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Contents

President`s Address

As Spring slowly returns and the floods recede somewhat, another year has passed. For some of us it`s been a very difficult year financially, and worrying globally. For the Natural Scientists, the extraordinary weather and its consequences lead us to think about world wide problems never faced by our generations before. Of course in the past, there have been extreme weather events and climatic upheavals, but with world wide media it all seems over whelming. We are so very fortunate to live on our Island, protected in many ways from the worst manifestations. But that is not to say we are not affected in some way. I am aware that many people are finding it difficult to justify spending money on subscriptions, so I am truly thankful for your continuing support for the Society. We have been successful in gaining new members and I thank those who have worked so hard to provide such a rich and interesting programme of Events. I hope we can look forward to an interesting year ahead.

It is the 100th anniversary of Earthquake Milne, one of the Islands most famous scientists, and there will be many events to commemorate Milne, which I hope you will attend.

Very good wishes to you all,

Delian Backhouse Fry. BA Hons, Msc, Arch.

NOTICE BOARD

The Isle of Wight Flora Offer

The Society published The Isle of Wight Flora (Colin Pope, Lorna Snow, David Allen *et al*) in 2003. It was a hard-back book with 16 pages of colour plates as well as black and white photographs and maps. The bulk of the book comprises accounts of all the flowering plants, ferns, mosses, liverworts and lichens ever recorded on the Island. In addition, there are chapters written by experts covering topics including geology, climate the fossil record and a history of botanists who have visited the Island. The book sold out within a few years of publication and copies are now only available at high price on the internet. However, the Society has retained a small numbers of copies and is now able to make them available at their original retail price for anyone who might have missed out and would like to obtain a copy. If anyone is interested, please contact the Society headquarters at iwnhas@btconnect.com or telephone 282596 and leave a message.

Copies cost £35 but are available at discount rate of £28 and you can either arrange to collect them at one of our meetings or pay for the postage.

Bird Records

To help make the Isle of Wight Bird Report as representative as possible of all birds seen on the Isle of Wight during 2012 we would like to receive all your records of birds seen. Common birds are of the same interest as rarer species.
These should be sent to Robin Attrill. His email address is: robin@rpattrill.freeserve.co.uk
A simple electronic template is available from Robin but records are welcome in any other form. If you wish to send paper records his address is: Dr R P Attrill, 17 Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6BA.

Don't forget that we will be wanting all your records for 2013 and these can be sent to Robin at anytime throughout the year.

Photo Library

The Society is looking for someone to manage the Photo / Visual Records Library. If anyone would like to do this, please contact the Secretary or HQ.

NATURE NOTES.

To us, with a professed interest in the countryside, those harbingers of Spring are a welcome sight following a long dull winter and there is no better place to witness this transformation than Northwood Cemetery.

April is the month, but it is difficult to nominate a date, everything depending on the weather of the months leading up to the awakening. A visit in the early part of the month should reveal a glorious carpet of colour and a visit towards the end of the month will reveal that nature has changed its mantle.

If such a visit could be arranged for a Saturday morning, Friends of Northwood Cemetery may be present and an inspection of the newly renovated East Chapel should be possible. Don't miss the stained glass windows designed by a local person.

In 2013 our Archaeological Group will be carrying out a survey within the grounds of the old Quarr Abbey ruins. Take this opportunity to inspect the most spectacular tree in the Island. Just a common English Oak, *Quercus robur*, that commenced life as a sapling on the top of a seven foot high stone wall, surely destined for the short life of a bonsai. Not a bit of it. Putting down three limbs it stands today on three massive supports, with the trunk commencing seven feet from the ground. A mature tree that can only be described as standing on a milkmaid's stool.

For devotees of the unusual, the avenue of Coast Redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, in Firestone Copse, is worth putting on the itinerary. The double row of trees, now approaching a hundred feet in height, is worthy of a visit, but there is more. It is the only conifer grown in Britain that reproduces by suckering and these trees are present from saplings to maturing trees. There is yet another feature of these American immigrants. At the base of some of the trunks there is a platform of horizontal growth. Will they turn vertical ?.

Coast Redwoods are most adaptable and I quote from Dirr's Encyclopedia of Trees and Shrubs (of America). "*Sequoia sempervirens*, the quiet giant of the West Coast from Oregon to California, easily reaching 300 feet along the fog shrouded coast. In the East the species will grow 30 to 60 feet high." What is the ultimate height of our Island community, which has already exceeded those of the American East coast. Before departing, note the large bare patch totally devoid of vegetation. Why ?.

Having received a report of Colin Black's annual survey of the Glow-worms, *Lampyris noctiluca*, it is not surprising that the result was disappointing. In St. Helens Churchyard, where the grass was excessively tall owing to the excessive rainfall, only two specimens were seen. A walk along the old rail track from St. Helens to Bembridge produced the highest count of 17. There are reports of singletons at Osborne and Hamstead. Reports of Glow-worms over the past century show that they are widespread on the chalk and the heavy clay to the north of the Island, but there is only a single record, Moortown Lane, Brighstone, on the greensand. Is this correct, if so why ?.

With the impending loss of the Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior,* with the relentless advance of the fungus *Chalara fraxinea*, we face the inevitable loss of yet another of our widespread trees. If there is any compensation it is that the visual effect will not be as dramatic as the loss of the Elm. Where the loss of the Ash will come to the notice of the general public is the disappearance of amenity trees, none more so than the iconic "Umbrella Trees" in East and West Cowes. The one at East Cowes is possibly the best known tree in the Island.

Bill Shepard

Bird Report Questionnaire

We received an excellent response to the questionnaire that was sent out with our August mail distribution. The answers to the questions gave us a clearer idea of your views.

117 replies were received making this a response from more than a third of our membership, so thank you very much for all the trouble you took.

Do you like receiving the Isle of Wight Bird report?	86 yes	25 No	
Do you refer to it?	60 yes	23 No	32 Occasionally
Do you share it?	32 yes	60 No	24 Occasionally
Would you miss it?	67 yes	55 No	

So 73 per cent would miss receiving the Bird Report. We provided a comment box and some suggestions were made as to how costs could be cut. Quite a number said that the publication should be continued; that it was a good point of reference.

The cost of the 2011 Bird Report, which you should receive with this mail distribution, was much reduced, £915, as a new printing company was found and the number of photographs was lower.

Jackie Hart

Rare lichen found on the Island after an absence of 134 years

In April last year, my husband Les Street was out walking on the Downs between Freshwater and the Needles when he noticed an unusual orange-coloured lichen growing on a hawthorn bush. He realized it was *Teloschistes chrysopthalmus,* a species that until recently was thought to be extinct in Britain.

The last recorded sighting of it on the island was near Ryde in 1878 and despite much searching, it had not been seen since. The species appeared to have become extinct throughout the whole of Britain for over a century, but was re-found in Cornwall in 1998, then another was found in Guernsey. Since then, a handful of isolated specimens have recently been discovered in southern coastal areas in Devon, Dorset and Kent. This lichen is so rare that it was only recently given an English name: Golden-eye lichen. It is a striking-looking species with vivid orange fruiting disc shaped apothecia (the reproductive part) encircled by spines.

By an incredible coincidence the next day Les and I were walking in Newtown meadows and I found another specimen on a hawthorn bush! That lichen was a younger one in slightly better condition. We began an exhaustive search along with Colin Pope to see if we could find any more specimens but so far have been unsuccessful. However, a few more *Teloschistes chrysopthalmus* are turning up along the south coast. The gap has been filled between Hampshire and Kent by two species being found on two separate hawthorns near Rottingdean east of Brighton, and, as recently as January 5th 2013 another one was found in Southampton on an apple tree in the east of the city.

Lichens are formed by a fungus and alga combining to become a self-sustaining species. They reproduce by spores or vegetatively. *Teloschistes chrysopthalmus* is common in Normandy so perhaps the spores are being blown over the channel and the weather conditions are now more favourable here for the species to start growing**. (Photo page 18)**

Tree Lungwort survey

A survey was carried out in spring 2012 on the largest population of *Lobaria pulmonaria* (Tree lungwort) on the Island, which is within Northpark Copse. There is still a healthy population as was found on the previous survey and they are still in the same localized area and on the same trees. One new tree was found to have the species growing on it and a previous specimen had become moribund. It is encouraging to find such a stable population and some of the lichens were fruiting too. **(Photo page 18)**

Sheila Street

A Poem in Praise of Eelgrass

A couple of years ago a large number of diaries and writings were brought in to the Record Office. These had been written by a member of the Society over many decades. The earliest diaries dated from 1909 when the suffragettes were busy campaigning for the right to vote for women, a cause with which he sympathised. The author was George Vernon Upward, a member of the well known wholesale grocers in Newport, Upward and Rich.

George Upward died in April 1955, in his 80th year. By then he was living at The Spinney in Park Road, Wootton, but for much of his life he had lived at a house in Sandown called St Albans. In that town he was involved in youth work with the Congregational School. George's main interests were politics, cricket (the work of the test selectors was often commented on in detail) and botany. He was also interested in geology, archaeology and astronomy. His obituary in the Proceedings said "there never could be one more thrilled with nature and more appreciative of all things lovely than George Upward." The obituary added "he loved the less frequented places and the grandeur of mountain and moorland scenery," a view which was borne out by Upward himself. In one of his volumes he gives an account of his visit to Dumfries and Galloway followed by a set of poems to a range of plants. At the front of the book he writes: "In this little book there are a few scattered yet blended thoughts about the three most wonderful things in the world: Hills, Seas and Flowers."

The poems are in praise of a remarkable range of plants, from lily of the valley, and various orchids, to black bryony, cat's tail and, most bizarrely of all, to zostera nana, or dwarf eelgrass, almost certainly the only verse that has ever been written in honour of this species. Each poem is illustrated with an ink drawing of the species in question, and some of these are very fine.

Dwarf Grass Wrack
Zostera Nana

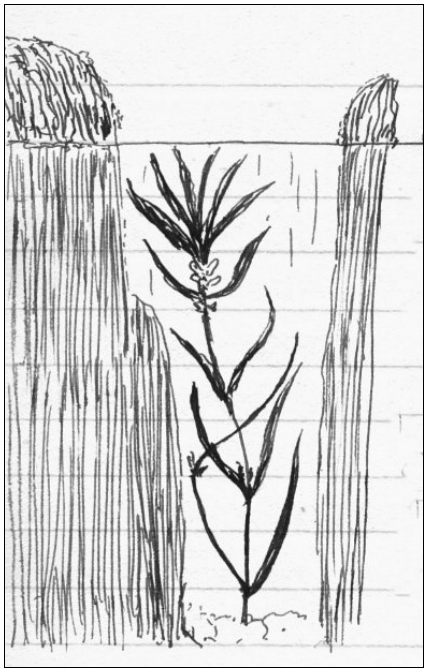
Come little Zostera last and the least
The smallest plant that draws the salt sea's breath,
Where shadowy shrimps and finny fishes feast
Upon the muddy verge of floral death

To live a hermit life beneath the sea
And never know that woods and trees are near
To live in that deep tidal estuary
And live and die without a song to hear

The thrush is singing on the tall ash tree
The lark is soaring high into the air
The chaffinch jinks away quite merrily
And all the gay dressed flowers are listening there

But you poor Zostera can never see
The Blue of Speedwell or the blue of sky
And never know the coloured mystery
And never think or ask the reason why

I wonder if your ancestors once knew
The glory of the life upon the land
And if in coloured dress they ever grew
And if their feet have ever felt dry sand



It is so easy to degenerate
To live in mud, content it should be so
To sink beneath the tidal waves of fate
And deep in sea-washed mud to live and grow

You come of poor relatives, for not one
Has ever lived a free life on the earth
To be a dismal Potamogeton
Is but a sign of humble lowly birth.

Each in its place lives out life's little span
The world is very full, there's not much room
It was not so when first the world began
But in those days life never came to bloom

And in the growth of life we always find
That some succeed while others always fail
To some this life seems cruel and unkind
And all their striving little will avail

And as for Zostera, what shall we say
To one whose lot is lived beneath the sea
A tiny traveller in a tidal way
With not a thought that brighter life could be

You are placed last in floral pedigree
The simplest little flower that eer saw birth
Without a care without anxiety
A little muddy wastrel of the earth.

Upward was in poor health for the last few years of his life, but still managed lengthy walks in the Island, often on consecutive days. In September 1954 a few months before his death these are some of his comments:

10th September: I received the IW Nat History Society Proceedings for 1953: it has quite interesting matter..... We are told to take no thought for tomorrow, but nature is taking thought everywhere. Take how the young spurge are all ready for next year, and many others, even to the formation of next year's flowers.

11th September: (After a morning visit to Newport, he goes to a geological meeting, a little reluctantly as most of those who he usually went with were away, "but I thought that is all the more reason why I should be there.")

"I had a tussle to fight as usual and all the way had a feeling that if I had sense I should turn back, but at Ryde I met Miss Pollard and her conversation made me forget myself. We travelled to Sandown together. At Sandown I, at one, went upstairs to the museum. It is beautifully arranged: everything is as it should be, a real model museum, and Allen practically devotes his life to it, and is really quite an authority. At 3 o'clock we started on our walk to the Culvers and stopped several times on the way while he explained the story of the Island. He said that Yarbridge opening in the chalk had been cut through by a tremendous river that swept down the English Channel, that the mountains where we stood now below sea level were 8000 feet high (?) and the Yar was a tributary. Somehow I like the old ideas best but this big river does account for the sweeping away of the whole chalk range between Culver and Boniface which the poor little Yar could never have done. We got down onto the shore and Allen stopped for several talks but the wind was so strong I had great difficulty in hearing."

In the end George Upward, clearly tired, heads back to Sandown on his own, leaving the rest of the party to continue up the slope. He returns to Wootton, and spends the evening looking at the season's cricket averages, with the batting headed by Compton and Graveney.

Richard Smout

John Milne in Iceland

2013 is the centenary of the death of John Milne, mining engineer, geologist, and seismologist, a man with a mass of interests from archaeology to the fate of the great auk.

A number of events will be held to commemorate the centenary during the year. The following account of crossing a river in Iceland dates from 1872. He visited the country with his fellow geologist, William Lord Watts, when they were both in their early twenties. This extract is taken from one of fourteen notebooks in Milne's handwriting, offering a vivid account of the expedition, and of the country and its customs. They are held at the Isle of Wight Record Office, and it is hoped that by the end of the year a digitised version of these notebooks will be accessible on-line.

"As this was to be our first experience of crossing a river without a ferry boat, great preparations were made for it, such as rolling up our trousers, arranging baggage, and receiving incomprehensible instructions from the farmer as to how we were to manage. After tucking up our legs as high as it was possible for those unaccustomed to this horseback performance, the farmer led the way, whilst in single file we followed shortly after. Splash ! Splash ! Splash ! went the horses as they entered the shallow water, whilst the nervous hearts of their uninitiated riders rhythmically echoed pit a pat, pit a pat as we momentarily expected a ducking at every lurch the horses gave, especially as the unseen stones gave way beneath their feet. For the first few steps it would have been well enough for everybody, but for a little water which the leaders splashed back upon those behind. How well we should have looked to a spectator on the shore (if there had been one). First the water grew gradually deeper until it reached the horses' knees, and we were frightened as if we thought our feet would melt, and we instinctively drew them up from the stirrups until we were huddled on the back of our ponies, more like our monkey ancestor relations than your humble servant and his worthy companions. But I had no time for thoughts as to what our resemblance might be: our peculiar position was enough to occupy my mind.

The water grew deeper and deeper whilst the current forced us downstream instead of allowing us to continue on the straight line we had started. The farmer in front at last passed the centre of the stream and with his horse's head turned against the current made for the opposite shore, whilst we were slowly plodding on through water reaching to the girths. With our knees on the pommel and our toes almost on the horse's back behind, we endeavoured, by clutching saddle, mane and bridle to keep a balance, whilst our horses slowly oscillated from side to side like the pendulum of a clock.

My legs, having been tucked up for so long a time in one position, now commenced to ache, and I felt that I could not stand it much longer. To have one's knees for two or three minutes against one's chin is bad enough, but to continue this novel posture for long is agony indeed. "Oh Scavenger's Daughter and the rest of medieval tortures" I exclaimed, "I realize your agonies." A violent cramp next seized my lower extremities, and now I felt it impossible to keep doubled up much longer. Having so far escaped a wetting and at last, at the eleventh hour, be compelled to shoot my legs into ice-cold water against my will was enough to aggravate a meeker man than I. It felt like murdering oneself. The demands of nature must be complied with and so, with many unheard mutterings and with unlimited mortifications, down they went. Boots, stockings, trousers and legs thigh-deep into the rapid running waters of the Ranga.

Now I had a better balance, and was at liberty to turn my head and gaze at my companion whom I found had long since resigned himself to the same horrid fate as myself. This gave me some sort of consolation for what I considered to be my own hapless fate.

On the opposite shore we landed among a number of huge dunes of ashes which evidently had originated from Hecla which was right before us. In and out between them a few stunted junipers struggled for an existence and this was the first attempt at tree growing which we had seen. A short trot which warmed our steeds and cooled our dripping legs brought us to the long looked for, long wished for Bolholt".

Richard Smout

Hunting for Truffles

The most famously expensive edible fungi are truffles. Most sought after, are the Piedmont or White Truffle (*Tuber magnatum*) and the Perigord or Black Truffle (*T. melanosporum*), neither of which occurs in this country. However, the Summer Truffle (*T. aestivum*), which is far less pungent, is widespread even if it usually goes unnoticed.

In the past, British truffles were collected commercially. The celebrated eighteenth century naturalist, Gilbert White, mentioned regular visits by truffle hunters in his *Natural History of Selborne*. The last full time professional truffle hunter was Alfred Collins, who lived in Winterslow, Wiltshire and retired in 1935. Although he did the bulk of his collecting in Wiltshire, I once read that he collected with his two truffle dogs as far afield as Somerset, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Surrey, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. In 1993, I wrote to Ralph Whitlock, who had known Alfred Collins, to find out if he knew any-

thing about his visits to the Island. He wrote: '*I fear I am going to disappoint you. I knew Alfred Collins towards the end of his life (he lived in a neighbouring village) but that was more than forty years ago. I know he claimed to have found truffles in the Isle of Wight but I never asked him for localities. He had a son, David, whom I believe is now dead and who didn't carry on his father's occupation, and I am now 79! So the records have now been consigned to oblivion*.' I had thought that this was the end of the story, but read on.

I was fortunate to find the first modern record of a Summer Truffle on the Island in 1985 beneath Holm Oaks on St Boniface Down. The specimen was sent to Kew where it is preserved in their herbarium. Since then there have been occasional scattered finds of truffles, most recently at Yafford this autumn, by a friend of the chef at Ventnor Botanic Gardens. There are also instances of specially impregnated trees being planted in gardens and yielding modest collections of truffles.

In October 2010, the British Mycological Society held their annual autumn foray on the Isle of Wight, based at Northcourt Manor, Shorwell. Caroline Hobart has made a particular effort to study subterranean fungi and she showed Jillie and myself how she carefully searched beneath the leaf litter for truffles. There are many species of subterranean fungi, mostly small and inedible and probably in decline. During the week, she discovered eight different species and these included a Summer Truffle she found on the first day, beneath beech trees at Northcourt.

However, these have all been small finds but Russell Palin, a forestry contractor living on the Island has struck gold. He first found Summer Truffles a few years ago beneath beech trees at Nunwell and was attracted to them by pheasants scratching at the ground. He has also found them at Yaverland, but in the last couple of years Russell has been successful in finding them in some quantity under beech on chalk in the West Wight. He has found truffles from April through to January; the largest he has found to date weighed 138 grams. When I accompanied him in Brighstone Forest this December, he quickly found three with relative ease. He looks for places where animals have been scratching, as he believes that they are taken by rats, mice and hedgehogs. Some truffles contain orange grubs; it would be interesting to know what are eating them.

Some truffles appear at the surface of the ground but they are usually buried shallow. Russell claims that he can recognise them by smell and also by a distinctive smell to the surface soil.

Clearly, Summer Truffles are not as rare as people believe but there is a definite knack to being able to locate them. I wouldn't be at all surprised to find that Russell was re-working the areas where Alfred Collins collected on his truffle-hunting trips to the Island more than eighty years ago.

(Photos page 15)

Colin Pope

General Meetings

28th July Chalklands and Lowlands: Early Medieval Landscapes of Rowridge and Watchingwell

Twelve hardy members assembled in beautifully sunny weather at the Blacksmith's Arms for an all-day landscape history walk led by Anglo-Saxon specialist John Margham, the fourth in a series of similar walks under his leadership in recent years. We began by ascending Bowcombe Down as far as the Anglo-Saxon cemetery site, where there is now little to see but where eleven 5th/6th-century inhumations as well as one cremation were excavated in the 1850s. The site was also one of the Island's probable early meeting-places, overlooking the Bowcombe Valley, where the local populace would have met to do business and enact laws: such meeting-places on the Island all have outstanding views, and this one is no exception. (Bowcombe Farm down in the valley was an estate centre of some importance at Domesday and included the Carisbrooke area, its church and town.)

Next stop was Monkham Copse, where John explained how Monkham Down had once belonged to the medieval Quarr Abbey and formed part of St Nicholas parish, even though the name was only first recorded in 1608. The nearby Apesdown had nothing to do with monkeys but referred to Alice, abbess of Wilton in Wiltshire, who was granted land in Carisbrooke in 1251, thereby creating the name *Abbessedune*, first recorded in 1295. John then expounded on one of his favourite topics, wet versus dry bottoms(!), including the example of Bottom Barn in Rowridge Lane, which we then descended as far as

Rowridge Farm. Domesday Book in 1086 mentions the place-name *Haldley* in this valley – literally, 'sloping wood-pasture' – but whilst Rowridge, 'the rough ridge', is first recorded only in 1227, it then takes over from the manor of Haldley when the two merge in 1449, and the latter name disappears completely.

Lunch stop was by the old marl pit at Swainston Down Gate, on the Anglo-Saxon parish boundary between Brighstone and Calbourne, and mentioned in a charter ostensibly recording a grant made in 826 by King Egbert to the bishopric of Winchester, though in reality the grant was more likely to have been made in the 10th century. And though we were unable to see it directly without adding to our considerable excursion, John pointed out Gallibury Hump in the vicinity, the well-known Bronze Age round barrow site which is referred to as a 'moot mound' in the Saxon charter dated 826, indicating the use of the site as a prominent meeting-place in this early medieval period. (It made quite a change being on the Calbourne side of Gallibury: one usually approaches it from the Brighstone Forest side.)

Descending the track to High Wood/Mudless Copse, we were now entering the Anglo-Saxon estate of Watchingwell, whose charter dates from 968, being issued by King Edgar to those nuns at Wilton Abbey, predating the previously mentioned grant by 300 years. We had now reached *aesc stede*, 'place of the ash trees' (then as now), with a view across the fields up to Round Copse and another Bronze Age barrow in front of it: the latter had become known as 'The Stack' by the 10th century. The track continued on down to Ashengrove Farm, first recorded in the Swainston Survey of 1630 and demonstrating a remarkable continuity in the use of 'ash' both as name and habitat over 700 years (then) and 1100 years (now).

As we crossed the main Newport-Calbourne Road, we were at this point leaving the Southern Chalklands behind and entering the Northern Lowlands. Proceeding along a metalled track through woodland with Swainston Manor to our left, John pointed out that the name *Sweineston* was first recorded in 1213, but forthwith quashed the notion that the Danish name specifically implied Viking invasions or settlement here – it was simply an Anglo-Saxon fashion at this time to take on Danish names, as for instance did the whole of the Saxon Godwinson family. Nor is this to deny, of course, that – as we know from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – the Vikings did overwinter on the Island.

A right turning on a woodland track past Bucket's Copse brought us to Upper Watchingwell, the old Newport-Freshwater railway, and its old station built for Sir John Barrington Simeon in 1923 then downgraded to a halt in 1948. The Watchingwell place-name is originally recorded in 968 as *hwætincg*, 'the spring or stream where wheat is grown' and, as if we needed further confirmation, Domesday Book states that "Wilton Abbey holds Watchingwell. It was always in the [lands of the] Monastery".

Next up was Great Park, which once lay within another detached portion of St Nicholas parish (based at Carisbrooke Castle). In the 10th and 11th centuries the northern lowlands would have formed a mosaic of woodland, wood pasture, meadow, heathland and arable, and also included a landscape of deer parks of which Great Park, later known as Watchingwell Park, formed an important one at the western end of Parkhurst Forest. The house still known as Great Park is early 18th century, replacing an earlier building which was still a deer park when it was sold in 1651, then from the early 18th century became a farm.

Our final stop at the Lodge by Betty Haunt Lane marked the eastern boundary of this park, the 'haunt' simply referring to the place where deer were fed – John was emphatic that it had nothing whatsoever to do with ghosts! 14th century references to New Park and Old Park to the east of the lane may refer to the subdivision of the existing park or may record the foundation of another park: we are looking at a landscape of enclosures in this area in the late medieval period.

Having started out at just after 10am and covered a good 5½ miles at a leisurely pace with many stops en route, it was 4.30pm before we finally made our way back to our cars. With this fascinating walk, John had once again conclusively demonstrated how such remote and scenic rural spots can, with the appropriate depth of historical research, be shown to be incredibly rich in historical reference and allusion, to be unpeeled layer by layer.

Alan Phillips

16th September **Bouldnor Forest Reserve**

Bouldnor Forest, the Hampshire and Wight Wildlife Trust's new Headquarters on the Isle of Wight, is one of four areas being returned to heathland by a partnership formed by the Wildlife Trust, the National

Trust and the Forestry Commission, with funding from the West Wight Landscape Partnership. In the Middle Ages the northern lowlands and the downs that flanked them were open heathland, grazed by sheep, where heather, gorse and birch trees were dominant. The economy of the Island at that time depended on wool. When the wool industry declined, however, so did the heathland. Rapid industrialisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to the depopulation of the countryside, and the development of soil improvement technology led to the replacement of heathland by grassland. Finally, some sixty years ago, the Forestry Commission began planting coniferous plantations at Bouldnor, Firestone and Parkhurst. By 1850 82% of heathland on the Island had been lost and by 2000 only 163 acres remained, most of it on National Trust land at Headon Warren and Luccombe. Heathland is a rare habitat in Northern Europe, although it is common in some southern counties of England, notably Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey. Bouldnor was chosen for this heath restoration project because it had been forested for a comparatively short time and during those sixty years no chemical fertilizers, fungicides or pesticides had been used there.

It was a beautiful afternoon in mid September when Richard Grogan, the Trust's Head of Conservation, led some thirty members of our Society on a tour of the reserve. Bouldnor Battery, built in 1938, is one of very few batteries of its vintage. It was built to defend the Solent from submarine attack during the Second World War and its use continued during the Cold War. Underwater cables were laid across the Solent to signal the presence of a submarine.

Out on the open heathland, wide vistas of the Solent and the New Forest coast were opened up when the Forestry Commission felled a huge swathe of trees that extended right up to the cliff edge. Here we found common heather and bell heather, glaucous sedge and fleabane. Richard told us there are four plants growing here that are scarce on the Island: pale violet, heath dog violet, dodder and cypress sedge. Adders and common lizards have re-colonised the heath, and last year four pairs of nightjars bred here. In May fifty Hebridean sheep grazed the land, as nightjars like bald patches in the grass, but this is hard to maintain. A raven nested here this year and in early September four hobbies were seen overhead.

Far below, between heathland and sea, is an undercliff, formed by frequent landslips from the unstable cliff. The coastal path has had to be moved back, away from the edge. Below is scrub reverting to woodland and Richard said that this could be one of the last remaining vestiges of primaeval forest in Britain, untouched by human hand. From the coastal path we could see the remains of a pier from which a railway ran up to the battery. Cormorants and great black-backed gulls perch here, undisturbed by man.

The western part of the heath is ungrazed, as it is difficult to fence off for sheep. Willow is spreading among the pedunculate sedge and heather. The gorse has been cut and may be mown. Unlike most butterflies, the Chalkhill Blue bred well here this year, despite the unusually wet summer. Richard said they are drawing up a management plan for the winter, after doing some research.

The narrow coastal path snakes through woodland down to a shoreline littered with fallen trees. A reed bed indicates that this area was freshwater marshland when the Solent River flowed here. Fossils of bison, deer, crocodiles, hippos and turtles from the interglacial periods are to be found along this coast. Humans also lived here some 8000 years ago, evidence of a Mesolithic settlement having been discovered just offshore. It can only be reached by divers. In 1999 a lobster digging its burrow sent pieces of worked flint flying out. Britain's oldest string, evidence of boatbuilding and the remains of a jetty are indications that this society was more advanced by several thousand years than other races of man across the world.

Coltsfoot growing on the banks just above the beach is a good indicator of unstable clay cliffs, as it cannot compete with other plants. Horsetails, one of the most primitive of plants, also thrive here. Offshore eelgrass is the only plant to survive in salt water, apart from seaweeds. There are three species of eelgrass, also to be found off Cowes, Ryde and Bembridge. Eelgrass forms a kind of meadow and is the preferred habitat of seahorses, but whether they breed here is not known.

Returning through the woodland, Richard explained how conservationists need to weigh up habitat importance to different species when deciding how much coniferous plantation and how much deciduous woodland to maintain. There is a far higher density of red squirrels in coniferous woodland than in deciduous: up to 6 per hectare, compared to 1.5. The remaining plantations are Forestry Commission

land. The Corsican pine has Red Needle Blight and the Wildlife Trust will advise on alternative planting, perhaps Scots pine, native to Britain and a particularly valuable food source for red squirrels. As there are no wild deer to eat the saplings, conifers regenerate and there is no need to plant them.

Coniferous plantations lack old trees, to be found in deciduous woodland – the habitat of woodpeckers that drill holes and bats that hibernate in holes that the woodpeckers have abandoned, or under a dense covering of ivy. Conifers are not good for drilling holes. Holm oak and sycamore spread quickly and the heath could soon revert to scrub without careful management. Hebridean sheep are currently used to graze the heath and cattle could be introduced. Old oaks pre-date the plantation.

We returned to the Ministry of Defence buildings clustered behind the battery. The Wildlife Trust took out a lease at Bouldnor a year ago and only needed to modify the buildings to provide a kitchen, training room, resources room and toilet. Kathy Grogan runs the Education programme here, with the help of staff and volunteers, holding Habitat Discovery Days with practical activities, mostly for primary school groups, and a Forest School programme, for which our Society gave funding. The programme consists of a two-hour session once a week for six weeks. The children learn shelter building and campfire cooking and explore the natural world through activities such as pond-dipping. Nowadays children lead more sheltered lives than their grandparents' generation. They need to assess and manage risk through exploration. There are plenty of volunteers to guide them, but the adults are not too intrusive. Children are given ground rules and introduced to using a knife for whittling in stages, starting with a potato peeler. If a child then uses a knife irresponsibly, he or she must revert to using a potato peeler again. No attention is given for negative behaviour. A child who misbehaves is simply told to sit and wait until he or she is ready to join in again.

Other programmes are for Family Learning, often the first experience that families have had of outdoor activities. Older children can study conservation management. Non-achievers with a history of trouble-making from one of the Island's secondary schools cleared Knighton Down, a recently acquired nature reserve, of scrub. Though very unfit when they started, these young people improved so much, working as a team and independently. They worked outdoors on Friday mornings, when their behaviour at school was at its worst, and followed up the practical work with project work in class.

Whereas our Natural History and Archaeological Society caters mostly for adults who wish to learn about wildlife and its origins, through talks and field trips, the Wildlife Trust is encouraging future generations of adults to study and protect the natural world. I was impressed by their initiative and pioneering work.

The Trust only moved its Island Headquarters to Bouldnor a year ago and yet it already seems well established here. It is surprising how quickly the heathland is recovering from its recent afforestation, how plants that have lain dormant are springing back to life and how heathland fauna is returning to live and breed here.

Maggie Nelmes

10th November A Life Underground: Thirty Years Searching for the Island`s Fossil Heritage

Dinosaur Isle is an iconic building, shaped like a *pterosaur*, a bat-like flying reptile. It houses a hugely diverse collection of plant and animal fossils representing many millions of years of life on the Isle of Wight. The main hall is dedicated to the dinosaurs, displaying the fossilised skeletons, footprints and footcasts of reptilian monsters found on the Island, as well as models, some of which move their heads and bellow.

This is where Steve Hutt worked from 2001 when the Island's geological collections moved from their cramped quarters in one room above Sandown Library to this purpose-built museum costing 2.7 million pounds provided by the Isle of Wight Council and the National Lottery Millennium Commission. The museum is well known for its guided fossil walks and educational talks, as well as for its working laboratory, where visitors can watch fossils being prepared and plaster casts made and bring their own fossil finds for identification by experts.

Steve Hutt needs no introduction to members of our Society, as in recent years he has led geology walks for us and, as Curator, taken us on a tour of the museum. Dinosaurs are his passion. As a boy, growing up on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, he found fossils, mostly in flint, of sea urchin spines and sponges. He lived on the chalk and had to walk a long way to reach gravels, where more varieties of fos-

sil were to be found. Then he discovered books on dinosaurs and he was hooked, as most children still are. 'But I never grew out of it!' he declares. His father took him to the Natural History Museum in London where he 'was blown away' by fossilised skeletons of fish and invertebrates. He saw a huge case of fossils from the Isle of Wight collected by William Fox, a curate at Brighstone. In 1865 Fox found the skeleton of a *polacanthus* in a bed of blue shaley clay in the Barnes High cliff.

Steve was inspired to come to the Island to explore the south-west coast where the *Wealden beds* of the Cretaceous period are exposed. At this time, the late nineteen-sixties, there was little interest in fossil hunting on the Isle of Wight. Steve came here about a dozen times a year, slept rough on the cliffs and found plenty of fossils, but identifying them was hard.. He took his finds to the Natural History Museum where they were greeted with great excitement, especially when a part skeleton of an *iguanadon* was accompanied by a bone identified as part of the tail complex of another dinosaur never before found in Europe.

In 1978 Steve joined the staff of the Museum of Isle of Wight Geology at Sandown Library, whose first curator was Allan Insole, a geologist who was once President of our Society. Before Allan's appointment, the expanding collection had long since outgrown its single room, looked after by a library assistant. Some specimens were kept in cold frames and the rest crammed under tables. As a result, many fossils were stolen. Horrified at the deterioration of much of the collection, Steve started a campaign to set up a purpose-built museum. When he discovered a skeleton in the Barnes High, he had to carry the bones, a few at a time, all the way to Sandown on the bus because he had no transport.

In the year that Steve joined the museum, a couple came in with fossils full of iron pyrite. They and three other families holidaying near Grange Chine had found a number of shiny black stones on the beach and in the cliffs, following a huge cliff fall. They split the finds between them and returned home to different parts of the country. Among the bones brought to the museum was an *iguanadon* tooth. Steve and his colleagues dug in the cliff at Grange Chine but found nothing. Years later they discovered that the rest of the bones found by the families were in the Natural History Museum. In 1985 the excavation was resumed when cliff erosion uncovered more of the bones. About seventy per cent of the skeleton of a giant *theropod*, a new species and a new genus, named *'Neovenator'* or 'New Hunter', was unearthed. Up to eight metres long, this was the major predator in the Wessex basin, probably hunting herds of *iguanadon* and maybe even *sauropods,* like the massive *brachiosaurus* with its long giraffe-like neck. Among the *neovenator* bones were *iguanadon* bones and crocodile teeth. This led Steve and his team to believe that a crocodile may have feasted on the dead dinosaur before it was buried in mud. The *neovenator,* a fierce bipedal predator that could run faster than a man, had sharp claws on its hands and feet and a set of five centimetre-long curved teeth with serrated edges for tearing apart the flesh of plant-eating dinosaurs. This has been the most important dinosaur find on the Isle of Wight to date, but bones keep appearing as the unstable cliffs fall.

Only weeks ago an almost complete skeleton of a v*aldosaurus*, a dinosaur peculiar to the Isle of Wight, was dug out of the cliffs. Steve showed us slides of the dig and explained how the fragile bones had to be wrapped in silver foil and then encased in plaster to protect them in transportation.

Steve brought a variety of exhibits to illustrate his talk, some of which he passed around. Several, such as a giant claw, were heavy, others colourful and highly polished by his wife, Penny. His talk was not only a fascinating history of the past thirty years or so at the cutting edge of palaeontology on the Island, but also the personal story of a pioneer, enduring hardship and fighting for his cause. He spoke with humour and great candour about his life and work. I left the hall full of admiration for someone whose life was so focussed and who, despite minor mistakes and setbacks, could look back with pride on a life fulfilled.

Maggie Nelmes

8th December **Explore the World of Lichens**

Who would have thought that lichens could be such a fascinating subject? Colin Pope`s introduction to the world of lichens took us on a journey from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, via Madagascar to Tasmania. His slides showed us what a great diversity of lichens there are and how attractive their structures and colours can be.

Lichens are not a single organism, but a symbiotic partnership between a fungus and an alga, usually a green alga. The fungus is unable to produce food and is dependent on its algal partner for its survival.

The alga uses photosynthesis to produce nutrients to feed itself and its host fungus. It can live independently, but it benefits from the shelter provided by the fungus and possibly from the sun-screening effects of chemicals that the fungus produces.

With his attractive slide show, Colin demonstrated how lichens come in different forms and colours. Some grow as crusts on rocks and trees and on the surface of the soil. Others, called bush lichens, are bushy and trailing, and another group is lobed and leaf-like. Some are so tiny that they have to be viewed under a microscope to appreciate their structure. Colour varies greatly, from purple-black to dull brown and vibrant orange and red. Victorian engravings show some of lichens' amazing shapes and forms.

Some lichens grow very slowly – those on tombstones can be hundreds of years old – whereas others grow very quickly. The oldest and greatest variety is on church buildings. Different types of stone attract different species. Before the Industrial Revolution lichens flourished all over Britain, but many were killed off by air pollution. That is why the Highlands of Scotland is a good area to study them. There is dense lichen growth on Scots pine bark, and in the Cairngorms lichens grow over heather, the spores blown in the wind. They can reproduce both sexually and asexually. In the Caledonian pine forest there is a community of lichens with a strong Scandinavian link.

Lichens can grow in extreme environments: in mountains and on the sea shore. In Northern Norway, in a treeless landscape, they are an important food for reindeer, although reindeer eat more mosses and other plants. In the Cairngorms a lichen known as *'rock tripe'* has saved the lives of survivors of plane crashes in the Arctic. On Cradle Mountain in Tasmania the *coral lichen* was the first Australian lichen to be named. It has an elegant lace-like appearance and was collected on an expedition in the 1780s and taken to Kew. Hooker, a Curator of Kew Gardens, collected some on one of his plant hunting expeditions to Australia in the nineteenth century. Lichens in extreme environments can be highly localised. On Ben Alder, in the Highlands of Scotland, there is a lichen growing on a limestone outcrop at high altitude that has not been found anywhere else in Britain.

On the seashore lichens must tolerate salt spray. One species resembles a tar spot on the rocks. The Channel Wrack seaweed always has a fungus growing in it. On St Kilda, a treeless island far off the Atlantic coast of Scotland which is exposed to strong salt-laden winds, a lichen usually found in woodland grows instead in the coastal grassland.

Lichens are particularly attracted to forests. The New Forest is one of the best environments for lichens in the South of England, as the air there is much cleaner than in the cities of Southampton and Bournemouth. A long, stringy *'usnea'* that grows on tree trunks and is very sensitive to air pollution survives there. However, on Dartmoor '*usnea florida'*, a highly sensitive and very distinctive lichen, has declined significantly. In the UK a lot of woodland is managed, but hazel coppicing, that lets in light, encouraging the growth of wild flowers, is not good for lichens, which thrive on high humidity. One of the most striking communities of lichen is the *'lobarian'* community that grows in old woodland and is especially well developed in the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Chile – the Gondwanaland connection. It thrives in very clean air, high humidity and undisturbed old woodland. In the UK it favours the Highlands of Scotland. In Tasmania mosses, lichens and ferns grow tightly packed on tree trunks in the rain forest. The 'wolf' lichen, *'lethraria vulpine'*, which grows on trees in the New World, Scandinavia and the Alps, is poisonous and was used as bait for wolves. *'Lungwort'* produces fruiting bodies only where the air is very clean: on the west coast of Scotland, but not in the New Forest. As it resembles lungs, it was ground up to treat lung disease. Woodland was the original ground cover in Britain and the Highlands of Scotland were once forested, too, but grazing prevents reafforestation. In the Orkneys there is only one remaining wood, but the soil is too poor and the site is too exposed for trees. Instead it is dominated by shrubs, especially hazel that is native here. This ancient woodland, with its high rainfall and very clean air, is also home to the *lobarian* community and mountain ash trunks are covered in lichens.

Lichens have various uses. In the past they were used to produce dyes. *'Cudbear'*, from Glen Affric near Inverness, was boiled and stale urine was added to make purple and red. A Leeds street was named after this dye, produced in a factory there. *'Crottle'* was used to make brown and fawn pigments for tartan cloth. *'Rocella'* from Madagascar produces litmus pigment used in acid-alkaline tests. In model making lichens are used for trees and bushes.

Wildlife also makes use of lichens for various purposes. The long-tailed tit collects bits of moss and lichens to interweave into its nest and camouflage it. Some moths are adapted to hide on lichen-covered tree trunks, and amazingly the *'peppered*' moth changed colour when pollution from the Industrial Revolution caused the lichen that concealed it to darken.

Lichens are good indicators of air quality and of changes in our environment. In 1974 a schools' project produced a 'Mucky Air Map' of England, according to levels of sulphur dioxide. Since then these levels have dropped, but levels of other air pollutants have risen. Lichens have a large surface area to absorb nutrients from the atmosphere and so they are particularly sensitive to air quality. Not all lichens thrive in very clean air, however. Some depend on a certain level of air pollution and have declined as air quality has improved. Others favour a higher level of nitrates in the air from intensive farming.

Colin gave his talk to an audience of some thirty members of our Society and the afternoon concluded with several interesting questions. Colin has travelled far and wide to study wildlife, as his photographic record of fungi in different parts of the world testifies, and he communicates his enthusiasm to his audience, speaking in layman's terms to make the subject accessible to all.

Maggie Nelmes

Section Meetings

Access

26th June **Dame Anthony's Common**

Seven members assembled at Ryde bus station on a sunny morning. We caught the number 37 bus to Brickfields Horse Country for the start of the walk on bridleway R38. This was once the main route from Ashey to Havenstreet and Newport, a drover's road for taking sheep and cattle to market.

The first part of the bridleway was in good condition but as we entered the common the path became washed out and poor. Rights of Way have in the past spent a lot of money on this path but every winter it deteriorates. There are a number of paths in this area; we took the main one to the bridge, the boundary between the parishes of Newchurch and Binstead. Here we stopped to talk about the history of the area.

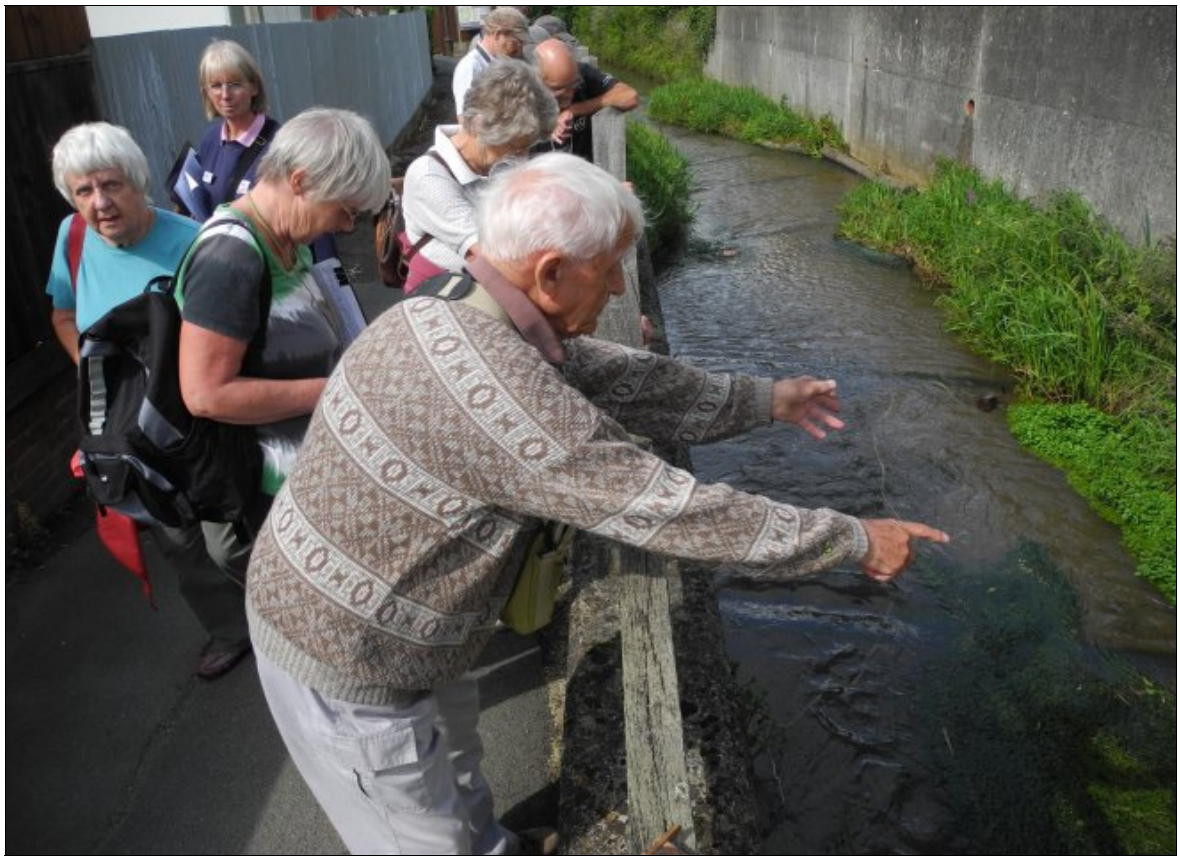
The hill going to the east is Playstreet, quite dangerous for horse and carts. In 1388 Edward Dryver was run over by his own cart loaded with wood, and killed. This record comes from the roll of the coroner who looked into all unnatural deaths – the most common deaths at the time were drowning, mainly children falling into wells, streams, ponds and rivers.

We walked a short distance up the hill to the Millennium Green, opened in 2000. Opposite the gate is a large Oak about 200 years old. We walked onto the green, which owing to the very wet spell is very overgrown: the main culprit is Horsetail, which is very difficult to eradicate. We walked on through the fairly new Oak Wood to another quite young Millennium Oak, about 100 years old. A boardwalk now takes us to the brook again and another bridge, across this into a wooded area and onto a footpath. Of historic interest, this area was not wooded in the 1800s, but on the north side was a rifle range.

We stopped at the site where a red flag once flew if the range was in use, and proceeded up the slight hill to a good view of Portsmouth. The field we were alongside was a disputed area where horse stables were proposed, but many objections were received by the Council and the plan was rejected on the grounds that an ancient hedgerow would be damaged; it was also part of the old Quarr Abbey boundary. We carried on walking until another footpath took us off to the right into a housing estate built on what was once Binstead Lodge Farm, then a short walk to a bridleway, past a recreation ground and school. The path is lined on the estate side by large Oaks, spared when the estate was built in the 1960s; on the field side it is mostly Field Maple.

We followed this path – which is in good repair even though used by horse riders – to the school, where we turned onto another path down to the brook again. This is a lush area full of Blackberry bushes all in flower, a good omen for later when the berries are ripe.

We neared the end of our walk. We crossed the road on to Binstead Estate, a super open grass area



Bill Shepard fishing
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Hunting for Truffles
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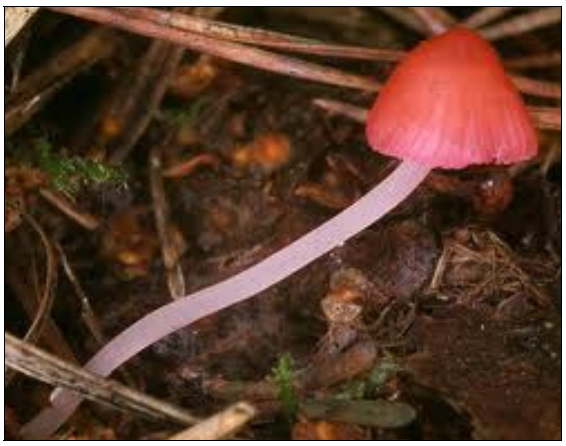

M. adonis
Page 29

G. frondosa Page 29

M .bulliadii Page 28

C. sanguinius
Page 29

T. heisutum Page 30

M.olivaceum Page 30

Tree Lungwort survey Page 4

Rare Lichen Page 4

that is well maintained. Large Oaks line the west side but are dominated by a towering Wellingtonia, a species of Sequoia planted in the 1800s, and named after the Duke of Wellington as a tribute in 1850. It is a native of California where they live for two thousand years. Then we crossed the main Ryde-Newport road for the bus back to Ryde.

When I walked this route two days earlier the paths were very muddy, but not having had any rain for two days, it was surprising how much it had dried up.

18th September **Palmers Farm & Kings Quay**

Fourteen members assembled at Palmers Farm car park for this walk led by Richard Grogan who through the Wildlife Trust had obtained permission to walk on private land, normally out of bounds for the general public.

Richard explained that the farm had changed over the years from arable to sheep, cattle and pigs. The farmer had also diversified to plant-hire, and we noticed a tracked digger in the car park.

We started the walk down towards the creek along a new fence-line which had the first signs of a hedge growing. Feverfew and Red Clover were the first flowers seen, Brambles had taken hold, Cow Parsley was in seed, Spindle was displaying berries, and Gorse was making a show. On the other side of the path was a longer established hedge and small Oaks were just visible, along with other older hedging shrubs. We could not see the creek for small trees as we headed to an ancient Carp pond probably used in the 13th century by the DeLisle family, who had been given the manor after the Conquest. Old Oak trees surrounded the pond, all about 200 years old. There were two Mallard swimming; in the winter many waders are seen resting at high tide.

Walking on a stone track we learned about the JIGSAW (Joining an Increasing Grant Scheme for Ancient Woodland) planting of English native trees to provide corridors for wildlife. The scheme is now 10 years old.

On the other side of the path a large clump of Nettles attracted our attention as a number of Red Admiral butterflies were feeding: we looked for their caterpillars but saw none, it was probably a bit late in the season. There were also a number of Meadow Brown butterflies, Britain's most common, on the wing all around us.

Across the creek in Woodhouse Copse, an SSSI, a line of dead trees stood out against the green of the wood – these were Poplars, totally out of keeping with the wood and deliberately killed by ring barking by the Forestry Commission.

Walking down to the waterline and Curlews Copse, we had a good view across the creek of Steps Copse, with Grey Herons and Little Egrets resting in the trees near the waterline. The gap between Woodhouse Copse and Steps Copse framed Woodhouse Farm, one of the original farms of the Osborne Estate that is still farmed today.

The remains of the old road and bridge, used by Queen Victoria as a carriage drive around the Osborne Estate, were seen. It is also the site where King John is supposed to have landed to stay with his friends the De Lisles at Wootton Manor, after signing Magna Carta and losing the Crown Jewels in the Wash. Richard told us how the brook's outlet to the sea here alters according to the amount of rain and mud discharged from far inland.

We then started walking back towards the farm, passing new woodland that had started to rejuvenate on its own accord as no cattle were grazing. We walked off the main track to visit a patch of ancient woodland, which to be classed as such has to date from about 1600. A Red Squirrel was seen (but not by me). We passed a small herd of Pigs in a very muddy patch where they were busy rooting in the ground, and their passing interest in us was shortlived when no food was forthcoming. Pigs are allowed to mop up acorns in the New Forest; they can however cause considerable damage in woodland if not controlled, as is the case with Wild Boar in the Forest of Dean.

We then walked back to the farm on the path we started out on and noticed a Wayfaring tree with berries. A Raven flew overhead, his arrival announced by his "cronking". Richard said it was very unusual to have Ravens on the north coast of the Island as they are usually found in the West Wight over Tennyson Down, and along the south coast where cliffs are a natural nesting and hunting ground. Culver Cliff did have a resident pair. Buzzards had also been seen and heard earlier in the walk.

I thanked Richard for his information on the area, a super walk full of interest. The weather had been kind to us: just a few spots of rain, but a mile away it was a torrential downpour.

3rd October **Wootton** .

Four members assembled at the Brannon Way car park for a walk led by Mary Edmunds. We started by walking down to Wootton Bridge, where we stopped to admire a large London Plane, and then turned off on to a bridleway past the new hotel. On the left were cottages where author and broadcaster CA Joyce once lived. On the other side of the track was the entrance to the woodland burial site. Fernhill Farm was next on the right, now turned into barn conversions for housing. Then through a gate onto the bridleway and a muddy track with high hedges on both sides where Blackberries were abundant, as well as Rose Hips, Hawthorn berries, Guelder Rose and many other shrubs and small trees.

We next turned off to the left into Hurst Copse. As Helen Butler was with us we were hoping to see Red Squirrels. We followed a well used path down towards the creek, passing Oaks, Field Maple, Hazel and a Wild Cherry, but our attention was drawn to a large Hornbeam with its vertical striped bark and concluded that it must be at least 100 years old.

We walked on to a boardwalk with a wired base across a brook, to the southern part of Hurst Copse. Hornbeams were all around us, and under foot this year's leaf litter had that musty smell. There were a number of Ash trees near the exit of the wood. There were no recent signs of coppicing nor of hazel nuts, though we were continually looking out for them. Likewise, we did not spot any Squirrels.

We went through a gate on to the bridleway: opposite was the old Icehouse, which belonged to Fern Hill House in the 18th century.

Finally, we walked back towards our starting point passing a flower meadow which had been created by the farmer with the Higher Level Stewardship scheme. Mary suggested a walk round the meadow in May when all the flowers are in bloom; I think we will take her up on the offer.

We finished the walk with a cup of coffee in a small café. Thank you, Mary, for leading this walk.

1st November **Seaview, St Helens & Brading**

We had one phone call to ask if this walk was going ahead: at the time of the call it was raining stair rods, but it turned out to be a heavy shower and only a few spots of rain affected us for the whole of the walk. Only one member met us at Seaview village where we started to walk east to Pier Road and on to the esplanade at Seagrove Bay.

At the sea wall a large swell was running after a gale force wind and an inch of rain overnight, and high water was two hours away – so we knew we were in for a very wet walk underfoot. The esplanade ends at the Old Boat House where the bridleway turns into the coastal path, and we made our way through deep puddles across the width of the road. On the sea side there were quite a lot of new buildings, very up-market properties, mostly holiday homes.

At the end of this road is a Cork Oak tree – the only others I know of are in Northwood Park Cowes. The bridleway stops here where a footpath takes over for 50 metres to Seagrove Bay slipway. The old Coastguard Boathouse, which was a café, is currently being knocked down.

We now started a long climb uphill on a private road – Ferniclose Road – which also forms the coastal path at this point; then past the old Coastguard houses to a gate with a notice saying "footpath only", though residents can access their houses by car. The road was like walking the bed of a brook, with water rushing downhill. As the hill flattened puddles replaced the running water. Plenty of berries, fungi and a new flush of Alexanders growing.

On our left-hand side were several long drives to houses on Priory Bay. This is also the site of the Priory Hotel. Leaving the coastal path, we turned onto a footpath across fields towards St Helens. The path had an electric fence on one side to keep about 150 sheep in, but it did not make walking dangerous as there was plenty of room. A notice on the fence displayed the name of the owner and a contact telephone number; I have never seen this before. Over the years of walking, leading groups and being led, we have rescued many sheep, some on their backs, some with heads stuck in wire fences: they just keep pushing, and it takes two to pull them back, and you have no idea who owns them. If you are on your own very often you cannot help, you just hope the shepherd will visit again soon.

This path was not too bad, only lorry wheel tracks, and we could walk with ease for the first time on

this walk. We crossed the main road onto another footbath by the old rectory past a trig point into St Helens Village. Plenty of berries mostly Hawthorn in the hedges, also fungi everywhere: Bracket and Turkey Tail were just a couple I recognised. The Ancient Breeds Farm had no cattle in the fields. We walked through the village to the next bridleway and onto the old railway track towards Brading, which is not an official way on the OS maps. The footpath to the right was under water, with two swans and a number of Canada Geese on the stretch before the footbridge, it was just a lake. The railway track was in parts not much better, huge puddles some of which were quite deep – thankfully the three of us were well booted and we were able to walk right through. We met the RSPB warden in his four-wheel drive but did not have the chance to talk to him as it was in the middle of one of the largest puddles!

A flock of Redwings were feeding in the hedges on both sides of the track, I estimated about 20. A Grey Heron was seen, also Robins were chirping in the hedges along the entire walk. Just before the track joined Quay Lane we came across the worst part of the whole walk: one puddle 25 metres long and deep across the whole track, there was no option but to walk through it. It was a relief to get onto a decent path for the final walk into Brading.

It was a good walk (distance 3.7 miles) and we enjoyed it, but it was hard work. We only had to wait a couple of minutes for our bus back to Seaview and Ryde.

6th December 2012 Carisbrooke Church to Newport

Six members assembled at Carisbrooke Church on a bitterly cold morning. Three arrived by bus and three by other means. I was pleased to see Bill Shepard among the gathering, as he is a local and knew more history than I had researched.

We started the walk outside the church of St Mary the Virgin, which was one of the richest churches after the Conquest, built by FitzOsbern in the 11th century. He was the first Norman Lord of the Isle of Wight, and gave the tithes of the church to the Abbey of Lyre in Normandy, but made no arrangements for the collection of tithes. The Abbot obtained permission for monks to collect the tithes and send them to Lyre Abbey, and as a consequence the monks came over and built the Priory. As well as collecting tithes they began writing up the local records, farming to support themselves, and supporting the local poor of the parish.

There was always tension between the residents and these French monks, as well as with the owner of the Isle of Wight Isabella de Fortibus, who was a tough taskmaster and who did not like foreign monks. After my history lesson, Bill Shepard took us to see the stone hand carved on the wall: its origin is unknown, but it is now a wish stone.

Leaving the churchyard through the lychgate we looked at the impressive tower rebuilt in the 18th century by a local architect by the name of Stone. He allowed the local mason to carve a stone with two heads, which were looking down at us.

We then crossed the Calbourne Road into Nodgham Lane past many fine houses with views over Carisbrooke Castle. We also passed an old drovers' resting place, where cattle were penned overnight after the drive from West Wight, to be taken to Newport Market the following morning. The Tennyson Trail begins just past the drovers' rest. Walking down to Clatterford Road we crossed to Clatterford Shute, a steep hill with old cottages, some thatched, then down to the Lukely Brook, which was in full flood.

We looked over the flooded meadows once known as Paper Mill field, though this was incorrect as the paper mill was some 100 yds away to the south of the field. Its ponds were used for soaking the wood to make the pulp. Bill suggested we walk to see the exact site of the mill, also to see the stream that powered the millwheel. Great care was taken on this path as it was covered in ice.

We then moved on to the steep path to the castle, locally known as Constitution Hill, stopping at the top to recover from the climb, then on to the castle moat to walk anti-clockwise round the walls. In summer this is an area where many types of butterflies can be found. The path was very muddy with frozen patches, and again care was needed in walking. Leaving the castle grounds we passed one of the biggest Beech trees, undamaged by the 1987 hurricane.

Crossing the road to Gatcombe we walked up the steps to the perimeter wall of Mount Joy Cemetery, and stopped to look over the wall at the landscape of the Bowcombe Valley. This part of the cemetery was the Roman Catholic area.

At the end of April this area is covered in Cowslips, it's worth a visit to see them. A little further along the wall was an entrance into the cemetery where we were led to the biggest Juniper tree on the Island, covering several graves. Then to the chapel, which looks as if it is stone-built, but in fact is only faced in stone, being built of concrete blocks in the 1800s. It has one bell, which in the past was rung at funerals by the verger: a 'ding' for a male, a 'ding dong' for female, and a 'ding dong ding' for a child. A little bit further on a Badger sett was dug into the chalk hillside.

We then left the cemetery to continue the walk down the hillside to Shide, where you get the best views of Newport and the Medina River. On reaching the road we turned onto a footpath leading to Shide Path along the riverside, then crossed a bridge to the east side, where Bill told us that in his young days if you dropped bread in the water, eels would come from the bank to eat it. Connie's Way led us past a flock of Hibernian sheep grazing between the footpath and the road, clearing tough grasses and brambles. We passed two trees that had been grafted together by the effect of the wind rubbing their trunks, a natural process called 'inosculation'.

We walked under a road bridge to the start of Newport shopping area. The weather was now closing in, rain was on the way and we all decided to head for the bus station, after checking no one was waiting at the pub for us. I am sure everyone found this an interesting and enjoyable 3-mile walk.

Colin Black.

Archaeology

8th September **Vikings and Villas**

This intriguing title led us into a fascinating talk by Delian Backhouse-Fry about a comparison of two empires.

Delian began by pointing out how the decline of the Western Roman Empire was matched by the spread of the Scandinavian peoples across Northern Europe, eventually establishing themselves, for example, in parts of Britain and in France where they became the Normans.

She reminded us that 'Vikings' (a term used for convenience rather than historical accuracy) had been trading for centuries before they became associated with raiding and pillaging. In a culture where the eldest son inherited the family farm, the younger sons might become warriors, craftsmen or traders.

Perhaps using some of the one-time Roman manufacturing centres and trading routes they developed routes to the Black Sea and Constantinople and along the silk road to China. Evidence found in Scandinavia suggests they brought back Arabian horses, rugs, dates, precious metals, amber. Coin hoards found in Norway have included Byzantine and Arab examples. It seems they also reached North Africa; in Libya they could meet the trans-Saharan trade routes.

So the Viking 'empire' was based on commerce not on subjugation, but covered much of the Roman world. And of course the Vikings spread further – across the Atlantic to establish farmsteads in North America before a climate downturn drove them to abandon those sites.

It was probably the worsening conditions in Scandinavia with the resultant pressure on limited productive landscapes that led to the more aggressive inroads and eventual colonisation of parts of Britain, where in some cases such as York they settled on previous Roman sites.

It was during this time that they over-wintered on our island, after burning London. Why here? Delian offered the tantalising hypothesis that there may have been familial links. Whilst only a few Viking artefacts have been found (including the whetstone found by the archaeology group at Newtown in 2012), it has long been argued that the post-Roman settlers were the Jutes; had they maintained links with their ancient homeland of Jutland?

In answer to the question "What could the Vikings offer in exchange for all these items?", Delian thought they were middlemen benefiting from their ability to connect societies or craftsmen who could work the exotic materials and trade the finished goods.

And so to the villas. Delian offered a picture of Vectis in Roman times that was not just a sleepy farming backwater, but a busy trading centre using the rivers, the Solent, Brading Haven and landing places on the Southern coast. Finds at, for example, Pan, Bonchurch and Chawton (near Northwood) suggest undiscovered busy sites to add to the 8 villas already documented.

This was a thought-provoking morning and a useful reminder of how archaeological understanding develops and adapts to new discoveries and new ways of looking at the evidence. The notorious Viking

horned helmets are a good example of how firmly misinformation can become fixed in popular culture but also how we must be open to new ideas that challenge dear and long-held beliefs.

Helen Jackson

27th and 28th October Archaeology in a Ritual Landscape

The Saturday Talk

As with so many of Delian's talks, this was entertaining and informative, wide-ranging in time and place, with contributions welcomed from all present to offer knowledge and insights as we tried to enter the mindset of our ancestors.

Monuments placed in the landscape may serve a range of purposes such as religious symbols, boundary markers, memorials to the dead and may be made of earth, stone or wood. Although we still create monuments it is obviously difficult to enter the minds of people living in the distant past.

The earliest written evidence comes from the Sumerian clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform which, recording administration, trade, poetry and stories, give us an insight into daily life and belief in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. As ideas we might call religion developed there was a sense of an external power that might be associated with the sun or moon or a natural feature; only later did these entities take the form of gods.

In Britain there were no cities as existed in Mesopotamia but still the urge to create monuments and leave symbolic markings, such as the axe heads carved on the Stonehenge blocks. Many of us are aware how monuments, even when we do not understand their purpose, can impress us with their beauty in the landscape, even an 'aura'. Since they were first established, subsequent cultures have adapted them to their own use. The Saxon additions to Silbury Hill are one example.

We have noted previously the use of processional ways to control the view as groups approach monuments. Atkinson, when studying Silbury Hill, noted the differing viewpoints as one climbed up the mound.

We were left with much to consider for our walk at Mottistone the next morning.

The Sunday Walk

The clear bright skies of Saturday were now covered in cloud and drizzle but as we walked up and about Mottistone Down we were able to see far enough to appreciate the significance of the landscape.

The Longstone is unusual in having been originally a barrow with two upright stones at the entrance and has more in common with Brittany than mainland Britain. After considering the views from this point and how it would be seen from afar, we walked uphill to a Bronze Age barrow. Situated on the greensand, any chalk covering would have been transported from the downs, as would the numerous flints that have been found here. As well as looking towards the barrows at Brook and Afton, we could peep through the gaps to see those at Headon Warren and several sites to the east. We then went up to Castle Hill where there is a rectangular enclosure long thought to be Iron Age, but intriguingly like a Roman camp in shape.

Whilst exploring the wider landscape, we were also interested by a wide range of fungi and, thanks to David Biggs, various leaf miners.

The 'aura' mentioned on Saturday is evident to many as they approach the Longstone. We discussed how various groups now incorporate the site into their own rituals and beliefs. We were a little early in the day; on our way back to the car park we met several Morris dancers on their way to perform their own ritual.

Helen Jackson

24th November A Survey of Island Maritime and Coastal Archaeology

Seventeen members gathered for this talk at St Lawrence delivered by Dr David Tomalin. He began with one of the earliest speculations in the field, in 1607, as to why the British Isles were not attached to mainland Europe and the possible connection (as it appeared then) with the legend of the lost land of Lyonesse. But it was not until Jacques Cousteau's work on undersea wrecks in the 1950s that the subject really came alive.

It had long been known that ships had a habit of going down in particular places, often in their last hour of voyage when approaching land, with bad visibility. The south-west coast of the Island was notorious, especially the Goose Rock, a black chalk stack at the Needles which habitually brought boats to

grief. But the *Mary Rose* was of course the most famous shipwreck of all.

Archaeologists, who tended to be terrestrially based, were horrified at the prospects of 'excavating' these wrecks and the inordinate expense, with attendant ideas of salvage and treasure hunting lurking in the background; David pointed out that it has taken a very long time to shake off this negative outlook.

Today we are thinking in terms of whole landscapes being submerged. The main inundation of Southampton Water took place c.6,000 BC: prior to that the Solent River ran to the east of the Island, but we now know there was no western arm to it. Late Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic implements such as those found at Hengistbury Head match up with some found in northern France. David conjectured that the early birthplace of European human culture probably lay under the English Channel.

In the 1980s the IW Archaeological Committee started up a local maritime project with assistance from Manpower Services Commission funding, and though these funds were suddenly withdrawn after four years, a choring project had been accomplished at Port La Salle with the ability to assess varying periods and in particular the birth of the Solent. The foundations for the Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology had been laid. Then important finds of posts on Fishbourne beach led to a grant from English Heritage and radiocarbon dates of 3,700-3,300 BC; this in turn marked the beginning of the Wootton-Quarr project.

At the same time excavations at Grange Chine were yielding 1st century AD Roman pottery (Vectis Ware), as well as 3rd-4th century Roman material. These finds are likely to intensify as further erosion is caused to the south-west coastline as a result of the changeover from pasture in the past to current cereal farming, with gentle meandering streams turning into chines. Roman amphorae from the late 2nd century BC are found all round the Island's coast, especially the south-west, indicating that Islanders were getting through enormous quantities of Mediterranean wine before the Romans ever arrived.

David concluded that, whilst we may not be much of a maritime community today, we seriously underestimate the Isle of Wight's maritime role in the past.

Alan Phillips

15th December Christmas Meeting at Newport Roman Villa

Nineteen members gathered at the Villa, where Delian led a session, appropriately enough, on the **Roman Saturnalia** festival, which was celebrated around the winter solstice in honour of the god Saturn. It began with a sacrifice held at the god's temple, followed by a banquet for the elite and a carnival for the masses.

Saturn was an agricultural deity, and the festival looked back to a Golden Age when the gods gave generously of their bounty. The Latin writer Macrobius referred to it as a 'festival of light', and many candles were lit throughout. 25th December represented the birth of Sol Invictus, 'the Unconquerable Sun', as it did for several of the ancient sun-gods such as Mithras, Bacchus and Attis, and was unquestionably an influence on Christianity later on. The statue of Saturn normally had its feet bound in wool in his temple, but they were unbound for the duration of the festival!

Families most likely sacrificed a suckling pig, and Delian pointed out the interesting parallel with the feast of pig bones found at Durrington Walls, also consumed at the winter solstice. In this period of Roman licence cross-dressing was prevalent, alongside the wearing of masks and generally dressing up in disguise. Togas were set aside in favour of colourful dancing clothes. Gift-giving was common, and gambling and dice-playing for coins were permitted for all, including slaves. Over-eating and drunkenness were rife, and there was a temporary reversal of roles as slaves were treated to a banquet by their masters (though the slaves still had to prepare the meals). A mock king was appointed as master of ceremonies, very like the Lord of Misrule figure that developed in the medieval period.

Following the talk, the company then participated in a 'Roman' feast comprising: Delian's spicy 'dormice' (small pieces of chicken breast cooked in a spicy breadcrumb coating), black olives, dried figs, grapes, almonds in dates, honey cake, nut and seed sweetmeats, pretend 'gold staters', a 'gold platter' of fruits (apricots, lemons and oranges), and not least the famous Newtown Noggin (concocted from Bullace berries).

However, there were no signs of any cross-dressing, gambling or drunkenness, and nobody's feet were unbound!

Alan Phillips

Botany

7th July **Mead Nature Reserve**

Unfortunately heavy rain caused this meeting to be cancelled. We are hoping to re-schedule it for next summer.

5th August **Pan Mill Meadows**

This area lies alongside the River Medina between St George's Way and Shide.

This section of the river corridor has undergone a restoration scheme in recent years and the adjacent land has been cleared of some of the woody vegetation to allow more light penetration. We recorded 152 species during the course of the afternoon. Some of these were associated with the riverbanks and channel and the collection of some samples was assisted by Bill Shepard's improvised fishing line. **(Photo page 15)** A large clump of Stream Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* was visible in the channel near to Shide Road, where the stream-bed has been modified to produce a more natural flow. A few weeks later this featured in the County Press as its shape had been influenced by the water flow to produce a fish-shaped mass. Watercress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum,* Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* and Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* were also in this section of the channel.

In the land adjacent to the river we found plants characteristic of damp areas such as False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae,* Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria.* There were also species which had probably arrived via garden waste such as Opium Poppy *Papaver somniferum* and Virginia Creeper *Parthenocissus quinquefolia.*

After the main survey was completed we walked further along the track towards Blackwater to look at a plant of Greater Burdock *Arctium lappa* growing by the river bank, so we could compare its features with the much more commonly-occurring Lesser Burdock *(A. minus).* Bill also showed us the nearby Milne memorial. Finally we walked along the other side of the river bank to admire a fine specimen of an Indian Bean-tree *Catalpa bignonioides* in full flower.

8th September **Brading Marshes**

Our survey of Brading Marshes this year took place in the area accessible from Yarbridge. The river channel, the banks and the wetter patches of vegetation were our main interest. The Yellow Water Lilies (*Nuphar lutea*) in the main river had finished flowering but their distinctive seed-pods, sometimes called brandy bottles from their shape, allowed us to identify them.

Other notable aquatic species included *Ranunculus penicillatus, Bidens tripartita,* Marsh Yellow-cress *Rorippa palustris*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* and two species of sweet-grass, Small Sweet-grass *Glyceria declinata* and Plicate Sweet-grass *Glyceria notata*. The identity of the plant finally determined as Tall Mint *Mentha x smithiana* a hybrid between three species *M. aquatica x arvensis x spicata* caused some debate. It had not previously been recorded from this site. Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata,* another new record for the site, was a striking plant on the edge of a wet area, the flowering spikes standing some distance above ground on the crowns produced in successive years.

29th September **Borthwood Copse**

Our annual meeting to look for gall, leaf miners and microfungi affecting plants was well-attended and produced a long list of species of which 16 were new records, well-exceeding our target of ten new species for the site.

Ten species (eight gall causers, one leaf miner and one microfungus) were associated with English Oak (*Quercus robur*) and a further two gall causers with Sessile Oak (*Q. petraea*). One of the latter, a gall wasp called *Andricus glandulae,* causes the buds to form a gall, and it is not one which we have seen very often. It generated much deliberation and reference to identification books.

Artichoke Galls, so called from the appearance of the affected buds, were found on two different species. They are caused by two different insects. On Yew *(Taxus baccata)* a gall midge *Taxomyia taxi* causes the deformation and on English Oak (*Q robur*) the gall is caused by *Andricus foecundatrix* which is a gall wasp.

Anne Marston

Entomology

14th July **Freshwater Bay and Afton Marsh**

The meeting was held in the morning rather than in the usual afternoon slot. This was the day when the Olympic Torch came to the West Wight, and the chance was being given to move on from the meeting and choose a venue from which to see the flame. In the end the meeting was cut short by a band of heavy rain, which reached us just as we were finishing the first part of the meeting on the clifftops east of Freshwater Bay. We did not therefore proceed to Afton Marsh as originally intended and this area will be the location for a meeting in the summer of 2013. Today proved to be a popular meeting with some ten members present.

It had been hoped that this meeting would produce a number of butterflies. However the conditions were not warm enough for this, and only Meadow Brown was recorded. A Silver-y was found in the short grass, as were a Speckled Bush-cricket and Meadow Grasshoppers. Nymphs were found of the Lesser Cockroach, which attracted considerable interest, but the most interesting record of the day was the mine of a fly *Scaptomyza graminum* which was on Kidney Vetch, and proved to be only the second site for this species on the Island.

As well as insects a number of other items of interest were seen. There was a good view of an Adder and among the birds seen were Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, a Stonechat and a brief view of a pair of Ravens.

14th August **Knighton Down**

This was our second afternoon meeting of the year at this site. Although not as warm as hoped when the visit was planned, the day was less windy and sunnier than forecast on the day. Six members were present. There were six species of butterfly seen. The commonest species were Meadow Brown, Chalkhill Blue and Common Blue, although it was also pleasing to see five Walls (all but one of them by the path adjacent to the Downs road, rather than on the main body of the Downs). Red Admiral and Gatekeeper were also seen. A number of cocoons for Burnet Moths were found, a couple of the Six-spot Burnets were also seen. Other moths included a single Silver-y, a couple of Chalk Carpets, and a range of pyralid moths, including *Pyrausta cespitalis.*

Among other species Green Woodpecker, Kestrel and a pair of Buzzards were observed.

17th September **Haseley Manor**

This meeting was the second attempt to moth trap at Haseley, after the gales and heavy rain in June. The wind was not a feature this time, but the weather still made it impossible to hold a successful moth trap, there being a steady drizzle throughout the evening. Two members attended. Flounced Rustic and Setaceous Hebrew Character were seen.

Despite this second disappointment of the year, it was very interesting to have a chance to watch members of the Isle of Wight Ringing Group as they recorded a number of young Sand Martins and over fifty Swallows. It was an excellent opportunity to appreciate the plumage differences between adult and young birds, and to see close up the wonderful iridescence of purples and violets in the plumage of the fully grown Swallow.

Richard Smout

Fungi

2nd September **Parkhurst Forest**

A keen group of fifteen met in the main car park at Parkhurst Forest for our first foray of the year. Despite the wet summer, fungi haven't really got going yet this year and our expectations were not high for our first event; those expectations were duly met! Nevertheless, it was enjoyable to get together again and David was able to find and name quite a collection of leaf spots and mildews to add to our list.

Walking up the main drive, our attention was caught by a number of Earthballs, *Scleroderma citrinum* pushing through the ground. I picked up one of these to show the others and was delighted to find that it had attached three very young specimens of the Parasitic Bolete, *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* growing from the base. An excellent start to the foraying season.

As is often the case, a careful search revealed a few other fungi in the same area. A small, unidentifiable bolete was trodden into the ground before it could be identified but we were able to admire a young specimen the The Sickener, *Russula emetica*, pushing up though a clump of Polytrichum Moss.

Sadly, it was some time before we found any more large fungi in the form of a group of Plums & Custard, *Tricholomopsis rutilans* growing from a conifer stump, by which time the rain (not forecast) was setting in.

But there were other compensations. We found the lovely little white slime mould, *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa* growing on rotten wood. It only reveals its beauty under a hand-lens.
Easier to see was the Green Elfcup , *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* which stains the wood in which it is growing green and was once used as a decorative inlay in furniture manufacture. The specimen which Lesley found displayed one or two beautifully coloured fruiting bodies, which we don't always get to see.

We also saw a number of the so-called woodwart and tarcrust fungi that grow through the bark of dead twigs. *Hypoxylon fragiforme* and Common Tarcrust , *Diatrype stigma*.

15th September **St Boniface Down**

It was always going to be a gamble visiting an open grassland site for fungi in September, but in previous years St Boniface Down has been productive at this time of year. This year, it was warm and sunny, and dry, so our expectations were not high as we set off. Nevertheless, it was a glorious day for a walk and butterflies and dragonflies were showing well, even if we found no fungi.

As we descended the slope of the Down, Lesley found our first find of the day. It was clearly an ink cap, but which one? We identified it as a Snowy Ink-cap*, Coprinus niveus* from its size, white colour and loose flocculose fibrils on the cap surface. It was growing on much decayed dung.

As we approached the top edge of the Holm Oak woodland, Jillie found our first big fungi – two very fine specimens of a bolete. This was the Rooting Bolete, *Boletus radicans*, a distinctive species with a pale cap and yellow pores, bruising blue. These specimens were probably growing in association with the roots of Holm Oak but later we found specimens in the open grassland which were growing associated with clumps of Rock-rose, *Helianthemum*.

One of our target species was the rare Bearded Amanita, *Amanita ovoidea* for which St Boniface Down is the only permanent site in the country. It is really a more southern, Mediterranean species and in good years specimens of this large white Amanita are easy to find. This time, we struggled and had almost given up when Jillie found a young specimen pushing out of the chalk under the Holm Oaks on the wrong side of the fence. The specimen was collected for all to see but the slugs had beaten us to it and there wasn't much to look at!

We then found an old, dried specimen of a Brown Puffball, *Bovista nigrescens,* followed by several specimens of our second Amanita, the Solitary Amanita, *Amanita echinocephala*, probably growing on Rock-rose. We didn't find any good specimens to properly appreciate the pointed warts on the cap surface; ours were either very young or very old.

That was about it for macro-fungi for the day but our visit was enlivened as we sat and watched the Ryde Harriers St Boniface Fell Race as they scrambled up the slope and then hurtled back down.

Although our list of macro-fungi was short, David was at hand to add to the list with micro-fungi

growing on other plants. These included the very common Violet Bramble Rust fungus, *Phragmidium violaceum*. On one plant, we saw two stages of the same fungus growing together, Orange Urediospores together with Black Teliospores growing from red blotches on the leaf.

It was also novel to see a fungus growing on a lichen. David showed us black patches of a lichenicolous fungus, *Xanthoriicola physciae*, growing on the bright orange yellow lichen, *Xanthoria parietina* which was itself growing on a twig.

In total, we found just 12 fungi, although they did include some unusual ones which we don't usually see. We missed finding *Marasmiellus carneopallidus*, an extremely rare fungus looking like a fairy ring champignon but growing on Rock-rose. It was found here as new to the country a few years ago and has been spotted several times since.

30th September **Fattingpark Copse**

We had a total of eighteen people for our foray this time. We proceeded along the old railway track behind the Crematorium and into Fattingpark Copse. The very wet weather of the preceding Sunday finally kick-started the foraying season and we had a productive time this morning. Most of the finds were of frequently found fungi but this is not uncommon at the start of the season.

Our first find was a Little Ink-cap, one just emerging and a second fully open. It was the Hare's-foot Inkcap, *Coprinus lagopus.* An early find was a fungus which mystified us but, back at home on microscopic examination it very clearly keyed out to the Goldleaf Shield, *Pluteus romellii*, growing on buried dead wood.

Mike appeared with a long branch covered in fine material of a resupinate fungus, forming light round patches developing blunt teeth or folds. This was the Toothed Crust, *Basidioradulum radula.* An interesting discovery was the Redlead Roundhead, *Stropharia aurantiaca,* with bright orange cap, white scaly stipe and dirty, greyish-brown gills. This is an introduced species, possibly from Australia, which in recent years has spread extensively in this country on wood-chip mulch flowerbeds. We find it regularly in Ventnor Botanic Gardens, but it was a surprise to find it in an ancient semi-natural woodland site away from cultivation. We found an acorn and cup with tiny white stalked cup fungi growing on the outside. This was *Hymenoscyphus fructigena*, which grows specifically on Oak and Hazel. The Red-capped Russula under Oak was confirmed as *Russula pseudointegra* from the spore print.

Ros found an interesting bracket fungus with a very fine cinnamon coloured pore undersurface. This was *Phyllophora ribis* (= *Phellinus ribis*), which grows on spindle and currant bushes. We don't know the host in this instance although I suspect it was spindle.

All in all, we had a successful foray with around forty species identified.

20th October **Quarr Abbey grounds and woods,**

A good crowd of forayers gathered in the Quarr Abbey public car park for our exploration of the grounds. As we walked down the path to the Abbey we found several fungi growing on the woodchip lining the path, including the little brown fungus called the Scurfy Twiglet, *Tubaria furfuracea*, a characteristic woodchip fungus. Our deliberations on the specimens we found attracted the attentions of the Abbey pigs!

At the Abbey, we were met by Father Gregory who welcomed us and hoped we would have a productive visit, encouraging us to visit the tearoom after our foray. We were joined here by a young lad who was staying in retreat at the Abbey and had carried out a recce of the woods earlier.

Our first stop was by the shrubbery in the south-east corner of the new Abbey. Here, growing on piles of leaf litter under the bushes was a spectacular ring of Clouded Agarics, *Clitocybe nebularis*, large fungi which generally fruit late in the season.

Behind them, was a big patch of large white *Marasmius*, with a characteristic two-tone white and reddish-brown stipe. This was the Pearly Parachute, *Marasmius wynnei*,

We also found another much more delicate *Marasmius* growing on oak leaves which, on close examination, was found to have a couple of distinctive features. The gills were joined into a collar at the base where they joined the stem, and some of the horse-hair like stipes had side branches, some of them bearing poorly developed fruiting caps. This little treasure was *Marasmius bulliardii*. (**Picture page 16)**

We found a few Collared Earthstars *Geastrum triplex* here, but unfortunately they were not good specimens. From here, we walked down the woodland walk spectacularly lined with clumps of Butcher's Broom into Fishbourne Copse, making finds all the time. One of these, found by Selina I think, was a primrose yellow mould. I have kept this growing at home and I now think that it is an ozonium, the name giving to the yellow or orange mycelium of certain inkcaps, *Coprinus*, growing on the surface of the soil. The most likely species would be *Coprinus domesticus* but, without any fruiting bodies, we can't be sure so it cannot go on the list.

Within the wood, we found lots of bonnet fungi, *Mycenas*, which have been so characteristic of our forays this year. We found a single large and over-ripe Cep, *Boletus edulis*, and a single False Deathcap, *Amanita citrina*, but Boletus, Amanita and Lactarius have all been very scarce groups this season. Apparently, it can sometimes be too wet for some fungi and it looks like that has been the case this year.

Emerging from Fishbourne Copse at the far end, we found the strikingly coloured but poisonous Blue Roundhead, *Stropharia aeruginosa*, growing beneath a group of field oaks.

From close to the Fishbourne beach, we walked back through the fields and ancient oak trees to the Abbey, continuing to make further finds. In the end we had clocked up 91 species in three hours which is pretty good for our little group, a testament to everyone's growing skills at both finding specimens and naming them.

17th November **Borthwood Copse**

The fungus season was drawing to an end and we were not expecting to find many toadstools. In the event we were able to identify a total of 67 species, not a bad total. They included some very nice finds but a high proportion of them were dead wood species. There is a lot of dead and dying Oak and Beech in Borthwood Copse!

Amongst the particular highlights was a Mycena with a coral pink cap, found by Selina. This was the Scarlet Bonnet, *Mycena adonis* var. *coccinea*, not often found on forays and always a highlight. For us, it was only the second Island record. **(Picture page 16)**

Another good find was *Marasmius epiphylloides*, a tiny Marasmius that only grows on dead ivy leaves. This was another one for which we have only one other Island record.

A particular delight was the stunningly coloured Blood Red Webcap, *Cortinarius sanguineus*, which we found to be locally plentiful. This is one Cortinarius that is so distinctive that it can be easily identified. **(Picture page 17)**

Several of the oaks had exuberant growths of Hen of the Woods, *Grifolia frondosa*, at their bases. **(Picture page 16)**

There were also many resupinate fungi that sit flat against the substrate. One of these was Smoky Bracket, *Bjerkandera adusta*, which was found covering an old fallen beech log. As these fungi become fertile, they change to a greyish colour from the centre of their fruiting bodies.

Towards the ends of our visit, Jillie showed us a splendid clump of Yellow Stagshorn, *Calocera viscosa*, growing against moss at the base of an old stump.

2nd December **Northwood Cemetery**

Eleven members met up at the Cemetery entrance where we were welcomed by Lora Peacey Wilcox, chair of the Friends of Northwood Cemetery. It was a bright but frosty morning and we were to find that many of the fungi had been spoiled by frost, making them difficult to identify. Nevertheless, we had a very successful and enjoyable meeting, finding nine sorts of the brightly coloured waxcap fungi and six sorts of club fungi, both groups of fungi being old grassland specialists and very much a feature of Northwood Cemetery. Altogether, we identified 42 species of fungi during our morning visit, which was to be the last of our foray sessions this Autumn.

Shortly after we set off, David showed us a group of large white fungi which puzzled us. We couldn't name them on site but afterwards we realised that these were the white variety of the Meadow Waxcap, *Hygrocybe pratensis* var. *pallida,* which we have recorded from here in the past alongside the more conventional form of orange-brown capped Meadow Waxcap.

This was just one of many waxcaps for which Northwood Cemetery is well known amongst fungal enthusiasts (mycologists). They come in a range of bright colours and are a strong indicator that the

grassland in which they grow is old grassland, which has not been adversely affected by chemical treatment. They had been really spectacular this year, sprinkled over the grassland like brightly coloured sweets, but, by the time we arrived the frosts had damaged many of them, turning them into an unpleasant mush. Nevertheless, we were still able to find good specimens in more sheltered areas of the cemetery.

The splendid, chunky Crimson Waxcap, *Hygrocybe punicea*, is a particularly strong indicator of old grasslands and is rather scarce and local.

Smaller, but brighter red is the Scarlet Waxcap, *Hygrocybe coccinea*, which is quite frequent at Northwood Cemetery and readily found. So too are the Yellow Waxcaps. There are several species of which the commonest with us is the Golden Waxcap, *Hygrocybe chlorophana*. It is always exciting to find the Pink Waxcap, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis,* sometimes also called The Ballerina. This one was be lieved to be nationally rare and, because it is so distinctive, a special survey was commissioned to discover where it still survived. Raising the profile of this species resulted in many more records being made and it is no longer considered to be rare. It is however both local and uncommon. We often find it at Northwood but it is much rarer than the other waxcaps. Lesley found just two specimens on our visit.

In addition to the waxcaps, a whole variety of Earthtongues and Club Fungi can be found and these are also old grassland specialists. One of the commonest of these, but also one of the prettiest, is known as Golden Spindles, *Clavulinopsis fusiformis*.

There are many others and we were impressed by a large clump of Smoky Spindles, *Clavaria fumosa,* near the chapel building.

However, it is the little black Earth-tongues that are really special. We found three sorts of these including the Hairy Earthtongue, *Trichoglossum hirsutum*, which requires checking under a microscope to confirm its identity. **(Picture page 17)**

Rarest of them all, indeed a national rarity, is the Olive Earthtongue, *Microglossum olivaceum*, which isn't black but has a brownish fruiting body on a greenish stalk. We have found it here before in its only Island site, but today we were impressed by the considerable quantities that we found in the vicinity of the chapel, although in a different area to where we have found them previously. **(Picture page 17)**

Other interesting finds included a group of Earthstars, *Geastrum pectinatum*, rather dried up and past their best; a large specimen of the Mosaic Puffball, *Lycoperdon utriforme*, a species which has done well this season; and several specimens of the late fruiting toadstool known as The Goblet *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis*.

During our walk around the cemetery we had frequently been distracted by what turned out to be pink piles of digested yew berries, probably eaten by foxes. On our return to the chapel building, we met Richard Day, one of the Friends of the Cemetery, who was cutting back yew trees to rejuvenate them. The foxes and birds can be assured of a good supply of berries into the future.

Afterwards we repaired to the Society HQ for refreshments and to examine our finds and look at photos of highlights from the Autumn's foray season.

Colin Pope

Ornithology

22nd July **Fort Victoria Country Park.**

14 members met on a lovely morning at Fort Victoria. We started by having a sea watch in front of the fort and saw a Whimbrel, several Cormorant, Great Black Backed Gull, Black-headed Gull and some tern; Common Tern and Sandwich Tern. There were quite a few Gannet flying in the Solent, at least 30 were counted. As the passage of birds seemed to have stopped, we then went up into the woods to Cliff End and returned to the car park via a footpath across fields. There seemed to be very few birds around, perhaps the poor spring and summer affected their breeding. We did see some House Martin and Barn Swallows, Common Whitethroat and Blackcap. It was nice to see a family group of four Bullfinch. We had two Ravens, a Buzzard and Kestrel as well as a Sparrowhawk. In all we saw 28 species.

18th August **Ventnor Downs**

Nine members met at the far car park for a walk in the area. Although the weather was lovely prior to the meeting starting, mist descended reducing visibility and the temperature. A Dartford Warbler was heard but not seen amongst the gorse bushes. We saw a Wheatear and some Meadow Pipit as well as Linnet. The walk was extended to take in St Boniface Down and we managed to find Blackcap and a number of Willow/Chiffs. There were some Barn Swallows during the morning. By the time we returned to the cars the mist had lifted as had the temperature. 16 species were recorded. We also saw some butterflies, Small Copper, Gatekeeper and Peacock.

23rd September **West High Down**

Six people turned up despite the bad weather forecast and we did venture up the bridleway to the top of the Downs but within an hour the heavy rain defeated us. There were very few birds around; we only saw Jay, Jackdaw, Blackbird, Meadow Pipit and Goldfinch. The day before, when I did a recce, the weather was perfect and there were masses of birds including many Meadow Pipits on passage.

6th October **Blackgang**

Twelve people met on a bitterly cold morning but which was bright, with excellent visibility. The Isle of Portland was clearly visible, a new sight for some. Five veterans of the bird section were joined by two new members and five visitors. Very heavy rain overnight curtailed the walk as the leader considered that the path on the intended inland return route was likely to be dangerously slippery. Two hours were therefore spent on the path along the cliff edge over Gore Cliff. Looking down at 100 Barn Swallows and 300 House Martins together with two Sand Martins, we were able to distinguish easily between them. Two Gannets were seen out at sea. Excellent views were had of two Peregrines perched on the cliff-face and a female Northern Wheatear about to migrate. Three young Stonechats, flocks of Linnets and Goldfinches and a party of eight Jays were seen. We had good views from above of three Stock Dove. Altogether 23 species were recorded and the new members and visitors seemed to have enjoyed themselves and learned more about our birds.

DT Biggs

3rd November **Culver Down**

Eleven members met on a very windy but bright morning. We walked from the far eastern car park onto the Downs. Although we had hoped for large flocks of finches, not many were found – perhaps it was too windy. We did see some Goldfinches and heard Chaffinch. A few Meadow Pipits were seen and Skylark heard. A Kestrel was hovering and two Peregrines were seen, as was a Buzzard. We did manage to spot a Northern Wheatear near the Coastguard cottages. A large flock of corvids was spotted in the distance flying into Sandown Bay off the sea. Jackdaw, Crow and Rook were noted and a Raven was heard and seen. Blackbird, Robin and Wren were found in or near the hedgerows and a Pied Wagtail on the grassland. In all 21 species were recorded.

9th December **The Folly to Island Harbour Marina.**

Eleven members met near The Folly, although rain threatened it managed to hold off. Fortunately, the programme co-ordinator managed to get the tide right on this visit! With the tide dropping the mud was exposed for the waders to feed. On one of the pontoons ten Dunlin were resting. We had great views of a flock of 28 Turnstones feeding and flying. At least 20 Oystercatchers were feeding and resting, as were a few Lapwing, a Redshank and Grey Plover. Some Widgeon were swimming in the little bays but no Teal were seen. On the far bank 3 Canada Geese and Mallard were spotted. Sparrowhawk and Buzzard were seen flying and we had a very good view of a male Kestrel hovering patiently in front of us. At least two Rock Pipit and two Skylark were flitting about on the shore edge. A Mistle Thrush flew over the field to the top of a Poplar tree and a Little Egret was seen looking for fish by the hull of a boat hulk. In all 33 species were seen.

Jackie Hart

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

New Members

Deaths

Society Officers
President Mrs Delian Backhouse Fry, Hereward, Old Park Road, St Lawrence, IOW. PO38 1XR
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Next Bulletin
Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings
for 1st January 2013 to 30th June 2013 should be sent to:-

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The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be **12th July 2013**

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