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President's Address

I will be standing down as President at the AGM in March and I am delighted to say that Paul Bingham, who many of you will know, has agreed to stand in my place. Paul has very wide interests and a great enthusiasm for the Society. He is already editor of Wight Studies and, I think you will agree that he has developed our flagship publication into a truly worthwhile journal of which we can be proud. I know that one Paul's projects is for the Society to commemorate its one hundredth anniversary in style. The inaugural meeting of Isle of Wight Natural History Society took place on 8th November 1919 at 6 p.m. in the lecture hall of the Newport Literary Society; archaeology was included a few years later. 2019 is not far away and, if we are to mark the occasion over the following year then a lot of planning will be required. I do hope that everyone will get behind this. It will be a marvellous opportunity to celebrate one hundred years, to learn about how the Society and the subjects which it studies have changed over this period and to present ourselves and our achievements to a wider audience. There will be opportunities for everyone to assist with this in all sorts of different ways so please look out for much more about this over the coming months and years.

Rather closer to the present, over the coming year I hope you will begin to hear about iWatch Wildlife, our three year project with the East Wight Landscape Partnership to promote and encourage wildlife recording. At our first steering group meeting, we felt that the working title 'Habitat Health Watch' did not really express what we were trying to achieve and we voted for the new title of iWatch Wildlife. Tina Whitmore is assisting us with this and I would

encourage you to read her piece in this Bulletin where she introduces herself and the project. This project should be of benefit to us in building on our legacy of species recording, a core objective of the Society, as well as introducing wildlife recording to a wider public.

Finally, we reduced our print run of 'Wight Studies' this year. If you have a copy which you no longer need, we would be very grateful if you were able to return it to us.

Colin Pope

Dragonfly Recorder wanted!

The British Dragonfly Society is seeking to recruit a Recorder to handle the Isle of Wight's dragonfly records. Full support from the Records Officer will be given. iRecord is our favoured recording platform and you would be in charge of helping others to enter records, verifying records for the IoW and reporting periodically on progress & trends. Join our network of Vice-County Recorders in maintaining one of the longest-running, comprehensive and useful biological datasets in the British Isles. For more details from the BDS please contact David Hepper, BDS Records Officer by email: records@british-dragonflies.org.uk or phone: 07768 452365.

In addition to the above, support with dragonfly identification and local knowledge will be available from myself Dave Dana 01983 854166 davedana@btinternet.com and Andy Butler 01983 854925 a.butler321@btinternet.com

Initial introduction to iRecord is also available from Anne Marston (Local Records Centre) Anne.Marston@iow.gov.uk

For more details locally please contact Dave Dana 01983 854166 davedana@btinternet.com

Recording matters

Have you made your first wildlife records of 2017 yet? There are organised opportunities with the BSBI's New Year Plant hunt, or you may have been out with your binoculars with other ornithologists on 1st January to start your list for the New Year. The RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, at the end of January, has had a growing following in recent years when the public are encouraged to see what is outside their window for a one hour time slot during those days. Analysis of the records sent in has enabled us to understand more about the fluctuations in the populations of common birds to see if there are trends developing which can be linked to other factors such as milder winters.

With all of these projects, there is the potential for large numbers of people to take up and develop an interest in natural history. Wildlife documentaries from far-flung locations may awaken interest to what is to be found, but sometimes we forget what is on our doorstep, which is equally fascinating and not necessarily well-recorded.

'Citizen Science' projects are numerous and aim to collect large volumes of data which can then be analysed to help our understanding of the natural world and how it is changing. For example in recent years we have been aware of the 'invader' harlequin ladybirds as they may appear in huge numbers particularly indoors in late summer and autumn. These insects are relatively easily to identify and a dedicated website has photographs to assist. There is the facility to report the sighting giving details of date and

location (with an accompanying photograph to assist in making sure the record is correct) has helped to track their spread across the country.

Accurate observation is the first stage in any recording – what has been seen, when, where and how many and who was the observer? The second stage is passing on the record to a local or national group so that the information can be combined with that collected by other people. Facebook groups have become popular recently and area good way to tell others about what you have seen, and to get help with identification but to ensure your record is really useful, it needs to go into a database.

This may be the more time-consuming aspect of the process, but in the long run it is worth the effort needed, when a detailed picture begins to build up either with your own records or in combination with others.

For bird watchers with a smartphone entering records via the Bird Track App is an option. ‘Casual’ records or your complete list of bird species seen on a visit can be entered. All records can be accessed by the Island’s Bird Recorder and passed on to the analysts preparing the annual Bird Report. Uploading records after each visit reduces the effort of compiling end of year lists. Follow this link to find out more:

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/taking-part/birdtrack-apps>

The Society’s network of local expert recorders and section leaders (details in the programme and on the website) are always willing to help with identification and are pleased to receive your records. The records need to be written down on paper or in a computer format and recording forms are available either on the website (see <http://iwnhas.org/recording/>) or as a hard copy on request. Records made on Society meetings are collated and entered into the IWNHAS database so you have plenty of opportunities to make a contribution.

The Society is starting a recording project, iWatch Wildlife, this year so if you want to have a bit of practice with making records and entering them into a database, while enjoying the company of others with similar interests, come and join in! For more about recording, see Tina Whitmore’s iWatch Wildlife introduction and Jim Baldwin’s BTO report elsewhere in this edition of the Bulletin.

Anne Marston

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) News

2016 has been another busy year for BTO volunteer surveyors on the Island and I am most thankful for their continued support and enthusiasm.

The year started with the culmination of the winter’s Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) with data received for 71% of the Island coastline sectors (over 75% of the priority sectors were covered) in comparison to 70% coverage for the whole of the English coastline. This was no mean feat considering the inaccessible areas of the Island’s coastline, particularly in winter. The national results are due to be published during 2017. The ongoing Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) continues to go from strength to strength with a record number of sites covered during the year.

The Heronry Census, the world’s oldest bird survey, recorded occupied nests at Bembridge, Gatcombe and St Lawrence indicating an average breeding year for the species. Once again there were no records from the original Island colony at Wootton. If any members recorded occupied Grey Heron, or Little Egret, nests in 2016 from Wootton or any other Island location excluding those mentioned above, please can you forward me the details a.s.a.p for inclusion in the survey. Site confidentiality is assured if requested.

There was a welcome increase in the number of 1-km squares covered for the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) with special thanks to Mark Larter (Natural England) for covering three squares, two of which had substantial coverage in the past and his efforts have ensured the continuation of this dataset.

The second year of the BTO House Martin Survey concentrated on nesting behaviour. Records were submitted from colonies at Chillerton, Whitwell and Wootton although the quantity of survey forms and online data input screens may have put off other observers from contributing. Hopefully an improved version will be available for the repeat survey in 2017. The local occupied House Martin Nest Survey resulted in over 160 nests recorded on the Island.

Island volunteers also contributed to BirdTrack, Garden BirdWatch (GBW) and its associated projects, the Abnormal Plumage Survey and Garden Wildlife Health, Nest Box Challenge and Nest Record Scheme (NRS). In addition the Isle of Wight Ringing Group participated in the Constant Effort Scheme (CES) and NRS.

Finally the WeBS counters along the north coast of the Island are participating in the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy survey which commenced in the autumn and concludes in March 2017. The purpose of this survey is a follow-up to the 2009 survey to establish which areas need to be protected or need further conservation management. The data is also used for planning and land management decisions. The steering group is hoping to run an additional survey on the Island in autumn 2017 covering inland movement of Brent Goose and waders.

A BTO Isle of Wight website was also launched during the year with details of the above surveys and local results along with news updates. The website can be found at the following link; <https://isleofwightbto.wordpress.com/> .

Volunteers required for 2017 surveys

With the start of a new year, why not make a resolution to take part in a BTO survey during 2017? For those of you who are not members of the BTO, now is a great time to join and I would be happy to forward the current subscription offers to anyone interested. Similarly we urgently need additional participation in the Garden BirdWatch survey and again I will be happy to forward details to interested parties. If you enjoy taking part in the annual RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch then this is the ideal survey for you as this lasts all year round.

- BirdTrack – If you maintain manual records of your sightings then BirdTrack is the ideal tool to safeguard them online while you are also automatically forwarding them to the county bird recorder, Robin Attrill, and enabling your records to be used by the BTO. Your data enables the production of weekly reporting rates by species (increased reporting acts as a measure of abundance in comparison to the total number of submitted records) as well as geographical variations and further ongoing migration studies. You can also enter all of your records from prior years so your data is accessible online should you ever lose your old notebooks while you can run online reports against your historic data. This also applies to mainland and abroad birding trips. The latter is extremely valuable as European records are being used for the forthcoming European Bird Atlas. You can register for BirdTrack and find out more about it at the following link; <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/taking-part>
- Breeding Bird Survey - There are a number of 1-km squares available for BBS recording. Volunteers need to be able to identify common birds by sight and sound. The survey involves two early morning spring visits to your 1-km square to count all the birds you see or hear while walking two 1-km lines across the square.

- Nest Box Challenge – This is an online survey and the only requirement is that you have at least one nest box in your garden. You then record what you see throughout the breeding season and also include any other nests in the garden. For further details and to register online please use the following link; <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nbc>
- Heronry Census – As previously mentioned in the review of 2016, I would welcome any nest records of Grey Heron and Little Egret on the Island excluding Bembridge, Gatcombe and St Lawrence. The census requires two or three visits to the site to count the number of occupied nests. Please advise me of the location as soon as possible so I can arrange for the inclusion in the 2017 survey.
- Nest Record Scheme – If you are interested in recording nests please send an email to nrs@bto.org who will forward a quick start guide which will contain everything you need to give nest recording a try. If you then wish to take up the survey, please return the registration form and you will receive the more comprehensive NRS starter pack.
- House Martin Survey – The 2017 nest survey requires a weekly visit to the nest site to monitor nest behaviour. I am particularly keen to get any of the nests covered for the survey in Binstead, particularly the Binstead Lodge Road/ Verwood Drive area, and also the Brighstone /West Wight area. Margaret Burnhill produced an interesting survey of House Martin nests on the estate at Wilberforce Road, Brighstone in 1989. 42 nests were located (24 on bungalows and 18 on houses) so it would be interesting to see the number in 2017. Please contact me to express an interest in the survey and I will forward you details closer to the breeding season.

IW Ringing Group

The national ringing course, held at Haseley Reserve in September, was a great success. Locally there were some good morning's ringing at Haseley during the autumn; as an example highlights on 15th October were 40 Chiffchaff ringed, plus two re-trapped, the first Green Sandpiper ringed at the site this year while a Firecrest was notable as it was the first one ringed there for several years. The six Blackcap ringed were all carrying a lot of fat indicating that they were ready for their long journey south.

The only Yellow-browed Warbler ringed on the Island during the autumn was recorded by Ellie Ness in her garden at Kingston.

The group's ringing activities decrease during the winter with efforts concentrating on maintenance of the reserve, and the ringing equipment, in preparation for next year.

There have recently been three ringing sightings of gulls; a Mediterranean gull at St Helens beach, reported by James Gloyn, is a regular winter visitor to the Island after being ringed as an adult in southern Netherlands in 2007. It has also bred in Belgium in 2008 and was sighted in the Netherlands in 2011. John Adams has reported two ringed Black-headed gulls at Sandown Canoe Lake; one was ringed by the IW Ringing Group as part of the cannon-net catch at Lynbottom Tip on 18th September 2013. The other bird was ringed in Lithuania as a nestling in 2014 and has been seen at the Canoe Lake during the autumn and winters of 2014-16 and has been seen again in January 2017. Once again all of these records demonstrate the importance of bird ringing.

With the Sanderling back at Ryde Sands and Puckpool, a number of birds have been colour ringed as part of the continuing Sanderling project. Please report ALL sightings of the colour ringed birds as part of the research work is to determine site fidelity and if it applies to successive winters, age of birds etc.

Your sightings can be recorded online at <https://animaltrack.org/> selecting the Sanderling project. Alternatively you can contact myself and I will be happy to log the sightings on your behalf and advise you of the previous records of the bird(s).

If you require further information or wish to discuss any BTO-related topics please contact myself, **Jim Baldwin** (BTO Regional Representative) either by phone (01983 721137(home), 07528 586683(mobile)), email (wightbto@hotmail.com) or write to me at 21 Hillcrest Road, Rookley, I.W PO38 3PB.

Introducing iWatch Wildlife, our Habitat Health Watch Project

iWatch Wildlife is the Society's new project set to be launched in spring 2017 and is all about helping people explore, enjoy, study and record the fantastic array of species here on the Isle of Wight.

This three year project is funded as part of 'Down to the Coast' - a Heritage Lottery landscape partnership scheme, the focus of which is the intricate and diverse landscape of the eastern half of the Island through conservation-led schemes with an emphasis on training and community participation that will leave a lasting legacy for the landscape.

iWatch Wildlife will celebrate and raise awareness of the work of The Society and its dedicated volunteers. It aims to contribute towards The Society's purposes to promote the study of natural history especially in relation to the Island and to promote, in every possible way, the conservation of its flora and fauna, meaning in time, we can begin to work more with the wider public.

We plan to do this by supporting and providing training opportunities for existing members of the Society, to engage with new audiences, and encourage greater participation in 'Citizen Science'.

Initially the focus will be on working within the Society, identifying recording gaps, training needs, improving volunteer feedback and exploring the species recording process. There will be more information coming soon on The Society's website, but in the meantime if you would like to find out more about the project or to get involved please contact Tina Whitmore at iwatchwildlife@gmail.com.

Tina Whitmore, Project Co-ordinator

What's in a Name? Winter Heliotrope, *Petasites fragrans*

Petasites is so named for the round leaves which, with stretched imagination, bear a very basic resemblance to a broad-rimmed flat hat called a petasus, worn by ancient Greeks and their God Hermes. According to the 16th century herbalist John Gerard, larger leaves of Butterbur, *Petasites hybridus*, could be utilised as protective head-wear beneath hot sun or during rainfall.

Fragrans comes from the Greek verb fragare, to smell. The flowers of Winter Heliotrope are very sweetly fragrant.

Heliotrope is anglicised from Greek. Helios is the sun, the suffix -trope means turning or turn. In Chambers Dictionary, heliotropy is explained as the tendency of roots to bend away from the light and of stems and leaves to bend towards the light.

There is a *Heliotropium* genus of plants which includes *Heliotropium peruvianum* (synonym *H. arborescens*), Peruvian Heliotrope is well known to gardeners as a houseplant with sweetly scented mauve or purple flowers and which our familiar Winter Heliotrope is

likely to be named after. Some botanical field guides state that *Petasites fragrans* is heliotrope scented.

Nicholas Culpepper's 17th century publication, 'Compleat Herbal and English Physician' includes a white-flowered annual called *Heliotropium europium* in Latin and Turnsole in English. The name Turnsole is derived from two Latin words, tornare, to turn and sol, the sun.

During the Victorian era, clothing fabrics of a particular shade of mauve were described in colour as heliotrope. A synthetic chemical substance called heliotropin aka piperonal, was used in perfumery to imitate the fragrance of heliotrope flowers.

Sue Blackwell

A new and rare bat for the Island

On 6th September, Donna Street from the Isle of Wight Bat Hospital attended a call out at the Holy Trinity Church, Dover Street, Ryde (now the Aspire centre) where a bat had been found grounded in the garden of the church. It was immediately evident to Donna that this was a species she had not encountered before and was indeed quite different to any bat species recorded in this country. On further investigation, and with the assistance of Ian Davidson Watts, who was on the Island carrying out bat consultancy work at the time, it was confirmed as a four month old juvenile male European Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida teniotis*). This is the largest European bat and it is found right around the Mediterranean, roosting in mountain rock crevices and in cracks in the façade of high buildings such as water towers, churches and tower blocks. They are generally solitary but small groups of females come together to breed. It is unmistakable amongst European bats, being large and robust with large ears and very long wings. Its most distinctive feature is the tail which extends for about half its length beyond the narrow tail membrane and is provided with many sensory bristles at the tip. It also has strong bristles on the feet, which serve as combs for grooming.

The European Free-tailed Bat is a powerful flier but how it reached the Island is unknown. In 2003, a male of this species was discovered in Helston churchyard, Cornwall, and there is an earlier record from Jersey. Otherwise, the species is unknown this far north of its warm Mediterranean home.

Unfortunately, the bat had to be taken into quarantine, requiring Graham to construct a quarantine area in his living room to house the bat securely under the terms of a temporary quarantine licence issued by the Animal Health & Plant Agency. However, the bat is healthy and feeding well and has now successfully served its time in quarantine.

Colin Pope

Please look out for these

Three new gall-inducing insect species have been found recently in the south of England. It is possible that all three are present already on the Island but have not yet been recorded here. I would ask all members of our Society to look out for them and send me any examples.

The first is a jumping plant-louse or Psyllid (Homoptera – Psylloidea) which galls Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*). This plant, although an alien, is now very common here. The insect causer, *Trioza centranthi*, affects leaves, bracts and inflorescences. The leaves develop thickened up-rolled margins and can be conspicuously distorted and tinged pink. The bracts and flowers are hypertrophied and greenish, sometimes bent and deformed. The gall was very

rare in England until 2010 when it was reported from Dorset but is now recorded from all coastal counties of south and south-east England around to East Anglia, so it must be here somewhere!

The second gall to look out for is found in the flower-heads of *Agapanthus* spp. which, although to my knowledge is not yet naturalised here (although it is in the Channel Islands, Scilly and at Wisley in Surrey), is frequently grown in gardens. In 2014, galled flowerbuds were found at Wisley. The affected flowerbuds remained closed or only partially open and were variously distorted. Many gall midge larvae were found in the flowers and proved to be a new species, *Enigmadiplosis agapanthi* (Diptera – Cecidomyiidae).

The third species is to be found on Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). The Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp, *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*, was found in Kent in 2015. A second site was found in St Albans. This is the most important insect globally on Sweet Chestnut and is a regulated pest in the European Union. The gall wasp is a native of China but has now become established elsewhere in Asia and Europe. The galls appear on young twigs, leaf petioles and leaf midribs. They are oval, 10-20mm in diameter, initially pale green, turning red by summer and then brown and woody by autumn and those on twigs remaining on the tree over winter. Nothing else galls Sweet Chestnut in England, so the galls should be obvious and easily identified. Both saplings and mature trees can be affected.

Any reports to me please on 292595

David Biggs

An Exotic in the Woods

A few years ago, I spotted an exotic garden plant growing in Charles Wood that backs onto our land in St. Lawrence. I recognised it as a species of *Strobilanthes*, a genus of plants in the *Acanthaceae* family which includes the well-known “Bears Breeches” of gardens, but also includes some species normally associated with warm glasshouse cultivation. Initially I thought it may be *Strobilanthes atropurpureus*. Assuming it to be a garden escape as result of dumping of garden rubbish, I did not think it would survive the winter, but a few years later the clump is now large and spreading in all directions.

I sent Dr. Colin Pope some images of the plant and was surprised how much interest there was in this find. It would appear that it is the first time *Strobilanthes* has been found growing and apparently thriving in the wild in the UK. Eric Clement became involved and eventually it would seem Clive Stace.

The next stage was to get an accurate identification. I was unsure that my original id was correct so I was asked to forward some fresh flowering material to John Wood, who specialises in *Acanthaceae* at the School of Plant Sciences University of Oxford. He came back very quickly with a name-*Strobilanthes penstemonoides* (Nees) T Anderson var. *dalhousieana* (Nees)Kuntze. This is a Himalayan species, the type variety has glabrous (smooth leaves) and comes from Nepal, but the variety *dalhousieana* has pubescent (slightly hairy leaves) and comes from Northern India. It was first collected at Simla by Lady Dalhousie after which the variety is named. How interesting botany becomes!

However, the tale of the *Strobilanthes* does not end here. It would seem that the name *Strobilanthes penstemonoides*, while it rolls off the tongue quite easily, is incorrect as the botanist Nees made a mistake and spelt it as “*pentastemonoides*”. Under the taxonomic rules

of priority, the oldest published name takes priority over all others, so while acknowledged as a mistake, the name *Strobilanthes pentastemonoides* var. *dalhousieana* has to be used.

As a garden plant, *Strobilanthes pentastemonoides* var. *dalhousieana* is very worthy of cultivation. It is really a clump forming sub-shrub 3-5ft tall (it gets quite woody by the end of the growing season) and has beautiful tubular bluish purple flower spikes which appear in late summer and continue flowering into the autumn.

Dave Trevan

The Range meadows at Jersey Camp

For more than forty years, I have been fascinated by an area of grassland just forty acres in extent. This is the meadow at Jersey Camp, Porchfield, belonging to the MOD. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, it was ploughed, ridge and furrow in six turn strips. Evidence of that activity is visible to the present day. What the crop was is unknown, but it was probably a cereal crop.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the area became a rifle range, very much restricting any other activity. Maintenance consisted of taking off an unimproved crop of hay, a procedure that has lasted for more than a century. How would nature react to such a regime?

The early half of the twentieth century passed unrecorded but, with a new warden came my access to the meadows. It was obvious that here was something unique. The ground was coloured by Green-winged Orchids, *Anacamptis morio*. In their heyday, their numbers were estimated at a quarter of a million! This was not just a wild guess. In the original ploughing of the land, the system had left a pattern in which the area is divided into some two hundred plots. By counting the orchids on a percentage of those plots, an acceptable total was ascertained.

With a minimum volume of debris remaining after the annual cut, the conversion to nutrients was insufficient to maintain such quality and today the orchid is present but in vastly reduced quantity. In the meantime, another species was building up its reserves. Today, Dyer's Greenweed, *Genista tinctorial*, with its parasitic Dodder, *Cuscuta epithimum*, dominate the area. That it will reach a peak in quantity and decline, as have its forebears, is certain. This ripple effect will no doubt continue, but what will replace the forerunners? Already, Saw-wort, *Serratula tinctoria*, is increasing in abundance.

With such a history, the land is becoming acidic heathland, different from any other on the Island. Similar land, such as that at Hamstead and Cranmore, are dominated by trees and shrubs, providing a much greater quantity of debris to eventually become humus. On the forty acre plot, Heath Dog Violet, *Viola canina*, is becoming sward forming in places, but to suggest that it may become dominant would be speculation. However, a species will emerge to assume dominance.

Nature is in no hurry and so human lifetime will span this fascinating story. The application of fertiliser would terminate the natural process, favouring the more aggressive species, and turn the grassland into that similar to the surrounding cattle grazed fields.

Bill Shepard

“Poor Little Percy Hayter”

A sequel to the Countryside Section Christmas Walk

The December walk of the Countryside Section took us round Nunnery Lane, Mount Joy, and Carisbrooke Castle. At Mount Joy we detoured into the cemetery to look at some of the more interesting memorials, where Mary Edmunds pointed out one to “Poor Little Percy Hayter, died 26 August 1898, aged 9”. She told us that the children of Newport had raised money for the memorial, although no one now seemed to know why.

Being interested in family history, I found this intriguing, and so after the walk did some research, with the help of the archives of the IW County Press and the website of the IW Family History Society, and discovered Percy’s sad story.

Percy was born in 1889, and lived in Worsley Road, Newport. His father Harry was a labourer at the West Medina Cement Mill. Percy attended Newport Board School and was a ‘junior soldier’ in the Salvation Army. On August 26, 1898, the last day of the school holidays, he was playing with friends in a field belonging to Parkhurst Barracks which adjoined the Yarmouth Road. At lunchtime, it began to rain and his friends went home, but Percy stayed, apparently hoping to watch a cricket match in the afternoon. Then later that same afternoon, a man walked into Newport Police Station saying, “I want to give myself up. I have cut a boy’s throat in the Barrack Field at Parkhurst.” He produced a knife and said, “that’s what I done it with.” The police hurried to the field and found Percy’s body lying near a tree.

The man, Maurice Holbrook, aged 42, was said to be in a weak and dishevelled state. He was an Islander, but had been away for some time, and had been transferred from the Bristol Union Workhouse to the IW Workhouse Infirmary suffering from typhoid. He had discharged himself a few days previously, being recovered, and had apparently been homeless and penniless since. He had no explanation for what he did, except to say that “a man in red” had told him to do it, and that he had had nothing to eat except a few penny buns for three days.

An inquest found the cause of death to be wilful murder, and Holbrook was committed for trial. At the initial hearing held in Newport, a hostile crowd gathered to jeer at the prisoner, pelting his carriage with gravel. The trial was held at Hampshire Assizes on November 22, where Holbrook, although he appeared to be perfectly rational and quiet, was found to be guilty but insane. It appears that a letter outlining his mental state, which should have been sent from the Bristol Workhouse, had never been received on the Island. Holbrook was sent to Broadmoor Hospital, where he remained until his death in 1918.

Percy’s funeral was held with full Salvation Army honours, the route to the cemetery being lined with people wishing to pay their respects. Mr W. Ledicott, of the ‘Old Curiosity Shoppe’ in Newport, set up a subscription fund for his memorial and especially encouraged the children of Newport to contribute their pennies.

Renella Phillips

Andy's Nature Notes July to December 2016.

July

- 2nd A freshly emerged Elephant Hawkmoth on the footpath at the back of Monk's Bay. A Common Sandpiper on the beach past Monk's Bay.
- 3rd A Humming-bird Hawkmoth along the revetment at Wheeler's Bay and also a female Black-tailed Skimmer dragonfly.
- 5th Dave Nordell and I went along to Sandown Levels this morning as it was a sunny day at last. Saw 2 male Scarce Chasers and, unusually, a pair in cop. There was also about 15 Banded Demoiselles and 2 Broad-bodied Chasers. The Common Sandpiper is now in Monk's Bay.
- 6th A Bloxworth Snout [rarish moth] in my garden.
- 11th A Painted Lady, a Comma and a Green-veined White in the garden today. Went out to Leechmore, near Bleakdown, to look at the fields of Corn Marigolds. A rare sight now in Britain.
- 12th 2 fresh Common Blues along the revetment.
- 13th Went to Southford, near Whitwell, this morning. Saw two Purple Hairstreaks which are new to the site for me. Also a Broad-bodied Chaser and an Essex Skipper.
- 14th Dave and I drove over to Newtown and searched all the meadows area looking for White-letter Hairstreaks but failed to find any. In Walter's Copse we recorded 8 Silver-washed Fritillaries, 7 White Admiral and 2 Purple Hairstreak plus a Southern Hawker.
- 22nd A couple of good moths in the trap this morning; a Lesser Waxmoth and a Golden-twin spot.
- 30th 7 Red Admiral in the garden.
- 31st A hot and sunny day so I went over to Brook Down and recorded about 800 Chalk-hill Blues in and around the pit by the car parking area.

August

- 2nd A miserable day, rained the whole day.
- 5th Another good moth this morning, a Plumed Fan-foot.
- 6th Another, different, Plumed Fan-foot.
- 8th Walked along the revetment with Pete Cambell in the afternoon. He pointed out a juvenile and adult Mediterranean Gull to me in Monk's Bay.
- 12th Another hot and sunny day so I went to Shepherd's Chine, Atherfield, to see what was about. Had a record count of Common Blue in the chine and environs, the total was 313 the most I've ever seen at one site.
- 14th Down to Southford to look for dragonflies with Dave. 3 Golden Ringed Dragonfly was all we could find.
- 23rd A total of 43 Common Blue along the revetment. They seem to be doing well this year.
- 24th 17 Jersey Tiger moths in the trap this morning plus a Western Conifer Seed Bug. A Humming-bird Hawkmoth along the revetment plus 3 Clouded Yellow and a steady stream of Swallows all day heading east, numbers would be low thousands.
- 26th 6 Clouded Yellow, 15 Painted Lady, 7 Small Tortoiseshell and one Small Copper along the revetment. 4 Bottle-nosed Dolphins off Monk's Bay.
- 28th Another Bloxworth Snout in the garden.
- 30th Went over to Newtown to see the reported Ospreys. Saw 2 and watched one catch a Mullet, which was nice.

September

- 1st Up to 3 Ospreys reported from Newtown.

5th 4 Ringed Plovers and a Dunlin along at Monk's Bay today.

6th 2 ospreys at Newtown. Had a Gem [moth] in the trap.

9th Went over to Brading marshes with Pete to see a Pectoral Sandpiper, an American wader. Good views of it and managed a few photos. There were also about 40 Yellow Wagtails in the field nearby.

11th As the Ospreys were proving difficult to photograph, due to them not coming particularly close, I decided to outwit them and thus asked my son to run me round to Newtown in his boat from Cowes. I'd noticed the birds took no notice at all of people in boats so thought this would be a winning ploy. Should have known better. The plan was to stay in the moorings vicinity just inside the estuary as the birds could then be seen safely without disturbing them from fishing as they were not bothered by people on the anchored yachts and would thus give a chance of decent flight shots. We duly arrived in the estuary and an Osprey was perched on his usual post over in the north east corner, which is where it stayed for the next 3 hours, fast asleep. As we decided to call it a day a chap in a rubber dingy from one of the moored yachts rowed past us and into the creek where the bird was, with the intention of photographing it close up (we could see his camera). Needless to say, he flushed it which is a bit irresponsible in my opinion. We headed back to Cowes and into the Folly Inn, an appropriate name in this case.

12th 4 Clouded Yellow and 2 Humming Bird Hawkmoths plus lots of Painted lady along the revetment.

13th Went to Atherfield this morning and saw 2 Green Sandpipers and 2 Common Sandpipers in the reservoir nearby.

15th Back to Shepherd's Chine this morning where there were 6 Clouded Yellow, 6 Small Copper, one Wall Brown and over 30 Common Blue.

18th Watched a Cormorant off Monk's Bay attempting to swallow a Flounder that was too big for it.

19th Up to Luccombe Down this morning and saw a Ring Ouzel, 2 Grasshopper Warblers and a Wheatear.

21st 6 Clouded Yellow, 6 Peacock, a Large White and 2 Painted Lady along the revetment and a freshly emerged Common Blue.

23rd Went over to Shepherd's Chine with Pete this morning: 2 Garden Warblers, 20 Blackcaps, 10 Whitethroats, 7 Small Copper, 4 Common Blue and 3 Whimbrel over the sea. Later on, up on Ventnor Downs we saw 3 Hobby.

28th Back to Newtown. 100+ Oystercatchers (a good number), 12 Knot and one Osprey.

29th A fresh Green-veined White in the garden.

30th There were 4 Greenland Wheatear along at Monk's Bay this morning. They are distinctly different to the normal Wheatear and quite easy to pick out.

October

1st A kingfisher on the rocks along at Monk's Bay.

2nd Up to Luccombe Down to see and photograph a Wryneck.

4th 2 Wryneck on the downs now.

5th Attempted to lead a guided walk along Luccombe Down in an easterly gale. We did manage to see 6 Ring Ouzels and that was about it.

8th Went to Bembridge Down with Pete and recorded at least 30 Ring Ouzels, the most I've seen at one site.

10th One Ring Ouzel up on Ventnor Golf Course.

14th A juvenile Cuckoo along at Monk's Bay.

15th 4 Ring Ouzels up on the Golf Course.

20th A second generation Holly Blue in the garden.

- 21st Pete and I had a look into Haddon's Pits this morning. Saw a Woodcock fly over us.
 25th 2 Clouded Yellow along the revetment and another Holly Blue in the garden.
 26th 6 Oystercatchers in the bay in front of home.
 31st Fleeting views of a Yellow-browed Warbler in the trees at the back of Monk's Bay.

November

- 2nd A Clouded Yellow and a Small Copper along the revetment.
 3rd Photographed an excellent example of a sun dog this morning. This one had only one false sun and the ring round the sun was easily visible. It occurred to me that having had these pointed out to me by my grandmother when I was a small boy and informed that it meant it was going to rain I didn't really know anything more about the subject. Looked it up on the internet and was amazed at what came up. I'd recommend anyone to do the same.
 7th Back in the 1970s, one of the family outings was to go to Atherfield looking for fossils so after all these years I thought I'd go and see what had changed. Today was a very cold morning with a bitter north east wind blowing as I strode along the beach so I was a bit surprised to see a lady in swimming! Anyway, as this was a 'suss out' the site expedition I carried on to the point and round into Chale Bay. Nothing much to see and find and it has certainly changed over the ensuring years. A return visit after a storm is indicated. Back home I spotted a Lapwing on the rocks round in Monk's Bay, an unusual record.
 8th There are 3 Lapwings along there now plus 2 Stonechats, Oystercatchers and 2 Little Egrets and a fox asleep in the sun above one of the cottages.
 10th A Clouded Yellow along the revetment.
 11th 2 Black Redstarts on the cliff along from home.
 20th The weather has been pretty awful lately, culminating in Storm Angus last night.
 23rd Now the storms have calmed off, back to Atherfield to look for fossils. Did quite well and found one good fossil lobster and plenty of bits.
 25th Went to Newtown, plenty of birds to see including a Slavonian Grebe.

December

- 3rd A south easterly gale, cold and miserable.
 8th Dave and I counted 15 Rock Pipits on one small stretch of the apron below the revetment along by Shore Rd.
 21st About 40 Gannets diving close in off Wheeler's Bay today. I managed to photograph them and could see when the photo was enlarged that they were feeding on sprats. Over the next week or so this continued most days.
 29th A Red Admiral in the garden. The last sighting of 2016.

Andy Butler

Reports of General Meetings

30th July Burhs and Beacons: the Defence of Wihthlande in the Viking Age

Over sixty people gathered in Carisbrooke village hall for a study day held jointly with the Friends of Carisbrooke Castle Museum, and presented by John Margham and David Tomalin.

John began by defining the Viking Age in southern Britain as lying between 800 and 1066, and showed how the Isle of Wight was of strategic importance to the house of Wessex

during this period. Therefore the actual occupation of the Island by a Viking raiding force during 897 was hardly good news for mainland Wessex!

He went on to elucidate the meanings of the term *burh*, which may be summarised as ‘defensive enclosure’, and of which there are at least three recorded place-name examples on the Island: Barton or ‘*burh-tun*’, Stenbury or ‘stone *burh*’, and, not least, *Wihtgarasburh*. Referred to twice in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the latter name can almost certainly be identified with the Lower Enclosure at Carisbrooke Castle, though John argues for an earlier, Romano-British, date for the fortification than the later Anglo-Saxon one it has usually been assigned.

The Island’s strategic importance was supported by the three ‘common burdens’ of military service, bridge-work and fortress work, and the Island’s roads would have been of great significance in the deployment of the *fyrð*, or militia, in the event of an invasion; it is not surprising, therefore, that lookout and beacon sites were sited in relation to significant roads. Place-names provide further evidence of defensive operations, including ‘*tōt*’, ‘lookout place’ – as in Totland, or Tolt Copse (on Chillerton Down); and ‘*wacu*’, ‘watch or wake’ – as in Wackland near Newchurch. The inquest held at Shide Bridge in 1324 mentions 31 beacon sites throughout the Island, referring to them even then as of considerable antiquity.

David Tomalin followed up with a presentation on the defensive stonework used on the Island during this period, including ‘Bembridge limestone formation’, to give it its proper name, an excellent building material; Quarr limestone, first used only in the late Saxon period; and Greensand, quarried from Gatcliff. Then reconvening up at the Castle itself, we sought out these various types of stonework as we circumnavigated the walls of the Lower Enclosure. Of particular interest was the ‘little bastion’, quite unlike the larger ones usually seen elsewhere, but quite effective from a defensive point of view in that it would have afforded an invader little room to manoeuvre. With the Island having been a great grain-growing area, the suggestion is that the Castle at this point acted less like a conventional fort than a bonded warehouse or quartermaster’s store.

After lunch, twenty-three people joined John for a 4½ mile circular walk from the Castle. The Alvington Down beacon site – once known as *Wygthbergh*, ‘white barrow-shaped hill’ – was visible at the start of the walk. At Whitcombe Cross John pointed to Dark Lane as giving a good impression of what medieval roads must have looked like, so important to the civil defence of the Island in the Viking Age. Passing along Nunnery Lane we learnt of the detached portions of Gatcombe parish formerly in this area: Gatcombe church is of course dedicated to St Olave – properly Olaf – king of Norway 1016–1029, whose cult spread quickly after his death. At Mount Joy John informed us that this was known as Shidehamdown in the medieval period, a potentially ideal location for a warning beacon, with suggestive ‘watch’ field-names in the area.

Arriving at Carisbrooke church, this was shown to be originally recorded as Bowcombe church in the Domesday Book of 1086, then became a minster church holding sway over a vast area from the 12th century. In fact, John is of the view that although the whole estate was known as Bowcombe in the late Saxon period, the place-name Carisbrooke was also of considerable antiquity, its most plausible etymology being ‘the brook called Cary’, invoking a lost Celtic stream name which we now know as the Lukely Brook. The name Bowcombe was first recorded in a land charter in the 10th century, deriving its name from the *cumb* beyond Bowcombe Farm, meaning ‘a short, bowl-shaped valley’, above which was the pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery site which subsequently became a meeting-place for the Bowcombe Hundred (West Medine) by the tenth century.

As we looped the Bowcombe valley, returning by the water meadows, we could not only see the location of Clatterford Roman Villa but also learnt of a ‘productive’ Saxon site in the area which was active from c.700 to the early ninth century, confirming the valley as a

‘central place’ for the Island during its century or so of existence, before this function was taken over by Carisbrooke itself by 1086.

A steep climb brought us back to the Castle, where both John and David were warmly thanked for a most fascinating study day.

Alan Phillips

17th September The marine ecology of species that colonise artificial structures and experiments on artificial pools, a walk led by Dr Roger Herbert and Alice Hall from Bournemouth University, with Ian Boyd from Arc Consulting and Nigel George from Eccleston-George.

We met on a fine mid-September afternoon, ideal for a stroll along Yaverland’s sandy beach as the tide was retreating. A crowd of our members was gathered - there must have been about thirty – eager to hear Roger tell us what his PhD student’s research project in the inter-tidal zone was all about. Little did we realise just how important this pioneering project is to the survival of the marine ecologies of beaches all around Britain’s coasts. “We are developing the sea, installing new structures, whether wind farms or sea defences, man-made structures. We’ll be seeing more of them with the rise in global warming”, Roger told us in his introduction. So why not use these structures to help marine life? “We could create artificial reefs to restore habitats that have been degraded”, continued Roger. “Put in new structures and wildlife begins to interact with it.” Alice is recording the wildlife that inhabits the artificial structures.

We followed Roger and Alice down to the beach, whose sand is protected from being washed away in the currents by a series of parallel groynes. These are one of the kinds of artificial structure that Roger was referring to, and in this experiment in Sandown Bay, they are being used as the ‘test-bed’. Other examples are sea walls and piers. We looked at the materials used in the construction of the groynes: concrete topped by wooden planks. This is a fairly old design. Newer groynes, such as those at Ventnor, are made of natural rock. The materials used can make a difference to how a structure is colonised by marine life. Natural rock may provide very little habitat.

Roger handed out some large tape measures and asked us to work in groups, dividing the beach into thirds: an upper, middle and lower inter-tidal zone, and recording the marine life we found colonising the groyne in each of these zones. We found nothing in the upper zone, but the further down the beach we went, the more densely packed the side of the groyne was with limpets and barnacles, and bivalves further into the sea. We found tyres fixed to the groyne’s side, serving as artificial rock pools, within which there is a flap to let the wildlife in when the tide rises. Seaweeds and barnacles cling to them. Barnacles were so densely packed on the groyne, they were forming clusters, one on top of the other. Predators, such as small fish and crabs, lurked in the artificial pools made of various materials. There was a wide range of habitat, materials, nooks and crannies to attract diverse species.

Ian Boyd has been working with Nigel George, co-founder of the innovative artists’ collective, Eccleston-George, to design optimal artificial habitats for seashore life. They are leading research of this kind in the UK. Five years ago, Ian had the idea to create rock pools on built structures at different heights. As the inter-tidal zone narrows, with more and more sea defences filling this space as sea levels rise, the idea is to replace the horizontal with the vertical. The team designed structures for an experiment at Bouldnor, asking themselves: what can we put here that can retain water and maybe let it out, too? There are very few natural pools on new rock groynes. Ian and Nigel are working on ‘Bio-Armour’, the design of new sea defences with integrated habitat. ‘Test tiles’ are small squares of tile stuck onto the

groynes using different resins, providing a smooth surface for shellfish to cling to. Unfortunately, beachgoers have removed the tiles, so the team needs to find a way to inform the public about their purpose.

Alice pointed out that there were two different designs of rock pool and that red and green seaweed species, not seen on the groynes, grow here and can survive when the tide is out. Look under the flap and you can find different species of sea squirt, keel worms and bryozoans. She said it is amazing how well the rock pools had done in only eighteen months. She has found seasonal variations in species. The more delicate algae die off in the winter. More mussels are to be found on the north side of the groyne than on the south side because it is shaded from the sun. The mussels are covered in barnacles. Dog whelks live on barnacles and have to stay put for several days while they drill through the barnacle's shell. The tyre rock pools are eventually shaken loose by the tide and have to be bolted back on.

At Boscombe in Bournemouth, Roger's team have extended this experiment using a bubble-wrap surface attached to concrete groynes. Bournemouth Council is funding this experiment because, due to their intervention, the natural rock pools there have been buried under several feet of shifting sand.

Nigel invited us back to Eccleston-George's workshop, 'The Works', situated on Brown's Golf Course. During the Second World War, this pavilion was one of the secret PLUTO buildings, designed as an ice-cream parlour, and the artists' collective is planning to restore it. Nigel showed us his tile designs to attach to the groynes. Alice showed us some video footage of different species of fish sheltering under Sandown pier. She used bait on the end of a pole. The pole has to be non-rigid, so that you don't lose the camera. This is a technique used in Australia, the idea being to see how many species you can record in fifteen minutes.

This was an afternoon full of fascinating insights into how natural history professionals and creative designers can work together on a pioneering project to protect ecosystems. We are very grateful to Roger and Alice, Ian and Nigel for sharing their amazing project with us. Eccleston-George is now working with Glasgow University on designing and implementing 'Bio-Armour'.

Maggie Nelmes

12th November St Helena - Secret of the South Atlantic, an illustrated talk by Rosemary Stewart

St Helena lies in the South Atlantic - the most remote inhabited island in the world, 1200 miles from Angola and 800 miles from Ascension. Formed by two shield volcanoes 12 million years ago this semi-tropical island measures about 6 x 10 miles. The coast is entirely sheer cliffs and steep valleys, only one of which is wide enough for a small town but up in the hilly interior it is 5C cooler, rich with semi-tropical vegetation, grassland and forests, dominated by a ridge topped by Diana's Peak at 2,680 ft. It is often covered with cloud and has an annual rainfall of 39" as opposed to the coast with 5".

It was discovered in 1502 by a Portuguese navigator and kept secret for 86 years, used as a supply stop for their trading ships to the Far East. Many skirmishes and pirate attacks took place over the next century but it was finally claimed in 1659 by the British East India Company who built a fort and a small settlement called Jamestown. Among the early inhabitants were refugees from the Great Fire of London. Slave trading ships called and the people were joined by many nationalities. In 1815 Napoleon arrived. In 1834 it was taken over by the Crown. In the 1840's many freed sickly slaves were dumped there. 6,000 Boer prisoners-of-war were set up in camps in 1900.

I sailed there on the Royal Mail Ship St Helena - 5 days from Cape Town. Known as the RMS, it is the only way to get there - a much loved and iconic ship bringing everyone, all

their supplies and the precious mail. A controversial new airport has been built involving many months of huge land works costing us millions but unexpected problems with a cliff updraft on landing for big jets has put everything on hold for now and the ship has been recommissioned until 2018. A long ongoing story.

Life on board was relaxed, happy, comfortable and entertaining with caring local staff and wonderful food. The Purser organised gentle games such as shuffleboard and quoits but the big one was the cricket match when the sun umbrellas from the deck was cleared and a net erected. If you hit the rope ball into the sea you lost your score and the team was not happy!

Jamestown boasts some elegant Georgian residences and cosy terraces built by early settlers, with important buildings like the courtroom, the Castle Garden and church tucked in beside the Fort. New houses are now built on open land at the top of the cliff reached by a twisting road or on foot up The Ladder - a military-built flight of 699 steep 11 inch steps! These are a 'challenge' for the visitors but part of life for the locals who climb up with their shopping! The record is just over 5 minutes! It took me 50!

The people are called Saints and have their own dialect. Apart from whites, many are descended from slaves - African, Malay, Chinese, Madagascan and Indian. They are mostly brown, of all shades and shapes, and all delightful. In fact, they are 'more British than the British' with pictures of the Queen everywhere and an old fashioned politeness. British TV is popular. They love sport, carnivals and dressing up in bright clothes. Local crafts include lace-making and woodworking. There are 8 religions but mostly Anglican under the Bishopric of Cape Town.

The Suez Canal was built in 1869 and steam ships replaced sail so the island became neglected. Then in 1907 they planted New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*), to make rope and twine. It soon covered up to 3,000 acres and destroyed many endemic plants. Processing the leaves was a back breaking and messy business but they produced good rope and twine for GPO mailbags until 1966. Inevitably, the plants now cover hillsides and roadsides.

The Diana's Peak area is now a National Park and a success story in habitat restoration. The last natural stronghold of the endemic plants - trees, shrubs and tree ferns are thriving which provide microclimates for lichens and mosses. Walking is popular up there and all over the dramatic cliffs but some are pretty vertiginous and you need a guide.

In the 1980's a local man called George Benjamin spotted two bushes of the rare endemic St Helena Ebony on a ridge below a steep cliff. He was lowered down on ropes to take cuttings and now it is the national flower and he is a legend! At Kew he learned how to set up a nursery to propagate other endemics and the young trainee sent out to help him was none other than Simon Goodenough, previous Curator at Ventnor Botanic Garden! He is still revered at the busy Nursery where they are preparing many endemic varieties for landscaping the airport and growing trees for the nearby Millennium Forest. Gumwood trees (*Commidendrum robustum*) and ebonies were planted by the local people on a hillside and we paid £10 to plant one too.

Their National Trust works hard to protect, enhance and promote St Helena's unique culture, environment and heritage. There are no indigenous terrestrial mammals, reptiles, amphibians or fresh water fish but they do protect their 455 endemic invertebrates - 70% insects and 21% beetles. Some have wonderful names such as the Spiky Yellow Woodlouse, the Golden Sail Spider and the Blushing Snail! Sadly the 8cm-long Giant Earwig is now extinct.

The fiercely-protected dainty little plover called a Wirebird is the only endemic bird left and lays its eggs on open grassland. Among others were the noisy imported Mynah birds, the Peaceful Dove, Java sparrows and the beautiful snow white Fairy Terns. The brown noddy, a large tern, makes a cliff nest 'decorated' outside by copious amounts of guano! Red-billed tropicbirds with their elegant long tails often flew over the town.

The top spot for tourists, of course, is Longwood House where Napoleon Bonaparte lived from 1815 - 1821. He arrived with his retinue and 2,000 soldiers to make sure he did not escape! We saw his big bathtub where he spent much time dictating his memoirs, his sleeping 'cot' and elegant furniture. There was a great view of two of the iconic hilltops and a beautiful garden. He dined with his Generals in full uniform! He hated the Governor who would not let him be called Emperor. His controversial death was most likely due to stomach cancer. His burial, within 4 elaborate coffins, was in a most beautiful sheltered valley. In 1840 the British allowed him to be taken to Paris and laid in the great tomb in Les Invalides. The procession to the ship was made in a magnificent carriage accompanied by many illustrious persons who had sailed from France. All sites connected to him are owned now by the French Government.

St Helena Coffee is world renowned. In 1733, seeds of the Green Tipped Bourbon Coffee were imported from Mocha in the Yemen and it thrived in one of the purest environments in the world. Napoleon said it was the only good thing about St Helena! It won top prizes at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition. Production has now been revived and on sale for £7.25 for 125gm bag but at Harrods it sells at £600 the kilo! Luckily, at the Coffee Bar on the seafront we only paid the normal price for this really delicious drink.

Another smart enterprise is the most remote Distillery in the world! A Welshman married a Saint and produced a wonderful spirit called Tungi, made from the prickly pear fruit. His unique bottles are made stepped in the shape of The Ladder! There is Midnight Mist coffee liqueur and a 43% gin made from a rare Bermuda juniper which grows well on the island.

The Governor lives in an elegant Georgian mansion 3 miles out of town. Its most famous resident is Jonathan, the giant Seychelles tortoise. At 190 years old, he is probably the oldest living land creature in the world.

The sea is all important, of course. The staple diet is tuna. We had big 'joints' for dinner and their special comfort food is tuna fish cake. On our boat trip 300 pan-tropical dolphins swam all around us and leapt into the air. Then we saw, beneath the waves, a wonderful whale shark. There are trips offering the chance to swim with them and also game fishing for barracuda.

We also saw the Boer Cemetery, the dramatic High Knoll Fort and visited the High School. The children take our exams and come to our universities but they are tempted to stay and thus the 4,000 population is dwindling. This is why it is so important to offer an air service to increase tourism and give them an incentive to stay or return more often or the island might be in trouble.

See <http://sainthelena.island.info/visitors.htm>

Rosemary Stewart

Footnote: An audience of some thirty-five members listened spellbound as Rosemary described her voyage to this remote island and showed us photographs of what she saw and did there and the people she met during her stay. I was amazed at how much she discovered in such a short time. The scenery was dramatic. The road out of Jamestown's deep valley was so narrow, steep and winding, I experienced vertigo at the very thought of travelling up it. It looked perilous. The cliff sides were sheer and I imagined the impact of rock falls and landslips on the dwellings far below. As for the new airport, built to rescue the Island from its isolation, seeing how the runway was perched on top of a mountain, I was not surprised to learn there were problems with landing large aircraft there. Notwithstanding air currents, the surrounding crags looked hazardous enough.

About fourteen years ago I met a cleaner at work who showed me some photographs of her homeland, St Helena. I knew nothing about it and had no idea where it was. As she

spoke, I was intrigued by the Island's remoteness and the enormous problems its inhabitants face as a consequence. She told me how she'd been trained there to work in domestic service, as it was the only way a girl could afford to leave the Island. She applied to work for a wealthy family in South Africa, who paid her fare for the long sea crossing. Boys could find work on the British base on Ascension Island.

When Rosemary showed us her photographs and told us about the people, places and wildlife they depicted, I could imagine I was there with her, experiencing it for myself. There was warmth and intimacy in her relationship with the audience, a lightness of touch and humour. St Helena is a remarkable place and the landscape is stunning. Rosemary is to be admired for her determination to make the most of her visit and experience everything she could, even the ascent of the great cliff staircase, the short cut out of Jamestown. I think everyone in the audience was impressed when she showed us that slide! We are very grateful to Rosemary for such an entertaining and fascinating talk.

Maggie Nelmes

3rd December The Roman Island of Vectis: an Archaeology of Past and Present Identities in the Isle of Wight, an illustrated talk by Dr David Tomalin

This talk was designed to introduce our members to David's new publication about Roman Wight, part-financed by our Society. Some forty people gathered to hear David discuss the main themes in his book. He began by questioning why the Roman name Vectis for the Isle of Wight is still in common use here, whilst very few other areas of Britain flaunt their Roman identity. No conclusion was reached.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, antiquarian and Headmaster of Westminster School, William Camden, toured the English counties to find out how people lived, and how far back they could trace their roots. People showed him Iron Age coins made of gold and silver, and he realised that these coins related to the counties and the counties related to tribes. Camden obtained an early map of Britain, copied from the original and brought to Britain by monks, on which the many tribes were named. By matching the name of the ruler featured on each coin with the name of the tribes in the area where the coin was found, Camden discovered who the rulers of each tribe were at that time and, depending on the condition of the coin, what they may have looked like. He would also have deduced that neighbouring tribes were trading with each other, as coins found in one county may have originated in another.

The Atribartes were the Vectensians' neighbours in Hampshire and David told us a fascinating story about one of their leaders, Commeus, as written in the Roman document 'Strategems'. Commeus, in a bid to escape with his followers into exile, claimed that he had been so badly treated by the Romans in a truce that he never wanted to see a Roman again. The Romans let them go, but soon changed their minds and pursued them to the southern shores of the Mare Gallicium, the English Channel. The tide was against Commeus and his fleet was trapped. In a desperate bid, Commeus ordered the sails to be unfurled, giving the impression that they were sailing away. Perhaps it was because the Romans, coming from the Mediterranean, were not used to tides, but they fell for Commeus's trick and turned back, leaving the Atribartes to return home. Coins bearing the name of Commeus have been found in Sussex.

The Daritribes were the Vectensians' neighbours in Dorset. Their coins are intriguing because they feature strange representations, each with a hidden meaning. A horde of 967 of these coins was unearthed in Brighstone. Frank Basford, from the County Archaeology Unit, photographed them and sent the coins to the British Museum. Unfortunately, they did not photograph them but sent them back to the finders, the local metal detectorists' club. This gave the impression that no official body was interested in the horde and so the club sold most of the coins on Ebay.

Returning to Atrebates coins, only two have been found bearing the name of Commeus's son, Tincomarus. After him came Verico, tribal leader of the Islanders. Coins from this time tend to feature a simple representation of an eye, signifying that the leader is all-seeing. The Emperor Augustus trained young princes and sent them back home to rule in his empire. Some coins bear an eagle, representing the power of that empire. Coins bearing a crab may be the Island's very first tribal coinage. Four were found on the mainland and six or seven in East Wight.

Pottery is another product from which archaeologists can obtain information about who was trading with whom, as it is so distinctive in colour and style. Roman pots, found in Knighton, are jet black, with very simple decoration, and tempered with powdered flint. 'Vectisware', named by David himself in the nineteen-seventies, is a very distinctive coarse pottery. Some pots found in Northern France, at Caen, may have been used to deliver Island produce. On Butser Hill, on the South Downs north of Portsmouth, a reconstruction of a Romano-British homestead gives us an idea of what the dwellings at Knighton on the Isle of Wight were like. During excavations here, archaeologists discovered a four-posted granary and a lot of pottery. "It is the best site we have, to show what a Vectensian farmstead was like", said David. Wafer-thin pieces of Gallo-Belgian beakers dating from about 10AD, the most popular beakers at that time, are clear evidence of wealth at Knighton. The only whole Vectisware pot to be found had the misfortune to fall off the back of a lorry delivering earth, and its lid shattered.

Excavations at Newchurch revealed a grave without a body, but an array of goods for the afterlife, including two storage jars, a beaker, a huge wine flagon and an enormous Vectisware pot, dating from about 40 to 60 AD. There is evidence that Vectensians were copying Roman pottery and taking it from ancient Gaul.

The Island produced and traded mainly corn, silver, high quality woollen goods, hunting dogs and slaves. Vectensians imported pottery. Dressel amphorae have been found mostly at Knighton and offshore at Yarmouth, at an anchorage site. These would have been used to transport wine.

Roman maps, that may have been devised by Ptolemy, identifying tribes by their language, suggest an understanding in Vectis of the langue d'oc, the language of Occitania in south-western France. This indicates that the Island traded with this region. The temple on Hayling Island, rebuilt in 60 to 75 AD in a grand style, in stone with walled-in colonnades, shows a strong Gallic influence. "In Occitania there is a mirror image of this temple, where lots of Vectisware was found", said David.

On the mainland, Iron Age forts abound. They were built on hilltops to defend the tribes from attack. The Island, however, has only one of these forts, on Chillerton Down. The Islanders were very good sailors, so maybe they used this skill to repel invaders.

David went on to show us slides of the Island's Roman villas and describe their design and structure. Apart from the two well-known villas at Brading and Newport, there were several others. Rock Villa, a two-storey building with an undercroft well suited to storing wine, was an unusual building, with external stairs leading up to a covered corridor that gave access to the rooms. The villa also had an annexe. By contrast, aisled houses were common across Northern Europe, the family living at one end and the animals at the other. Some, like Carisbrooke Villa, had a bathhouse added later. This style of building was characteristic of villas in the South of England, as far north as Bedford.

Not all Roman villas have fared well on the Island. Gurnard Villa fell into the sea. Carisbrooke Villa, uncovered in the eighteen-fifties by a builder constructing the vicarage, was left uncovered, its fine mosaics unprotected from the weather. From the late nineteenth century until 2003, Brading Villa was inadequately protected by a corrugated iron structure that rusted and let in rainwater increasingly towards the end of the twentieth century. In the

early nineteen-nineties, the mosaics were twice badly damaged by floods. This led to the villa being listed on the World Monuments Watch as being at serious risk. Finally, in 2003, the World Monuments Fund stepped in to save it. A temporary protective structure was erected while the mosaics were being conserved and extensive surveys carried out, before a new building was constructed to incorporate the villa and a visitor centre.

David showed us slides of the exceptionally fine mosaics that Brading Villa boasts, and described what each represents. By comparing the mosaics here with those from elsewhere in the Roman Empire, archaeologists can name the characters they depict and interpret the stories they tell. In one mosaic a merman is carrying a bowl of oysters. A steersman's oar shows that he is master of the sea. A triton is seeing Leucothea home safely. She is a minor Greek sea goddess or nymph who comes to the aid of sailors in distress and appears to Odysseus in Homer's 'Odyssey' in the guise of a bird, providing him with advice and a protective mantle when he is shipwrecked. She can be identified because she always carries a frond. Five of the rooms at Brading have mosaic floors, and both the quality of the mosaics and the mythical subject matter suggest that the owners were wealthy and well educated. The largest mosaic is a complex blend of images, including Medusa, gods and goddesses and farming scenes.

The afternoon ended with a feast of mince pies in celebration of David's forthcoming publication, and members were offered the chance to reserve a copy at a special discounted price. We are grateful to David for a most interesting presentation.

Maggie Nelmes

Reports of Section Meetings

Looking at the Countryside

Friday 15th July

Hurstake to Dodnor

It made a pleasant change to have dry, fairly warm weather for sixteen members and one very well behaved dog, Louie, who met at Medina Park Picnic Site for a walk beside the Medina estuary to Dodnor millpond and back along the cyclepath. There was much varied wildlife from start to finish.

First stop was at Hurstake footbridge to admire a stone sculpture of a contemplative sitting lady, inscribed with the sculptor's initials, SFE and date 2007. Nearby is a pentagram inscribed with geographical locations: Nile Delta, Gurnard, Tuvalu (a group of nine atolls in the South Pacific), Texel (an island off the Netherlands coast) and Sunderbans (a national park in Bangladesh). The group then proceeded towards the Rowing Club. Today, no evidence exists of the 19th century Hurstake shipyard where many naval frigates were built and launched into the Medina estuary. As well as the shipyard there was a public house, The Ship & Launch. When the public house ceased trading, the building was converted into a private dwelling which still retains the name. Newport Rowing Club has been at Hurstake since 1863.

Along the shore were typical halophytic plants like Sea Clubrush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), Marsh Mallow (*Althaea officinalis*), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*), Sea Purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*) and Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*). On the shore between Hurstake and Medina Valley Centre, we took note of a row of old boundary posts inscribed with BN (Borough of Newport). At the tideline by Riverview Park, a Grey Heron was feeding while close-by a young Black-headed Gull begged food from its parent.

While everybody was admiring several flowering patches of Sea Heath (*Frankenia laevis*) beside Dodnor millpond, a sudden shout of ‘Peregrine’ drew our attention to a pair of Peregrine Falcons at rest on Vesta’s factory roof and wall. During May, two birds had occupied a nest-box at Vestas and by June, three chicks had hatched and fledged. From Dodnor millpond we walked past several pretty but unpleasantly smelling plants of Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*). Hircinum means goats, of which the smell is reminiscent. A short detour was then made to Stag Lane to observe two particular plants, namely Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*), a third Island sighting for this easily-overlooked small, wiry-looking plant.

We returned to the picnic site by way of the cyclepath, remembered by some of us as the old railway line where steam trains chugged back and forth between Cowes and Newport from 1862 until 1966.

On the way round, Toni took note of the butterflies which included Green-veined White, Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and one Ringlet. Birds were logged down by Jackie. These included two Green Woodpeckers, Magpie, Blackcap, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Collared Dove, Kestrel, Coot, Mallard and Oystercatcher.

Dave added to the floral observations with species such as Corn Sow-thistle (*Sonchus arvensis*), Dyer’s Greenweed (*Genista tinctorial*), Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*), Goat’s Rue (*Galega officinalis*), Hedge Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*), Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*), Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*), Perforate St John’s-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) and many more.

By the time we arrived back at the picnic site, we were all quite astonished at just how much had been seen and discussed. All agreed it had been a most enjoyable morning walk.

Sue Blackwell

Tuesday 16 August

Shanklin Downs

Six members joined the two leaders in the Big Mead car park Shanklin for a 3½ mile walk on the downs and coast. Leaving through the churchyard of St Blasius, the group were soon walking up through the lower pastures, noting that two fields had a monoculture of tall rye grass. There was speculation whether this was for grazing, silage or the bio-digester. Soon the group turned off onto a permissive path through Anne’s Wood, a plantation created by Shanklin Estates to link two existing woodlands. Rejoining a right of way the route climbed through Greatwood Copse with discussions about the former quarries and the source of the Chine stream. After crossing the “kidney” field the path entered an ancient copse on the slopes of the down, and an old track was followed to emerge in the top field. Reaching the ridge above, views were obtained down into the Wroxall valley and, it being a fairly clear day, both Culver Cliff and Tennyson Down could be seen. Following an overcast start the sky now cleared to give sun with a reasonable breeze making for comfortable temperatures. On the way up a number of birds had been observed including an active Green Woodpecker.

This being the highest point of the walk, the party then descended the cool sunken bridleway down to the main road at Cowleaze. It was noted that this bridleway may well have been an old trackway connecting the downs to the sea at Luccombe Chine. Views forward to Luccombe were obtained as the walk descended footpaths though Luccombe Farm to reach the top of the Chine. Two of the party recalled the times they had spent at the adjacent Luccombe Chine Hotel (now closed) and at Dunnose Cottage Tea Rooms (again now closed). A heron had been seen investigating a field with a small water trickle whilst various dragon flies had been noted.

Returning to Shanklin along the coast path the walkers were able to see the ongoing erosion and the changes over time with the properties of Luccombe. Unfortunately, the “jam

man” of Luccombe did not have his table out for home-made preserves. Approaching Big Mead some of the party diverted into Shanklin village for a well-deserved coffee. Many thanks to those who attended for their company and interesting discussions.

John and Jennifer Hague

Wednesday 5th October Ventnor Downs

Nine members led by Andy Butler met on the top of the downs on a very windy morning and, after consulting everyone, it was decided to walk in the more sheltered areas of St Boniface Down with the possibility of looking for 2 Wrynecks that had been seen in the area. Andy talked about the history of the downland and the management, particularly for the Dartford Warbler which seem to be doing well due to the milder winters. Many swallows and house martins were seen as well as 4 Stonechats, 2 Ring ouzel and a Red Admiral butterfly.

Toni Goodley, Joint Co-ordinator

Friday 9th December Christmas Walk

22 people met at the Priory car park, Carisbrooke, on a lovely sunny morning. Bill Shepard showed us the trees in the dip below, always known as ‘Twelve Trees’, but thought to have always been only eleven. We walked through the arch to look at the statue of the Countess of Clare, who founded the priory in 1866. David Biggs gave us a brief history of the Priory, which closed in 1963 & is now administered by the Carisbrooke Priory Trust. Turning into Nunnery Lane we stopped at the gate on our right to admire the extensive view across the fields, with Shanklin Church to the west, St. Boniface to the south and Whitcombe Manor to our right. We stopped at Verbum Dei, now an ecumenical retreat, and Bill Shepard told us the nuns once kept a cow which was housed in the field behind us. Remains of the old gate were just visible in the hedge. Another lovely view was across the land of Newclose Farm, (currently for sale at over £1,000,000), where the deer were enjoying the sunshine. We walked over Mount Joy to look down the river Medina, and returned to enter the cemetery to view the oldest grave & the tomb of the Countess of Clare and her companion, Charlotte Elliot, and that of ‘Poor Little Percy Hayter’ (see separate article by Renella Phillips for more about this). The Countess had bought the land as there was no burial place for Catholics in Ryde, where she had lived.

Crossing the road, we walked to the top of the Shrubbery, Clerken Lane, so-called because it was a route used by clerks from the old Carisbrooke Priory to worship at Sheat Manor, round the castle to the entrance, where Bill showed us a small square metal cover, apparently hiding a ribbon which was stretched across the path to control crowds. He was pleased to find a second cover which had hitherto eluded him! Down the path for some unknown reason called ‘Constitution Hill’ we turned left to Millers Lane, past the site of ‘Paper Mill’ and up Froglands Lane, where John Edmunds pointed out the Wessex Helicopter in the field, which can be rented for bed-&-breakfast for a weekend break.

We enjoyed a hearty soup & home-made bread at the Priory, Alan and Renella Phillips won the IW quiz, and we adjourned to the tearoom for tea and coffee and cake for some!

Mary Edmunds

Archaeology Activities

Much of our time this summer has been spent at Quarr Abbey. This was probably the last 3 week excavation with the Southampton City Archaeology Unit, but it is not the end of our work at Quarr.

Our intrepid Island team of about 20 members was joined by students from various universities and, always welcome, Ron Brading from Southampton. The pressure was on in this final year to revisit some previous trenches, to open new ones in the cloister area and to explore areas of potential interest in some of the surrounding fields.

Our group, led by David Tomalin, was particularly interested in the watercourses and how the Cistercian monks controlled the water flow for purposes such as power generation. Another focus was the North West entrance that would have been used by visitors and traders landing on the coast.

It was not possible to dig all the proposed trenches but we were particularly pleased to expose the archways and adjoining features that were part of the water system ('pleased' perhaps only if you were not one of those clearing hard, sticky clay or masses of animal bones!). Some of the lucky students revealed part of the chapter house remains, uncovering a pillar, stone seating and decorative tiled floor.

We had done geophysics in preparation for this season's work and will continue our research to try and make sense of other parts of the site. Fieldwalking at Newnham Farm produced further evidence of Iron Age, Roman and medieval activity on this site so well situated above Quarr.

We were also able to do more fieldwalking and geophysics at the Garlic Farm as other fields became available to us. And we have a new toy, a Ground Penetrating Radar machine loaned to us by Island Roads. Normally used to find underground pipes this is another method of searching for underground features and disturbed soil. We are experimenting with this, having tried it at Quarr and Carisbrooke church where we looked for evidence of the medieval priory buildings.

In addition, the following indoor meetings were held:

Saturday 22nd October The Separating Island

We are all aware that the Island was once joined to the mainland but Paul Bingham's talk covered evidence from the past 200 years that showed how our understanding of the process of separation has developed.

In 1815, Smith's geological map of England and Wales was the first of its kind in the world. His work on stratigraphy, useful for agriculture and mining, fed into Webster's illustrations for Englefield's 'Isle of Wight' which was published in 1816. His detailed illustrations clearly show this deepening knowledge

In 1851 Reverend William Fox wrote to the 'Geologist' magazine in response to previous correspondence about how and when the Island was formed. Whilst some of his evidence was inaccurate, he noticed the similarity between the chalk here and in Dorset and used both geology and fossil evidence to suggest that a 'Solent' river estuary was flooded after the collapse of a chalk ridge between the Needles and Purbeck. He was also confident that this would have happened 'far back in time'. This theory has prevailed until the present day.

It was well into the twentieth century when a fuller understanding developed, for example with the surveying of the palaeo-channels, the ancient river beds now in the floor of the Solent and the English Channel. It now seems that the flooding was caused by more than the sudden collapse of the chalk ridge. Our own David Tomalin has dived in the Solent and told us how he was struck by the way in which the current was lifting the ground surface even as he watched.

We came up to date when Mike Cotterrill shared photos taken this summer in the Purbeck area as he tried to gain a sense of what the ancient landscape may have been like. He also showed us stunning photos of the Isle of Wight landscape and cliff faces to point out the

sites of ancient river beds. The story continues. Not only do new research and advances in technology enable a greater understanding, but the coastline continues to change. I await the next instalment.

Saturday 26th November Ice Age to Iron Age

Delian Backhouse-Fry described the geographical changes to the Isle of Wight over some 15,000 years and how this has influenced how people survived here.

As they adapted to change they also altered the landscape and so caused further change. Evidence for all this can still be seen in the landscape, not to mention all the artefacts that have been found. Delian referred to evidence from several archaeologists but also explained how the Archaeology section has looked at the evidence through observation, artefact collection, excavation and geophysics.

Delian also referred to the wider environment of Britain and Europe and to present day influences. For example, the currents that bring French fish boxes and cargo from shipwrecks to our shores today are the same currents that have driven trade for thousands of years.

Climate change not only formed and altered the shape and size of the Island but also the flora and fauna that lived here. Humans, plants and animals responded to the changes in temperature after the last Ice Age ended but we can trace continuity of occupation from the Mesolithic period about 8000 years ago before the Solent and the Island were formed, flooding the Mesolithic site at Bouldnor.

Evidence from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages is easy to see in the form of barrows and ancient trackways and boundaries. It is easy to forget how much of the Island was wooded before it was cleared by these early farmers. Through this period the settlers responded to the changing weather conditions by moving the areas they farmed, again affecting the landscape and the plants.

We are fortunate to have so many viewpoints from where we can see how ancient sites connect with each other and with mainland sites. This has been important throughout our history and continues to be so today.

As a case study, Delian outlined the history of occupation at the Garlic Farm over several thousand years, evidenced by artefacts and geophysics.

This was a detailed and wide-ranging talk. For those of us who have spent several years exploring with the Archaeology section it was fascinating to hear how a diverse range of activities and sites came together to contribute to a fuller picture of our beautiful and fascinating Island.

Helen Jackson

Saturday 16th July Geological ramble on the closed railway from Shide to Newchurch

Walking closed railways is hardly an unfamiliar pastime (e.g., Holland, 2016), but investigating a closed line while following a geological ‘field guide’ published 102 years ago is, at least, unusual. The geological ramble on the closed railway line from Shide to Newchurch was not a collecting trip to visit quarries, coastal cliffs and other exposures. Rather, it leaned heavily on the third edition of *Stanford's Geological Atlas of Great Britain and Ireland with Plates of Characteristic Fossils preceded by Descriptions of the Geological Structure of Great Britain and Ireland and their Counties; of the Channel Islands; and of the Features observable along the Principal Lines of Railway* (Woodward, 1914). This was written as an explanation of the gross features of the geology of the British Isles as seen from a railway carriage. Our perspective as a party of walkers was somewhat different to that of

Woodward, as we were both slower and less elevated. This meant that we could appreciate both the larger scale features, such as changing topography and drainage, but were also able to make observations that were local in scale and might have escaped the notice of the rail traveller of 100 years ago.

Newport to Merstone to Sandown and Merstone to Ventnor West were minor lines operated by the Isle of Wight Central Railway (Allen & MacLeod, 1967, map on p. 6). Both served essentially rural areas, but connected Cowes to resorts on the east coast. Sandown to Shide opened in 1875; Shide to Pan Lane opened in 1879; and Newport was finally reached in 1880. The Newport to Sandown line closed on 6th February, 1956 (the Merstone to Ventnor West line had already closed in 1952).

Sixteen walkers met in Shide on a sunny morning by the information board which describes the life and work of the distinguished geophysicist John Milne (1850-1913) (Kabrna, 2007). The party was comprised of Stephen Donovan (leader), Jo Bingham (motorized support), Paul Bingham, Angela Clark, Mike Cotterill, Pelham Donovan, Mary Edmunds, Fiona Fearnhead (Natural History Museum, London), Inge Holder, Steve Hutt, Jeremy Lockwood, Bob Matthews, Maggie Nelmes, Shaun Smith, Margaret and Hugh Walding. The excursion started at Shide, rather than Newport, because the traces of the railway between these two closed stations have been eradicated since closure 60 years ago.

To the south of Shide the route initially keeps to the west of the stream, which extends to both sides about halfway to Blackwater; the path is paved with pebbles, mainly of flint. (Railways, of course, follow the easiest paths wherever possible, such as river valleys, avoiding prominent topographic features.) Between Shide and Blackwater, the route moves onto the Cretaceous greensands. At about the mid-point between the former stations and shortly before a bridge over the stream, St George's Down was seen through the trees and to the north-east. This is a prominent Lower Greensand feature, mantled by plateau gravels which still appear to be quarried, but which were also reported by Woodward (1914, p. 143).

At this point Paul Bingham gave an informative account of the local valley gravel deposits, their palaeontology and correlation (Fig. 1A). Paul explained that the group had reached the position where the railway had skirted the edge of the location of Pan Gravel Pit. The pit had opened in 1912 and was hand dug. On his return from the First World War, Hubert Frederic Poole, a founder member of IWNHAS, had struck up a relationship with the gravel diggers and taught them to recognise Palaeolithic implements. Poole estimated that they found one palaeolith for every 200 tons of gravel dug. At the base of the pit, in bluish sandy clay, the workers found a tooth of *Elephas antiquus* and a yard away a handaxe. Paul suggested that if found together today in linked archaeological context, the finding would be sensational being compatible with the butchering of an elephant (although not necessarily a kill), 40,000 or more years ago. David Tomalin (2016) has given the most recent commentary on the Pleistocene gravels of the Medina gap at Newclose and Great Pan.

Closer to Blackwater, the bank of the river on the south-west side of the path had been strengthened by gabions enclosing cobbles of Carboniferous Limestone imported from the mainland. Further on still, a false exposure of limestone has been crafted by the path from breeze blocks, cement and recent seashells.

The valley of the River Medina is left at Blackwater, the river flowing from the south while the path trends south-east. About the central third of the route from Blackwater to Merstone is off the line of the railway and on a parallel minor road, the Stenbury Trail. The gravel quarry on St. George's Down was clearly seen from this road. The Cretaceous substrate to the landscape is emphasised between Blackwater and Merstone by the common cobbles and pebbles of chalk and flints in the soil (with rarer clasts of concrete). These are derived from further south, the nearby low hills being composed of Cretaceous greensand. A winter search of these erratics might produce a reasonable collection of chalk fossils. Back on

the path of the disused railway, it is bordered by old concrete fence posts before Merstone Junction. These relicts are probably of railway origin and possibly produced locally from quarried chalk or other limestone.

The drainage divide is just past the former junction station at Merstone. The River Medina and its tributaries drain to the north-west; the River Yar drains north-east and east. The track bed from Merstone to Sandown drops and curves tightly north-east and then east, following the valley of the river. The soils are a prominent deep red colour as the line straightens towards Horryngford. There are also more of the concrete fence posts, already noted. From about midway between Merstone and Horryngford to Newchurch and beyond the track bed is in the floodplain of the River Yar, the Yar River Trail to Sandown.

The grey tarmac of the path between Horryngford and Newchurch demonstrated two aspects of interest to the engineering geologist. Just to the east of the site of the former Horryngford station and the A3056 road, and for a few hundred metres, the surface has been disrupted by robust roots growing beneath the tarmac. This feature was only common in this area and a discussion produced several ideas as to why such growth and disruption should be concentrated here. Further on, parts of the path were cracking parallel to the southern side. Here was a simple indicator of incipient land movement where the path on the same side as the stream was cracking as the riverbank slowly eroded away.

The original intention for this excursion had been to carry on to Sandown and some attendees did continue to this destination. However, during two ‘dry runs’ by the leader earlier in July, it was decided that the path from Newchurch to Sandown added little to the geological features already noted. Further, the presence of the Pedallers Café in Newchurch provided a comfortable site where the walkers could relax, enjoy a drink and a sandwich, and reminisce.

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Professor Stephen K. Donovan and Paul Bingham

Botany

Sunday 2nd July Wydcombe

A group of twelve followed the footpaths of the Wydcombe estate past Moorhills, until we arrived at the access point to marsh lying to the north-east of the house. This was a different marsh to the one we visited last year and we were interested to see how it compared. It proved to be less species-rich but nevertheless had a good range of marshland plants which we enjoyed seeing and identifying. Of particular interest was a good display of the uncommon Heath Spotted Orchid, *Dacylorhiza maculata*. We recorded 51 species. We then followed a different route back to Wydcombe manor and visited the marsh to the southwest of the house, which was the subject of our visit last year. We were delighted to find a local abundance of the uncommon Marsh Arrow-grass, *Triglochin palustre*, which we were too early to see last year, together with several different sedges. However, the star of the show was a magnificent Golden-ringed Dragonfly which posed obligingly for many of us to take photographs

Wednesday 24th August / Thursday 1st September Wood calamint monitoring

Eight members of the botany group met on two separate occasions to monitor the flowering of wood calamint both on the original sites and the translocation plots. Access to some of the plots established in recent years had become impossible because of the regrowth of bramble and clematis. However, it was still possible to walk over the plot established in 2014 and we can report that the plant has taken well here, and on the woodland plot established earlier in 2016. The plants set out on the cleared slope were very difficult to find and do not appear to be doing as well as those under light woodland cover.

The lay-bys had a lot of completing rank vegetation but we could assess the plant's flowering. It is still present in the parts of the site we would expect, but it was difficult to see. The original translocation plot has not fared too well this year as clearance of rank vegetation is needed periodically. There are plans for this to occur in the coming spring and it will be interesting to see if the plant has coped with the bramble cover when we assess its flowering next year.

Saturday 10th September Nansen Hill

The weather during the morning did not bode well for botanical survey work of any kind, let alone on a steep grassy slope, but as one of our group had travelled over from Hythe, three of us set off from Newport to see what the weather was like in Ventnor. We were joined by a fourth person when we reached the car park, and decided to take shelter in the car to review the possibilities.

After about 20 minutes the drizzle stopped so we made our way carefully up the slope to the top where the sward is generally richer in flowering plants. In particular, we were looking for autumn gentian (*Gentianella amarella*) which has been found here in the past. Unfortunately, the grass was rather long and none were visible, but our total species count for the afternoon was 58 which was quite good considering the conditions. There was a brief interlude where we could enjoy the view over Sandown Bay to Culver Cliff but heavy drizzle set in soon after so we retreated homewards.

Saturday 24th September Walters Copse

A warm sunny afternoon was ideal for our annual meeting to look for galls, leaf miners and microfungi. Setting off along the main ride we progressed very slowly as

members of the group found all sorts of evidence of invertebrate activity on plant leaves, stems and seed heads and Dr Biggs gave a running commentary on our finds.

Out of the total of 22 gall causers found, Oak (*Quercus robur*) and willow (*Salix cinerea*) were the host species for 7 and 5 respectively and there were 3 new gall causers recorded for the site. Leaf mining organisms, principally moth and fly larvae had also been busy and we found signs of 23. 11 were new species for Walters Copse. They are identified firstly by the plant on which they are found and then by the shape of the tunnels they make in the leaf tissue- whether it is a corridor (long and thin, spiral curved etc) a blotch or a tentiform blotch – where the blotch is raised slightly.

Sixteen microfungi were found, with half previously unrecorded for the site. They were categorised as rusts, powdery mildews and leaf-spot fungi.

Anne Marston

Fungi

Saturday 24th September

Parkhurst Forest

A group of 14 keen forayers met in the main carpark at Parkhurst Forest for our first foray of the year. The weather had been variable and we were not sure whether we would find very much. In the event, we had a very successful foray and were able to name 41 species. These included two very fresh specimens of the Cauliflower Fungus. However, this was not the commonly found *Sparassis crispa* but the much rarer *Sparassis spathulata* (also known as *S. lacunosa*) which has a much more open, looser structure. It has been previously recorded from Parkhurst Forest in 1997 by Derek Reid. There was a good showing of the rare tooth fungi in their usual location. All the specimens we saw were the Velvet Tooth, *Hydnellum spongiosipes*.

Sunday 16th October

East Knighton Wood

Iain and Nicky Eaton kindly allowed us access to their private woodland for our foray. Most of the conifers, including larches, from the days when the Forestry Commission owned this ancient woodland, have now been removed by the owners, leaving the native broadleaves. We found quite a few beechwood specialist fungi which we do not usually meet on our forays. Altogether, we were able to identify 75 species. At the end of the foray, the Eatons very kindly provided us with tea and biscuits from their portacabin in the woods.

We were sorry to be shown evidence of ash die back (*Chalara fraxinea*) on some very young trees. Having been shown the symptoms, several members went on to find evidence of ash die back in other woods scattered across the Island

Sunday 6th November

Wydcombe Estate, Whitwell

It was a bright sunny morning, but cold with touches of ground frost, when 16 of us met up to foray in the woods and amongst trees on the National Trust's Wydcombe estate. However, this autumn has been remarkable for the lack of rainfall and we struggled to find many fungi apart from those associated with dead wood and microfungi and there was no sign of the rare species we had hoped to find. Honey fungus, *Armillaria mellea*, was very much in evidence. It appears to be having a 'good' year generally, this autumn. Despite unfavourable conditions, we were able to identify 54 species.

Saturday 19th November**Osborne House**

We enjoyed a mostly bright and sunny morning at Osborne, with a few heavy showers, thanks to the courtesy of English Heritage. Our group of sixteen were joined by Jo and India, two of the gardeners on the Estate, who were able to direct us to where fungi were showing. The Ornamental Garden in front of the house was a visual treat with troops of colourful waxcap fungi on the lawn. In addition to several species of waxcap (*Hygrocybe* spp.), we found a good variety of fungi. Particularly interesting were two species which we rarely record, *Amanita submembranacea*, a greyish Amanita with a volva but no ring on the stem (left below) , and *Hemimycena delectabilis*, a tiny white *Mycena*-like fungus growing in groups in mossy grassland (right below).

On the grassy banks of the Long Walk, behind the house, we found further waxcaps including the stunning Crimson Waxcap, *Hygrocybe puniceus*, and the pink ballerina waxcap, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*, bringing our total recorded to nine. Altogether, we were able to identify 57 species

Sunday 4th December**Ryde Cemetery**

Our final foray of the season was held at Ryde Cemetery, where Jackie and myself had made some interesting finds last autumn. Nine of us met in beautiful sunny conditions but it has been cold and dry with ground frosts in the week so we were not optimistic. In the event, we identified 32 species, better than we thought but sadly the few waxcap fungi we found, including two specimens of the Pink Ballerina Waxcap, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*, had been badly frosted. The real find of the day was a group of the rare earthtongue *Microglossum olivaceum* which we had only previously recorded in Northwood Cemetery and, like the waxcaps, is an indicator species of old, unimproved grassland, a habitat for which cemeteries are particularly important. We found other earth tongues in various places but, on microscopic examination, they all proved to be *Geoglossum fallax*. Afterwards, we were very kindly welcomed into the Learning Centre for warmth and refreshments. Thankyou Ann Barrett for making this possible.

Full details of our finds can be found on the Society website.

Colin Pope

Ornithology**Saturday 20th August****Brading Marshes**

Very high winds and showers were predicted and sure enough delivered for our nine members who attended the meeting at Brading Marsh RSPB Nature Reserve. We met at the top end of Laundry Lane and as we were about to set off down came some heavy rain so we scuttled back to our cars for cover. Once this had passed we walked a few steps to look over the marsh at St Helen's end and almost the first bird spotted was a lovely Marsh Harrier. She gave us some very good views on a number of occasions. Great Black Backed Gull and Herring Gull were flying beyond the reed beds. In the near field were some Canada Geese, a blue phased Snow Goose and one Barnacle Goose with two pale odd geese, presumably domestic cross. It then came on to rain heavily so we ran back to our cars.

Once the shower had passed we started again and did hear Chaffinch and Robin and saw some Grey Heron and eight Cormorant. Because of the high winds the passerines were either absent or keeping a very low profile. We had to take shelter once more under the trees for a few minutes but that was the last time the rain fell. We walked along the raised footpath

by Bexley Point to the new bridge wet area where we managed to add to the species list. There were a few Swallow and 2 House Martin, Mallard, Moorhen and Coot. The ducks were in eclipse, but we saw at least 12 Teal and a Gadwall. Some of the group were lucky enough to spot a Water Rail. Of the birds usually seen on our walks we noted Buzzard, Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie, Dunnock, Kestrel, Wren and Starling. Walking back up Laundry Lane we took a look at the angler's pond and saw a Mute Swan and we then arrived dry back to our cars. 30 species were noted.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 18th September Ventnor Downs

16 people, including a visitor from Miami, met on Ventnor Downs by the radio station for a walk in the area. We were hoping to see some migrants passing through and were not disappointed. These included Chiffchaff, Willow/Chiffs, Common Whitethroat, Whinchat and Stonechat, Wheatear, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher. We also saw Dartford Warbler, Buzzard, Kestrel, Raven, Swallow, Meadow Pipit and Chaffinch as well as Blue Tit and Great Tit. In all 26 species were recorded.

Jackie Hart

Saturday 22nd October Culver Down

13 members met at the far car park on Culver Down on a lovely morning for a walk in the area. This was another morning when we had a fair number of birds passing through. There were at least nine Robin, a Kestrel, a small flock of Goldfinch, Crow, at least two Swallows, a Raven, several Woodpigeon and three Magpie. A Blackbird was seen plus a couple of Herring Gull and quite at least 5 pairs of Stonechat. At least 20 Meadow Pipit were flying around and four Pied Wagtail, one of which was a juvenile with a yellow on its face. Four Chiffchaff were seen, three Wren and a Dartford Warbler, Great Tit, Dunnock, Green Woodpecker and a flock of about 16 Long-tailed Tit and two Buzzard. The last species spotted was a Black Redstart sitting on top of the Earl of Yarborough monument. A very enjoyable meeting with 23 species noted.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 13th November Yarmouth marshes

17 members and one guest met in Thorley Road for a walk along the cycle track in Yarmouth on a beautiful and sunny morning. As the autumn has been unusually dry and mild, the water meadows at Rofford Marsh had little water. However, we did see Mallard, Lapwing, Moorhen, Teal and Wigeon and, on the return walk, a well camouflaged Common Snipe. Winter thrushes were spotted flying and in the trees, mainly Fieldfare but some Redwing. A Greenfinch was spotted in one of the trees too. A Swallow was seen flying round the Mill House and it also landed on the guttering. Two were spotted there on the reconnoitre on Friday, so had a late brood been raised here? A Pied Wagtail also liked the roof of the Mill and House Sparrows were heard and seen nearby. On the Station Pond, seven Redshank and 85 Black-tailed Godwit were roosting. On the waste area to the south of the Mill were two male and one female Stonechat and another two were seen on the estuary near Mill Copse. Two Mute Swan, an Oystercatcher, two Little Grebe and eight Curlew were on the Western Yar as were at least 500 Brent Geese. In a field opposite were 15 Canada Geese and one Greylag Goose. About 30 Golden Plover flew by. On the marsh opposite there were at least three Little Egret, a Grey Heron and a Shelduck. On our return trip, we heard the explosive call of a Cetti's Warbler, saw a Sparrowhawk and two Buzzard. In all we identified 48 species on a lovely morning.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 11th December**Shide to Blackwater**

A good turnout of 16 members was greeted by an exceptionally sunny and clear day, ideal for the leisurely walk along the former rail track from Shide to Blackwater. A varied list of species was observed and noted, along with a hopeful wish to view a small number of Siskins recently seen in the area, the latter wish which remained unfulfilled. Otherwise, whilst discounting an increasing flock of the human species gathering around hundreds of Christmas Trees at the Shide end and start point for the walk along the old rail track, around 'Shide Trees' were found Wood Pigeons, Rooks, Robins, Blackbirds, two Song Thrushes in song.

The field immediately south of 'Shide Trees' produced four male and three female Pheasants, three Mistle Thrushes, six Magpies together in the same tree, with further Magpies along the route. Feeding in Alder trees were numerous Blue Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Goldfinches, at least four Goldcrests and two lively Tree-creepers, the latter of which everyone saw at least one.

At the Blackwater end, on the track, members spotted one Grey Heron and one Little Egret in the hen enclosure, whilst one Grey Wagtail was observed by the nearby man-made pond alongside the track, one Pied Wagtail at the Blackwater Station house, several House Sparrows by the cottages on Sandy Lane. Other species noted included Great Tits, Dunnock, Starlings, Wrens, one Jay, one Buzzard, male and female Chaffinches, one Coal Tit, and one Green Woodpecker heard calling.

Overhead during the morning flew Herring Gulls, Black-headed Gulls, Carrion Crows, four Mallard (Christmas quackers), bringing a total of 33 species observed and noted to conclude what, in essence, was a very enjoyable and beautiful day.

Roger H. Blackwell.

Entomology**Tuesday 31st May****Brading Down**

This meeting was abandoned due to poor weather conditions.

Saturday 9th July**Dunsbury Farm**

This was an opportunity for the section to look at this recent acquisition by the National Trust, and get a sense for the range of species that might be found at the site. Our visit concentrated on the sheltered footpath running north from the farm and on the ridge running west from the northern end of this route. On the whole, the weather was dry, but there was a brief spell of light drizzle. We were greeted by a family of kestrels near one of the barns, and a pair of stock-doves in the same area. A raven and two buzzards flew over, with a whitethroat near the upper end of the lane.

As far as insects were concerned, most interest focussed on a couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies patrolling the lane and giving excellent views. Eight species of butterfly were found: the most interesting were on the southern slope behind Compton Farm: Dark Green Fritillary, Small Copper and Marbled White. The same areas held Diamondback moths and Six-spot Burnets, while a Large Yellow Underwing was seen in the lane. Among other species were a fine longhorn beetle, *Strangalia maculata*, as well as Seven-spot and Harlequin Ladybirds. Two Dark and three Speckled Bush Crickets were found in the lane.

Tuesday 9th August**Martin's Wood, Newchurch**

The morning had been very sunny but conditions clouded up somewhat in the afternoon. Seven members met and saw a wide range of species. These included thirteen species of butterfly, helped by a large buddleia bush just north of the car park which had good

numbers of Peacocks, Red Admirals, and Small Whites along with a few Commas and a Painted Lady. Other butterflies seen on the reserve included Holly Blue, Common Blue and Brown Argus. Caterpillars of the Cinnabar Moth were found on Ragwort, while adults of Mother-of-pearl, Rush Veneer, and the grass moth *Agriphila straminella* were seen. No fewer than nine new records were recorded for the site. Four of these records were for moths and included *Stigmella floslactella* and *Stigmella salicis*, mining Hazel and Grey Willow respectively. Another new species for the site was *Phytoliriomyza hilarella* which mines on Bracken. Other insect species of interest included, Green Shieldbug, Migrant Hawker, a number of Speckled Bush Crickets and Common Field Grasshoppers, and the attractive hoverfly *Xanthogramma pedissequum*.

There were a number of other observations made during the visit. Among the birds seen were Jay, Green Woodpecker and parties of Swallows. An Adder was also found.

Saturday 20th August

Mill Copse, Yarmouth

Three members joined David Biggs on an afternoon that remained blustery and very showery. Despite the poor weather there were a number of successes, including two new moths for the site. These were *Mompha langiella* mining Enchanter's Nightshade, and *Phyllonorycter salicicolella* making a tentiform blotch mine on Grey Willow. A third new record for the site was of the fungus *Sphaerotheca dipsacacearum*, a powdery mildew on Teasel. Larva of the tortrix moth *Endothenia gentianaeana* were found in Teasel heads. The weather limited the number of species on the wing, but both Large White and Meadow Brown were recorded. Other species of entomological interest found as adults were Dark Bush Cricket and the Variable Longhorn beetle, *Stenocorus meridianus*. In all twenty two species were recorded.

Saturday 15th October

Shalfleet Quay

Unusually for the section this was a morning meeting. There was a dull if dry start to the day, although it did brighten later. One feature of the meeting was the backdrop of summer and winter migrants in the area. There were a number of Teal on Shalfleet Lake and regular parties of Swallows and a few House Martins passing overhead.

In entomological terms the meeting was most striking for the number of galls that we were able to study and compare on the Oak trees, as we walked by the hedges between the water and the access road to the quay. Common, Silk Button and Smooth Spangle Galls were found as well as the Oyster Gall. Artichoke and Marble Galls were also seen. All these are made by gall wasps. A seventh gall on oak, is caused by a gall midge *Macrodiplosis roboris*. Two new species were found for the reserve. These were *Aulagromyza heringi*, a fly which mines ash leaves, and a damsel bug *Nabis ferus*.

Richard Smout

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Many thanks

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTES

New Members

Deaths

Society Officers

President Dr Colin Pope, 14 High Park Road, Ryde, Isle of Wight PO33 1BP
General Secretary Ms J. Tolley, 31 Glynn Close, Seaview, IOW. PO34 5JZ
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NEXT BULLETIN

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for 1st January 2017 to 30th June 2017 should be sent to:-

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

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 1st July 2017