum,* flowering alongside the Bastion Walk.

Colin Pope

Sunday 15th May Little Kennerley Farm

Unexpectedly heavy morning rain deterred some people from attending but nevertheless nine members assembled at the farm carpark to explore the wet meadow adjoining the River Yar where Trevor Price puts his horse out to pasture. Trevor was there to greet us and to guide us to the site. We were delighted to welcome Eric Clement to his first meeting since the pandemic and we were also pleased to welcome Phil Collier and Robin Garnett who had come over from New Milton. With their help, we were able to make a thorough list of the flora of the wet field, recording 109 species. Interesting finds included frequent Common Sedge, *Carex nigra*, in the wettest areas. Although called Common Sedge, this is a declining species of marshes and flushes. It was growing with Common Spike-rush, Marsh Horsetail and Marsh Marigold. We also found strong populations of two infrequently seen non-native species, Pink Purslane, *Claytonia perfoliata*, and the Pick-a-back-plant, *Tolmiea menziesii.* As well as plants, we enjoyed seeing the Swallows which have a strong breeding population in the American barn.

Colin Pope

Saturday 17th June Afton Down

The leaders, Dave and Hazel Trevan, were stricken by Covid so Anne Marston very kindly stood in for them.

A select group of six joined the walk from the car park above Freshwater Bay along the cliffs to Whiteways and then back along the Freshwater Way by the side of the golf course on Afton Down. Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) and Hoary Stock (*Matthiola incana*) were past their peak of flowering, but there were plenty of ripening seed heads. Pyramidal orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) in varying shades of pink, and even a single white flowered specimen, were abundant. Wild carrot (*Daucus carota*) was coming into flower, and we saw large bright metallic green beetles on the flower heads which Iain Outlaw identified as Rose Chafers (*Cetonia aurata)*. Close-up photography of the plants enabled an immature wasp spider (*Argiope bruennichi*) to be located.

Where the path runs closer to the road at its highest point, the turf is shorter and we saw a number of low-growing species, including Bastard-toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), with its white star-shaped flowers against yellowish-green leaves, Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), with pink and white buds yet to open fully, and Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), another delicate white flowered plant.

Oxtongue Broomrape (*Orobanche picridis*) is another speciality of the area and we first noticed it in the cliff-top grassland, but the greatest abundance was on Afton Down. It is parasitic on Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieraciodes*) and flowering specimens of the host plant were seen along the edge of the Freshwater Way.

Anne Marston

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTES

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

J

Deaths

We regret to announce the following deaths:

SOCIETY OFFICERS:-

President Matthew Chatfield, 2 Somerville, 17 East Hill Road, Ryde, IOW PO33 1LU
General Secretary Dr. Colin Pope, 14 High Park Rd, Ryde, IOW PO33 1BP
Treasurer Mr Nigel Locke, 81 New Road, Brading, IOW PO36 0AG
Membership Secretary Mrs T. Goodley, 15 The Lawns,Fairlee Rd, Newport, IOW PO30 2PT

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NEXT BULLETIN

Please send any items for inclusion in the next Bulletin, and Reports of any Meetings for 1st July 2022 to 31st December 2022 to:

Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeology Society, Unit 16, Prospect Business Centre, Prospect Road, Cowes PO31 7AD Email - iwnhas@btconnect.com

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 7th January 2023

Bulletin Editor: Colin Pope, colinrpope@gmail.com

View from Golden Hill, Freshwater, southeast towards Compton Down. Mike Cotterill.