

# Formby Civic News

The Formby Civic Society Newsletter



www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk



November 2008

## A New Future for Formby Powerhouse!

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Photo: Courtesy DK-Architects

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## Two unusual developments .....

This issue of Formby Civic News contains, we would like to think, at least two unusual "rays of sunshine" to lighten these increasingly dark days. The first is the unveiling of plans for the conversion of our 'problematic' old Power Station to luxurious living accommodation consisting of sixty apartments with associated facilities, car-parking, etc in an interesting open landscape, alongside the River Alt.

The plans were seen publicly for the first time at The Swimming Pool on 11th November, when the scheme's proponent, local resident Mr Mike McComb, together with members of his architectural and planning team were present to explain

the proposals in detail and answer questions. A fuller account of these proposals (yet to become an actual planning application) is to be found on p 7 of this issue.

Another pleasant surprise, of a very different variety, is reported by Dr Phil Smith in his 'Wildlife Notes' for October, (p 12). Native Black Poplar (*Populus nigra ssp. betulifolia*), once a very common and very useful tree south of a line from the Seven to the Wash, has now become very rare and therefore the provisional identification of nearly 300 possible specimens in woodland between Victoria Road and Albert Road is a remarkable and happy event. R.Y.



Photo: Courtesy DK-Architects

# Thomas Fresh Celebrated!



Photo: Tony Bonney

Organised by the Civic Society with support from 'Express Sefton 08' special event was held at the Freshfield Hotel, Freshfield on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2008 to celebrate one of the many links between Liverpool and Formby - an 'outlier' event during Capital of Culture Year with music by the Jill Fielding Band. A Hot-pot Supper was supplied by Priory Kitchens, Formby.

Attended by about 80 people, the available tickets were all sold some three weeks prior to the event. Those who managed to get tickets enjoyed an unusual evening's entertainment combined with insights into both Liverpool's and Formby's history, particularly on how Freshfield got its name and identity.

After an initial drink, guests were welcomed by Society Chair, Ray Derricott, following which Dr Reg Yorke provided a presentation on the background story, which he has researched with assistance from staff both past and present of the Liverpool Record Office and elsewhere. This story is about the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century recognition of the reasons for the then dreadful health of the inhabitants of towns such as Liverpool, first raised at national level by Chadwick, and followed here in Liverpool by the appointment of the country's first Medical Officer of Health (Dr William Duncan), the country's first 'Sanitary' Inspector (then called 'Inspector of Nuisances'- a former Police Inspector, Thomas Fresh) and

also the UK's first municipal engineer (James Newlands). This trio transformed conditions and demonstrated to the world the need for and the way to achieve satisfactory public health in industrial cities like Liverpool. This is a quite dramatic story with some unexpected twists but also a story which also relates very much indeed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of Freshfield and its delicious locally cultivated delicacy, asparagus.\*

This presentation was followed by a hot-pot supper provided by Prior Kitchens to music from the Jill Fielding Band.

Val Walsh, Chair of the Duncan Society, then spoke about the significance of this pioneer Liverpool work, not only locally but as a demonstration project for the rest of the UK and indeed the rest of the world. The lessons then learned are still

"This story is about the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century recognition of the reasons for the then dreadful health of the inhabitants of towns such as Liverpool."

very relevant in very many developing countries today. She then proposed a Toast to Thomas Fresh.

A response and thanks for this were then provided very convincingly by well-known actor member David Davies in suitable costume and manner. David really entered into the spirit of Thomas Fresh and his earthy background, using the vivid pen-portrait provided for us by none other than the great American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, who, living in Southport for 10 months in 1859 actually met and conversed with Fresh as fellow commuters on the Liverpool — Southport steam train!

This very interesting and happy evening ended with more music. This was a unique occasion and the Society is grateful to Express Sefton and the various participants for giving their help to make it such a great success.

\*Thomas Fresh made a very significant contribution to the improvement of living conditions and health of the inhabitants of central Liverpool in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Remarkably, he was also the person who obtained the construction of a new railway station at Freshfield. This in turn led to the growth of the area of Formby which since his time has been known as 'Freshfield'

R. A. Yorke

## Special General Meeting

Some 20 members stayed behind after the General meeting presentation on Friday 26 September to consider some amendments to the constitution. These have been discussed on several occasions in recent years and were listed for the AGM in April; in the event some late comments from the Charity Commission led to the item being deferred. However all is now well, the recently proposed clauses now all conform to the Commission's requirements and the SGM heard an outline of the proposals. The committee recommended the changes to better reflect issues such as the present scope of the Society's interests and current practices of subscriptions and financial control. **The amendments were unanimously agreed.**

The committee had already considered, and notified members of, the practical steps that should follow, but felt that the proposals should be formally approved at the SGM. This implementing resolution sparked considerable discussion, especially the question of corporate membership. After quite a lengthy debate the resolution was carried by 13 votes to 2 with 3 abstentions.



**Summer Outing to Holker Hall and Cartmel Village, 12th September**

Twenty seven members and friends assemble at the Grapes Hotel and where soon away by coach, with a small contingent following by car. We arrived at Holker Hall by 10.30am and over coffee got our bearings and an outline of the day's (very informal) programme. We then enjoyed a leisurely and informative wander round the beautiful (still privately owned and lived-in) house and gardens.

In addition to the availability of printed information, there were several helpful and informative guides, who could explain the history of the house, its family and their estate. Close to the house is the Lakeland Motor Museum and many members also enjoyed looking at its magnificent collection of old motor vehicles of various dates and states of preservation. It was interesting to see work on some of the cars actually going on.

The beautiful gardens, set in idyllic Furness countryside, contain many features of interest and, as the weather was good, were also much enjoyed until informal self-service lunch in the Courtyard Restaurant. By 2pm, it was time to leave the Hall and motor a short distance down winding lanes to Cartmel Village, where we looked at the beautiful and interesting remnant of Cartmel Priory, which since the Reformation has served as the Parish Church. We had time to wander round the old village and finally, after taking Afternoon Tea, at the Kings Head. left Cartmel,

Members who attended the second lecture of the Society's Winter Programme on 24th October will have heard Mr. Dave McAleavy, Head of Coast and Countryside in the Council's Leisure Services Department, report on the present position concerning the projected Visitor Centre on the Lifeboat Road site. He confirmed that there was no longer any prospect of a children's Play Centre as a nucleating component of a Visitor Centre, as intimated in the last issue of the *Formby Civic News*, and that the Visitor Centre project was now devoid of any funding at present. However, Mr. McAleavy emphasised that the Council was committed to the project and intended to solicit grants for a stand alone Visitor Centre from potential donors as they allocate resources in the next round of funding. Earlier, Mr. McAleavy had addressed the Formby Parish Council at its October meeting, when it was agreed that a working group would be formed comprised initially of representatives from the Council, the Formby Area Committee and the Formby Parish Council. In the discussion that followed Mr McAleavy's

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"review how best to get the various bodies with interests in Formby Point to cooperate in effective management of the area"

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talk to the Society, he confirmed the Society would be invited to send a representative to the group. At its meeting on 18th August, the Amenities and Planning Subgroup had a long discussion on how the Society could assist in promoting the Visitor Centre and it explored the possibility of finding private funding (as opposed to QANGO funding) for the project. Society Committee member John Houston, who was co-opted for the discussion, undertook to prepare a paper on the history of the project, which was first mooted in 1981, and to review how best to get the various bodies with interests in Formby Point to cooperate in effective management of the area and in making a visitor

Centre a reality. The matter will remain on the agenda of the Amenities & Planning Subgroup for the foreseeable future.

There was much adverse criticism of the decision by the Formby Area Committee, taken at its meeting on 18 August, to fell the trees in the pavement area in the vicinity of Victoria Buildings, near Freshfield station, and to repave as necessary; the cost of the work, viz. £5084, would have been paid for out of the Committee's own budget. The motivation for the decision was the very poor state of the four existing brick planters resulting from the growth of the trees which have become too large for the planters that contain them. The presence of large roots above pavement level necessitates the felling of the trees for safety reasons, once the planters have been removed. In addition to the distress that local people feel on account of the loss of these trees, there is little doubt that a good deal of the anger which the decision generated arose because traders and residents were unaware the matter was under consideration until after the decision had been made.

The Council's Tree and Woodlands Group, which has responsibility for trees on the highway, although it does not consult with the public when making decisions which are determined by safety considerations, aims to inform the public before work commences of what it proposes to do and to invite comment; however, in this case, even they found that they never had time to post their notice before clearance work had actually begun. However, the Formby Area Committee, at its meeting on 30 October, resolved that, in addition to the work it had already approved, the trees to be felled should be replaced by the planting of eight trees (with tree-guards) at an additional cost of £3120, to be paid for out of the Committee's own budget; the choice of species has still to be made. So we can now look forward, in the fullness of time, to the street scene at this prominent site once again giving

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# Altmouth Pumping Station - an important meeting by D. Brennan



Photo: Mersey and Weaver River Authority

Issues surrounding the refurbishment of the Altmouth pumping station (PS) continue to have a prominent place in the work of the Amenities and Planning Subgroup. On 31 October, Amenities & Planning Subgroup member Jack Gore and I attended a meeting with the Regional Director of the Environment Agency (EA), Tony Dean, and two of his colleagues, Ian Rowlands, recently appointed Regional Operational Implementation Manager, and Steve Crowe, Regional Delivery Manager, which was convened by our MP, Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas and held at her residence. Before giving an account of the meeting, it will be helpful if I first recall the situation leading up to it.

I reported in the August issue of the *Formby Civic News* that, at the meeting on 1 August, when the EA's representative had said that, while consultations may take place, the refurbishment decisions had been made and would not be changed, Mrs. Curtis-Thomas had vigorously rejected that position. She said that she did not wish the EA to make any further decisions relating to the refurbishment until meaningful discussions had taken place with her and the Society, and that she would seek ministerial support to that end; she also demanded that the Form G Report (the application for additional funding to provide for an on-site die-

sel-electric generator) should be disclosed forthwith. In the event, the EA's Regional Director said he wished to speak to Mrs. Curtis-Thomas before the consultation progressed further. There followed a very frustrating two months during which either Mrs. Curtis-Thomas or the Regional Director was unavailable for the conversation to take place; during this period, the Project Manager at first declined to speak to me concerning matters which had

"she did not wish the EA to make any further decisions relating to the refurbishment until meaningful discussions had taken place"

already been agreed pending the conversation between the Regional Director and Mrs. Curtis-Thomas. Earlier, the EA had refused to release the Form G Report because it had not yet been signed off, but the EA had promised to release it when it eventually it was signed off; when, with the passage of time, it had been signed off, they still refused to release it before the anticipated conversation had taken place. Likewise, they refused for the same reason to put into writing their abandonment of the figure of 52 cu. metre/sec for the maximum flow rate at the pumping station, regardless of the severity of the storm event, which they had agreed at

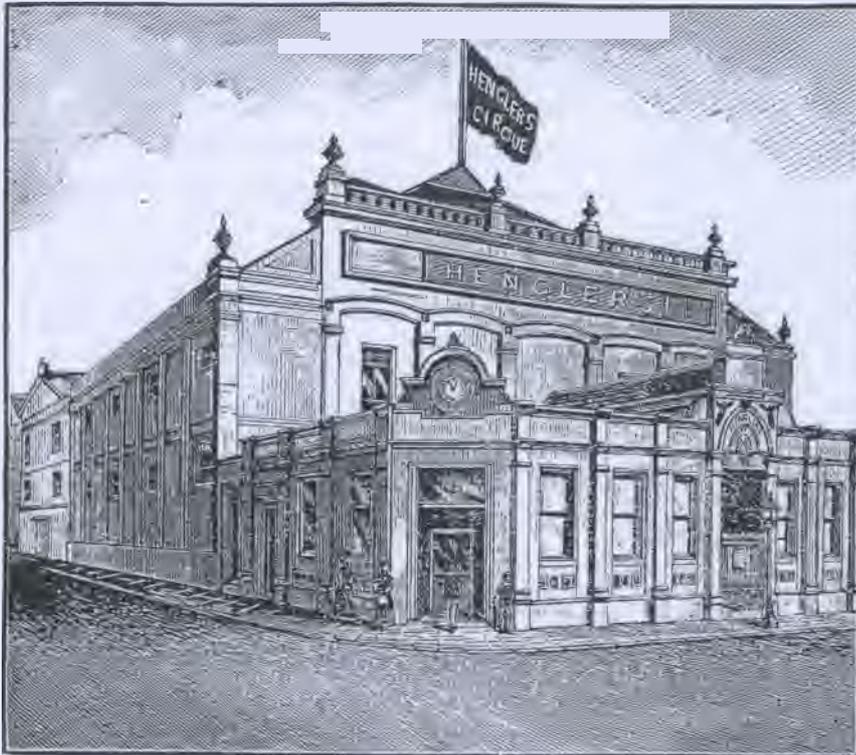
the 1 August meeting. It was only after further exchanges that the Project Manager eventually disclosed the Form G Report and that he confirmed in writing that the EA had been in error in specifying the 52 cu. metre/sec figure and that the EA would no longer refer to the figure in discussion or in scheme promotional literature, and, further, that they accepted our interpretation of the modelling data to mean that the maximum flow rate was considerably greater, at between 60 cu. metre/sec and 74 cu. metre/sec.

At the meeting on 31 October, the discussion ranged over all the issues relating to the adequacy and resilience planned for the refurbished PS. There are two main areas of difference between the Society and the EA, viz. how the agreed level of 54 cu. metre/sec storm pump capacity necessary for a standard of protection (SoP) of 1 in 50 years, is to be delivered and whether there is to be one 2 MW or two 1 MW on-site generators.

Concerning the issue of storm pump capacity, the EA made it clear that they are set on their specification of four 13.5 cu. metre/sec storm pumps, with no reserve capacity; the Society advocates three 18 cu. metre/sec pumps, with one 18 cu. metre/sec pump in reserve. However, after discussion, the EA agreed to ascertain from Scottish Power the maximum power deliverable to the PS from its network and to ask the manufacturers tendering for the storm pumps to quote for standard pumps of the maximum capacity consistent with the power available, in addition to quoting for the EA's preferred option. This is a significant concession, but, in making it, the EA emphasized that they would not agree to expenditure exceeding the approved budget for the refurbishment. A further option that was discussed was the possibility of having a fifth 13.5 cu. metre/sec storm pump kit available ready to be substituted for a failed installed storm pump on a timescale of approximately 24 hours; such a possibility would be the next best thing to hav-

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# The John Turner Collection



## HENGLER'S GRAND CIRQUE, LIVERPOOL.

The first Cirque in Liverpool was erected in Dale Street by MR. CHARLES HENGLER in 1858; and after a most successful run of four years was pulled down to make room for the present municipal offices. MR. HENGLER then built a second Cirque in Newington, which, after a stand of eight years, was taken down, the Midland Railway Co, wanting the ground for their present terminus. The present Cirque, the largest in the three kingdoms and situate in the West Derby Road, was erected by MR. HENGLER at a cost of £20,000, and covers, with stabling, an area of 25,000 square feet, and is capable of accommodating 5,000 persons. It was first opened in November 1876.

Above: Contemporary illustration courtesy National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield Library

Many of us knew of our former Vice-Chairman's strong interest in circus history and indeed enjoyed his fascinating talk on that subject, but few were aware of the vast amount of research he had carried out mainly between 1990-2007 following his retirement from academic life in the Biochemistry Department, Liverpool University (1963 - 1990). Now thanks to his wife, Janette, his research records and publications have been donated to the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield Library as the 'John Turner Collection'

For many years, John was the librarian for the Circus Fairground Association, and helped to get the library into the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield.

Professor Vanessa Toulmin, the Director of the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield first met John when studying for her doctorate in 1993. John was her mentor and an original supporter of the National Fairground Archive when it was founded in 1994. He would have been very proud to have attended her inaugural professorial lecture in December this year and to know that his books and data are be-

His aim was to produce a definitive series of source-books on the history of British circus

ing used by all aspects of University

John was best known as the author of the Dictionaries of British Circus Biographies - an invaluable source for researchers of Victorian and twentieth century circus performers, but he also created a database which enables quick searches of performers and provides citations of primary sources.

His aim was to produce a definitive series of source-books on the history of British circus which could be used by others to discover more about this popular form of entertainment. He continued this research right up until his sudden and totally unexpected death last year. His interest stemmed from his discovery that Hengler's Grand Cirque had once flourished in Hull, Liverpool and other provincial towns as well as in the Metropolis. Initially he collected information on the many performers and showmen of the Victorian period later continuing his research to include performers in the twentieth century. It is good that his research and database has now gone to the NFA enabling others to continue to be able to access the information that he painstakingly worked to gather.

John's circus publications include-

*Historical Hengler's circus. Pt. 1-5, 1780 to 1856*

*History of Ginnett's circus*

*James Newsome : genius of the ring*

*Twentieth century circus people: a dictionary of British circus biography Vol. 1-4, 1901-1950*

*Wombwell's travelling menagerie*

*Black Victorians / Black Victoriana edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gem*

Note:- John's Website is

[www.Two Centuries of British Circus People.](http://www.TwoCenturiesofBritishCircusPeople.com)

# National Trust Consultation Workshops by Barry Navarro



Photo R.A. Yorke

## INTRODUCTION

*This report summarises the discussions and continents made in the two workshops that were organised by staff of the National Trust, Formby and held on 30<sup>th</sup> September at the Gild Hall, Formby.*

Subjects covered included: Managing the impact of coastal change on the National Trust, Formby property and the surrounding area, proposal to re-site a car park, improve visitor facilities at the property and enhance conservation, traffic and transport issues, environmental footprint and the relationship to other visitor gateway sites on

Sefton's Natural Coast

The workshops were attended by representatives of public and voluntary sector organisations along with local residents; 100 people attended in total. Each workshop had a person who gave a presentation on the issues and a facilitator to aid discussion.

## SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

Climate Change, sea level rise, increased storminess Participants agreed that the car park needed to be moved from its present site. Participants wanted to see as natural a landscape as possible in the place of the car park. The natural landscape included, encouraging natural dune

slacks, sand trapping with brushwood fencing and Marram planting.

It is thought that more information is required to tell visitors about the fragility of the landscape and also to communicate where it is appropriate to walk, particularly if sections of the car park site were sectioned

off after it was removed to aid restoration of the dunes.

Participants suggested greater consideration should be given to access to the property and the beach in particular. Access for disabled people was also highlighted for consideration regarding all forms of access to the beach.

Suggestions included multiple access points to the beach to take the pressure off one or two routes, having circular boardwalks and using Lifeboat Road as an alternative car park. It was felt that the 'coastal offer' should be publicised more to take the pressure off Formby but this should not mean it becomes a beach for an

Cultural heritage, a place for people & nature, conservation Participants suggested that the car park should be moved as far inland as possible and that there was benefit in keeping the car park close to the entrance to reduce the traffic entering further on the site. It was also suggested to split the car parking facility in to small sites.

The Pine woodland was felt to be of great importance particularly to the red squirrel population and therefore it was felt that it was important to conserve it when considering re-siting the car park. Scrub woodland to the north of access road was generally considered to be an acceptable site.

There were opposing views concerning whether the asparagus fields could be partially used for re-siting of facilities. Some participants felt that the fields should be conserved in their entirety whilst others thought partial loss for car parking was acceptable.

Participants suggested that there was a need to manage the footfall to the beach from the car park and to provide more board walks.

Coastal access, popularity of coastal visits, tourism Participants suggested that Lifeboat Road needed to be considered for alternative parking to take the pressure off Victoria Road, but that it needed to have toilets and adequate signage. In addition, participants thought that more needs to be done regarding traffic management of the site with some suggesting a one entry and one exit traffic system at Victoria Road. An electronic signage system could be installed on the Formby By-pass to indicate when the car park was full and where alternative car parking is available.

Participants suggested that signage needed to improve to provide information on what the coast has to offer to reduce the pressure on Formby and the surrounding area. It was felt that a strategy for encouraging the role of cycling to and along the coast was required. It was also acknowledged by participants that coastal agencies working in partnership was a crucial factor in solving the complex issues.

NEXT STEPS Andrew Brockbank said The National Trust would be taking steps to progress the issues raised in the consultation session which included sending a summary paper to all participants to ensure that they received feedback on the workshop. In addition Andrew stated that the Trust wanted to form a group consisting of a cross section of people who have attended the workshops. The aim will be to work on further advising and progressing some of the issues participants have raised and prioritised with the Trust and its partners.

# Formby Power Station Transformation envisaged .....



From this ..... to this!

At a presentation held at the Swimming Pool on Tuesday 11th November, Mr McComb and members of his architectural and planning team explained their ideas on the redevelopment of the Powerhouse in a "sustainable way, sensitive to the needs of the people and the impact the site has on the environment." The design philosophy is to "create an environment which offers a unique and high quality of life, that is both attractive and environmentally friendly". Their proposals seek to preserve the historic character of the building but enhance it by removal of the lesser and more recent extensions to the building, reinstating its original character".

These proposals are to provide a mix of dwelling sizes, on site leisure facilities, as well as associated car parking and landscaping.

The following are extracts from the developers presentation of their intentions and aspirations for this programme.

They aim to "maximise the qualities that the site possesses in terms of key architectural elements and the aspect over the adjacent River Alt and surrounding countryside. The intention is to implement a feature entrance elevation of high quality design and of a suitable and strong industrial character. Internally 60 high-quality apartments are to be based on the existing form of the warehouse with partitioning working exclusively to the defined bay layout and informing

the monumental scale of the building.

The external works will play an important part in the enhancement of the site and the intention is to implement large swathes of native grasslands together with feature swathes of wildflower planting. These are viewed and accessed by perimeter paths inviting residents and visitors to maximise the schemes appeal and contributing to reversing the currently poor condition of the site. The overall form of the existing building has dictated the layout of the apartments with a central atrium area with private accommodation on either side facing out into the countryside. The central atrium takes on huge importance in the overall nature of the development in terms of aesthetic and circulation. This is intended to be a lively and exciting space with a glazed atrium, flooding the area with natural light and allowing an appreciation of the huge scale of the building from within - a 'glamorous' area in keeping with the exclusive nature of the property.

At ground floor level, this space would effectively be an internal street, flooded with natural light and beset with planting, shallow water features and areas to gather and relax. Towards the entrance area, a high quality gymnasium is proposed (exclusively for residents use) which protrudes from the main warehouse envelope into the new entrance extension and up to the first floor, including large areas of glass facing back

into the entrance atrium. At the upper levels the circulation is via suspended walkways, which dissect the atrium, enhancing views to the internal street and gardens below. A large glazed portion has been introduced to the rear facade to provide views and to increase light penetration into the building's core.

As the site lies within Green Belt, hard landscaping has been minimised. The sustainable development approach includes the 'meadowland' character of the site where native species are to be introduced to promote the sites character. As the vehicular access has evolved with the building's use, rather than being purpose planned and constructed, the surface treatments are in a poor condition. It is beneficial to the new residential conversion that the access should remain rural and low-key rather than the treatment that would be required if the building again began functioning industrially. However there is clearly a need on site to improve surface treatments and better define the hard standing into parking areas.

Several members of the Society were able to look at the plans at the Swimming Pool and are now sending in their reactions. Once an actual planning application has been submitted the Society's Amenities and Planning Subgroup will discuss it.

## Altmouth Pumping Station - continued from p. 4

having reserve capacity installed and will keep it very much in mind.

Concerning the provision of a single 2 MW on-site generator to provide the power for two of the storm pumps, should this unit not be available, the storm pump capacity would be reduced to half that required (the other half coming from the network). For this reason, the Society is urging the provision of two 1 MW generators, so as to provide some measure of resilience. The EA has rejected this alternative on the grounds that it would be more expensive (by a factor of 1.7 it was thought). We have asked to see the data that has led to this decision and, after initial reluctance, the EA has agreed to disclose the consultant's report and the EA's assessment of it. The EA said it would explore the possibility of hiring temporary generators in the event of failure of power supply to the PS.

Following on from earlier discussions, we again asked about the resilience of the substation at Stephen's Way. In addition to having discussions with Scottish Power, it was reported that the EA had now made its own assessment of the levels

of the various items of equipment at the substation in relation to anticipated flood levels and it appears that, apart from one building, all equipment is high enough for a SoP of 1 in 100 years; enquiries would be made as to the nature of the equipment which was in the vulnerable building. The government's Pitt Review requires that such installations should have a SoP of 1 in 1000 years; it was thought that Scottish Power was well advanced in its assessments as required by the Review, but no specific

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"it is hoped that the minister will be able to visit the Constituency to discuss local issues, including flood protection."

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information was available and the EA undertook to make enquiries. We made the point that there are indications that, at times of peak demand, the country's power station reserve generating capacity is already worryingly low and there are predictions from responsible sources of a shortfall in generated supplies nationwide before a sufficiency of replacement

new power stations come on line; it is not unreasonable to anticipate power outages within, say, the next 10 years. The EA undertook to ascertain from Scottish Power the likelihood of network supply interruption, its duration and their priorities for restoration of supply.

We asked about the scheduling of the strengthening of the Downholland Brook embankment, which is known to be in poor condition. The EA undertook to check its programme of works and to determine whether the remedial work should be brought forward. The EA also undertook to refer to their modelling consultants to try to obtain quantitative data for the increase in gravity flow through the PS accruing from improvements to the sluices and their flaps.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas MP has discussed the refurbishment of the Altmouth PS with Jane Kennedy, MP for Wavertree and Minister for Farming and the Environment, and it is hoped that the minister will be able to visit the Constituency to discuss local issues, including flood protection.

## Formby's Red Squirrel Crisis - the present position

Report by Ben Hargreaves, Acting Conservation Officer

Squirrel Pox continues to be the chief threat to Red Squirrels in Sefton at the moment. As many people will have noticed, there has been a great deal of media coverage on this issue recently, with a BBC News article on research led by The Zoological Society of London's Research Department and much media debate about the merits of Grey Squirrel Control (Both in the Editorial and Supplementary sections of *The Guardian* and *The Observer*) and the long term viability of current Red Squirrel Conservation.

The BBC article focused on a piece of research carried out into signs of

Red Squirrel immunity from the Squirrel Pox Virus, in which eight squirrels were found after Post Mortem to have antibodies to the virus while at the same time not being infected. It is likely that the squirrels have recovered if they have antibodies in their blood but no detectable virus, but the worrying statistic is that was only "eight squirrels out of over 500 over a five year period".

Two other important points were that there was no specific information as to where the Recovered Squirrels came from and it still doesn't give us the certainty that the strain of Squirrel Pox virus in these animals was

the same strain that is killing the Sefton's Reds, as virus's mutate and change their genetic sequence. In Sefton, we have been lucky enough to work closely with the University of Liverpool when we recover Squirrels that have been found dead as a result of natural causes or otherwise through Road Traffic Accidents and we have had no such encouraging information from any Postmortem results we have received so far, nor any cases of recovery from sick animals taken into care at the BSPCA's Stapeley Grange Centre.

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## Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

We had a very successful day sketching at Croston in September. The weather was fine and we enjoyed the peace and quiet in the church grounds. We then joined the local residents at an Open Day at the church and church school. A lot of them appear to have lived there for a long time as they all showed a lot of interest in the many photographs of the schools and the school attendance records, photographs of rural scenes and the now demolished Manor House. We were also able to go inside the church. The stained glass windows looked quite different from the inside.

The Exhibition put on by the West Lancashire Craft Guild in the Metropolitan cathedral was of a high stan-

dard. We will have another chance to see them at Crosby Hall Educational Trust in November and Rufford Old Hall in December.

We do not meet in December, but there are a lot of Exhibitions taking place between now and Christmas. I hope to see some of you at them. In January we hold our annual get-together. This is popular. We hope to arrange our programme for next year at that time and would welcome new ideas. If you are able to join us, please let me know by 7 January 2009, so that I can book the tables. We do not have a programme for February yet, but I thought it might be interesting to go to a sale of paintings. Cato Crane in Liverpool are having a sale end January or into

February, but date not yet fixed.

It was with great sadness that I and all the members of the Art Group learned the death of Graham Northcote recently. He was a member of our Group and always had time to give us help and practical advice when ever it was sought Graham and his wife Olive exhibited in our Exhibitions and it was obvious that he got a lot of pleasure painting and was interested in many aspects of Art and various styles. He will be sadly missed and our condolences go to Olive.

## Graham Northcote



Members of the Society were saddened by the death of Graham Northcote. Graham and his wife Olive were faithful members of the Society and were regular attenders at the general meetings and the meetings of the History Group. Graham and Olive were in the group of members who enjoyed the visit to Wolker Hall and its gardens and Cartmel on September 10th. He died on September 18th.

Graham Northcote began his professional career as a newly qualified teacher at Ormonde Drive Secondary Modern School in 1958. He became Head of Careers and then Head of the fifth year (now year 11). At the

school he became known for the help and encouragement for young teachers. In 1981 he became Deputy Head of Ainsdale High School where he developed his skills in the counselling and guidance of adolescents and he displayed his wide range of knowledge and practical skills in such areas as music, photography and electronics. Graham remained at Ainsdale High until his retirement in 1996. During his time at Ainsdale, Graham completed a Masters Degree in Education at the University of Liverpool, where as a student studying with experienced professionals he was well known for the help and support he gave to fellow students who needed help with their studies. Graham and Olive, who is a linguist, each devoted almost 40 years to teaching.

On their retirement both Graham and Olive took up painting and sketching. He became Chairman of the Association of Formby Artists, and under his leadership beginners and experts were equally valued and encouraged

to exhibit their work. His own artistic ability was always displayed in the Society's Art Exhibition. In his quiet way, Graham supported Barbara Mossop in arranging the Summer Exhibition

The Northcotes were regular worshippers at St. Peter's Church where Graham became a sidesman. At Church fetes Graham's distinctive voice became well-known as he took charge of the public address system.

In the same quiet way Graham and Olive Northcote were members of the group who helped in the distribution of the Society's Newsletter. Olive, who attended the Thomas Fresh Evening with one of her daughters, has indicated that she will continue her work as a Newsletter distributor. The Formby Society will miss the unobtrusive support given to the Society by Graham. We give our greatest sympathy to Olive and family at this sad time. R.D.

## Planning Matters - continued from p.3

pleasure to the many residents and visitors who frequent it.

Also a cause for distress and anger was the application (strictly prior notification) by 02 for the installation in Marsh Brows of a 15 metre tall telecommunications mast (in the form of a replica telegraph pole) together with ground-based equipment. We advised residents in the vicinity how best to resist the application; in particular, we pointed out that health considerations, the devaluation of property values and the presence of electrical substations nearby were not material planning considerations and that protesters should concentrate on loss of visual amenity and the availability of alternative sites. Although there was a petition sufficient to bring the application before the Council's Planning Committee, in the event that was unnecessary and the application was refused by the case officer. However, if the case is appealed to The Planning Inspectorate, the final outcome remains very much in doubt.

This latest application to put a mobile phone mast in a residential area highlights once again the need to revise the Council's moratorium on the siting of such masts on Council owned land or property. The moratorium has the effect of denying sites to the network developers which could otherwise accommodate masts much more appropriately than the sites eventually chosen. Recent developments give hope that a revision of the moratorium is a possibility. The Formby Parish Council has identified six potentially suitable sites on Council-owned land away from the District Centre which it believes would be more suitable for the location of masts. Unfortunately, the Formby Area Committee, at its meeting on 3 July 2008, declined a request from the Formby Parish Council to support a partial lifting of the moratorium so that in future such Council sites could be brought into consideration. In contrast, however, the Southport

for a partial lifting of the moratorium and itself requested the Council's Cabinet to consider the matter. In response, the Cabinet, at its meeting on the 30 October 2008, decided to ask the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environmental Services (SDRES) to submit to each Area Committee and Parish Council a report on the advantages/disadvantages of a partial lifting of the moratorium and the identification of potential sites for mobile phone masts on Sefton Council owned land. The SDRES is then to submit a report on the issue, incorporating the comments of each Area Committee and Parish Council, to the full Council for determination of the issue. It is to be hoped that Councillors will be able to resist the pressures to which they undoubtedly will be subjected by extreme pressure groups and reach a balanced decision based on the evidence and the practical realities.

To conclude, I will mention just three of the several planning applications on which we have made submissions to the Council (please see the Society's website for information about the other applications); while they are quite different in their details, they share a common factor in that they all involve the replacement of sound old buildings, which are characteristic of their localities, by new ones which are not. The application for 86 Victoria Road would have Committee, at its meeting on 3 September 2008, endorsed the request of the Formby Parish Council meant the demolition of the old children's home and the erection of an aggressively modern, but otherwise undistinguished, five-storey building comprising nine apartments. We opposed the application on the grounds that the building, both by reason of its height and mass, as well as its style, would have been incongruous and excessively prominent in the street scene;

the application has been withdrawn. At 87-89 Freshfield Road, the two existing dwellings would have been demolished to make way for two part three-storey houses. We opposed the application on the grounds that the size of the proposed buildings would have been incompatible with the narrowness of their sites and contrary to the character of Freshfield Road which is designated as an Area of Local Distinctiveness, in recognition of its large Victorian villas set in large grounds; the application has been refused. And finally, at 43-43A Freshfield Road, the existing large late Victorian dwelling would be replaced by two much narrower buildings with much less impressive facades on a site which is really not large enough to accommodate them in a way consistent with the character of Freshfield Road, which we wish to see preserved; the decision is pending. I understand that it is now possible to upgrade sound older buildings to modern standards of insulation and internal design and it seems profligate of resources that such buildings should be demolished. A change in tax law would help; at present renovation attracts VAT, whereas rebuild does not. In addition to being more sustainable, modernisation would avoid all the problems associated with the substitution of new buildings in styles which are incompatible with the local street scene.

*NEW SOCIETY PUBLICATION !*

### *THE FORMBY ASPARAGUS STORY*

*This booklet, out soon, tells the interesting story of this traditional local crop, based on recent research.*

AUGUST



In these notes, I often stress the international importance of our sand-dune flora. This was illustrated on 20<sup>th</sup> when Joan Valle Xirau, the Professor of Botany at Barcelona University, made a special visit to see the **Dune Wormwood** (*Artemisia campestris*, ssp. *maritima*) at Crosby dunes. The previous day he had called in at the only other British locality for this plant in South Wales. We have four individuals, the oldest, discovered in 2004, being one of the largest specimens the Professor has seen during his studies in Western Europe. He was also delighted to see, for the first time, the **Isle of Man Cabbage** (*Coincya monensis*, ssp. *monensis*), a plant which is confined to north-west Britain.

This month saw around 30 volunteers taking part in a major survey of another of our Nationally Rare plants, the **Dune Helleborine** (*Epipactis lunensis*). This orchid, often found with its close relative the **Green-flowered Helleborine** (*E. phyllanthos*), is mainly restricted to dunes in North West England and North Wales. It seems to have been a good year for these species, most recorders reporting unusually large numbers. For example, Pat Lockwood and I counted 1087 Dune Helleborines and 748 Green-flowered Helleborines on the northern part of the National Trust Estate at Formby Point. Once the final reports are in, we should have a much better idea of the main habitats favoured by the plants and the kind of management needed for their future conservation.

More good botanical news came from **Marshside**, where my visit with

friends, on the 10<sup>th</sup> led to the discovery of both **Common** and **Lax-flowered Sea Lavenders** (*Limonium vulgare* and *L. humile*) on the salt-marsh off **Hesketh Road**. **Common** Sea Lavender had not been seen in South Lancashire since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Lax-flowered is a new Vice-county record. These plants have presumably spread from the north side of the Ribble Estuary at Fairhaven, which they colonised several years ago.

Insects have again suffered in the wet weather, with most butterflies appearing in reduced numbers. However, there seemed to be plenty of **Graylings** on the outer dunes, while the colourful **Peacock** had a good emergence around the middle of the month. I counted 25 on Water Mint at Cabin Hill on 13<sup>th</sup>. Similarly, most dragonflies were in short supply, the only exception being the **Ruddy Darter**, one of our few nationally notable species. On 8<sup>th</sup> August, I recorded 37, including 5 pairs, on scrapes in the **Birkdale Sandhills** Local Nature Reserve.

August finds many of our breeding birds departing while migrants and winter-visitors arrive from the north. Lots of seabirds have been passing along our coast, with an extraordinary gathering of at least 2500 **Manx Shearwaters** being reported off Formby on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Roosts of **Sandwich Terns** on **Birkdale Beach** reached an impressive peak of 268 on 26<sup>th</sup>, while a rare and spectacular **Caspian Tern** was seen off Formby Point on 4<sup>th</sup>. The once rare **Marsh Harrier** seems to have had a good breeding season, groups of as many as five or six individuals, especially young birds, being seen at **Hesketh Out Marsh**, **Martin Mere** and **Altcar Moss**.

SEPTEMBER

A much needed "Indian Summer" kicked in around the middle of the month helping insects which had otherwise experienced another poor season. Dragonflies suddenly increased,

especially the **Migrant Hawker** (*Aeshna mixta*), an autumn species that has colonised our region over the last decade. My best count was 20 in the **Aimsdale/Birkdale** area on 27<sup>th</sup>. A few **Ruddy Darters** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*) lingered on well-vegetated ponds until the 26<sup>th</sup> and there were more **Southern Hawkers** (*Aeshna cyanea*) than usual along the coast. An unexpected sighting was an egg-laying female **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*) at Range Lane, Formby on 25<sup>th</sup>. Despite its name, this is by far the rarest of our large dragonflies. Most exciting of all was the largest influx of **Black Darters** (*Sympetrum danae*) since 2004. From 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, I counted a total of 19 individuals at four localities in the sand-dunes, including two pairs. This small **peatland** dragonfly is known to disperse widely in late summer and may then turn up in unexpected (non-peaty) places.

Butterflies also responded to the sun, with good numbers of **Commas**, **Red Admirals** and even some **Small Tortoisells**, the latter being almost non-existent this year due, it is thought, to the effects of a parasitic fly.

I visited **Marshside** with friends on 20<sup>th</sup>, especially to look for the **Short-winged Conehead** (*Conocephalus dorsalis*), a bush-cricket that has colonised the Northwest coast since 2002. Much to the delight of our 10-year-old companion, we found dozens of these attractive creatures on the salt-marsh. He could also hear their high-pitched chirps which are beyond the limit of adult ears. The same budding entomologist recorded two new insects, the **Water Measurer** (*Hydrometra stagnorum*) and



## Wildlife Notes, (continued from previous page).

and Water Scorpion (*Nepa cinerea*) in the recently dug ponds on Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve.

A major highlight at the beginning of the month was a Minke Whale washed up dead but in pristine condition on Ravenmeols beach on the 30<sup>th</sup>. An adult male, it was about 8.5m (27 ft) long and attracted large numbers of sightseers before being removed by the Council. It seems to have been the first record of this species in Sefton since 1954.

September is usually a good month for migrant birds, a keen sea-watcher being rewarded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> by a rare and beautiful Sabine's Gull and over 900 Manx Shearwaters off Ainsdale beach. Another good find was a Red-necked Phalarope at Martin Mere on 5<sup>th</sup>. Wrynecks were recorded at both Marshside and Seaforth, while a Yellow-browed Warbler from Siberia graced the latter reserve on 25<sup>th</sup>. Pink-footed Geese arrived in great numbers as usual, the monthly peak being 16,000 at Marshside on 29<sup>th</sup>, joining about 2000 Black-tailed Godwits, also mainly from Iceland. High pressure over Scandinavia in mid-month brought lots of Honey Buzzards across the North Sea; several reached the Northwest, though regrettably none came in my direction. The month ended with a northwesterly gale and the first reports of an autumn speciality on our coast — Leach's Petrel.

### OCTOBER

A rare excursion "over the water" on the 6<sup>th</sup> led indirectly to an exciting discovery at Formby. Pat Lockwood and I were invited by Hilary Ash to visit Wirral habitats similar to our own Birkdale Green Beach. While there, we were shown a rare Native Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*) in a Hoylake garden. This reminded Pat that the late Vera Gordon had identified this tree on the National Trust estate some years ago. So, armed with Dr Ash's

crib-sheet of identification features, we tracked down the specimen a few days later. Sure enough, there stood a convincing looking Black Poplar on the edge of a deciduous woodland south of Victoria Road carpark. Unexpectedly, however, there were another 80 or so similar trees in the adjacent woodland and more on field boundaries around the nearby Asparagus fields. Exploration further afield located more trees at Ravenmeols in the Firwood area. Altogether, we mapped nearly 300 Black Poplars; some are huge with massive down-curving branches that have rooted into the ground, sending up new shoots that have become large trees in their own right.

Reg Yorke tells me the poplars were planted as a "nurse-crop" to protect the original conifer plantings over 100 years ago. They were then known as "Frenchmen". This calls into question the identity of our trees, as several hybrid poplars were developed in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These closely resemble the Native Black Poplar, making identification a bit of a nightmare; so we will have to wait until next spring/summer to be sure that we have the genuine article.



Now a rare tree in northwest England, the Native Black Poplar is mainly found growing wild south of the Severn/Wash line. However, it was widely planted further north, especially around Greater Manchester, where it is known as the Manchester Poplar. These trees are now threatened by a virulent fungus which is rapidly killing them off. As yet,

the Formby poplars seem unaffected, though a few have died, probably of old age. If ours prove to be Native Black Poplars, they will constitute a nationally important population.

The cooler, unsettled autumn weather meant that insect activity



quickly declined, though a few Migrant Hawker and Common Darter dragonflies hung on until mid-month. Red Admiral butterflies were a welcome sight nectaring on Michaelmas-daisies and Ivy flowers.

Gales at the start of October brought large numbers of Leach's Petrels into Liverpool Bay; I even managed to catch up with one of these ocean wanderers on Ainsdale Beach. Martin Mere continued to be a good place to see birds of prey, several Marsh Harriers including a fine male being a particular attraction. The usual mass-arrival of Pink-footed Geese from Iceland and Greenland was heralded by noisy skeins heading west over my home to their shore roosts. This month's influx was exceptional, the co-ordinated count producing an October record of over 51,000. Many of these birds will already have headed further south to the harvested sugar-beet fields of Norfolk. One fellow-traveller was a Ross's Goose which breeds in Arctic Canada. This is a smaller version of the Snow Goose, its mainly white plumage making it stand out amongst the Pink-feet when I caught up with it on Downholland Moss. However, the origin of such birds is always a matter for debate as so many are kept in captive collections.



Following concern from many of the volunteers who carry out Red Squirrel Conservation and Monitoring in the Formby area, the advice from Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Save Our Squirrels has been for people to not take the recent media coverage out of context or extrapolate anything from it. Although news like this is encouraging in the sense that there is increased potential for vaccination, it can also lead to the falsehood that all will be well in the end if we wait for either a vaccine which could work or increasing natural immunity which could occur. That is two big possibilities and in the meantime it does not have any relevance to the Formby situation.

Ultimately, we cannot put our weight behind vaccination and captive release as magic solutions to the Pox Outbreak in Formby as this can never work while there is a single viable population of Greys left (nor without millions of pounds of money). An important piece of the research that The Zoological Society of London published was confirmation that changes in the distribution of the Squirrel Pox disease in red squirrels over time mirrored the changes in the

geographical range of the grey squirrel, supporting the theory that the grey squirrel was the reservoir host of the virus, passing it to the red squirrel but remaining immune to the virus itself. Once the disease is "in" a Red Squirrel Population it will pass quickly through the route of Red to Red contact which increases at certain times of year and in certain circumstances.

Everyone involved and interested in Red Squirrel Conservation needs to be aware that the only means we have of tackling the disease in the natural environment are through the practical routes of Grey Squirrel Control and the Searching / Monitoring / Reporting of all Reds and Greys, healthy and sick, which are being readily submitted by the active Volunteers in Formby, working with Formby and Southport Red Alert, Save Our Squirrels, Natural England, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, The National Trust, Sefton M.B.C. and members of the public.

*We are hoping to increase the level of awareness of the Red Squirrel*

"volunteers and volunteer groups in Sefton that are vital in providing the information and practical assistance we need"

*situation locally via articles such as this and intend to produce a leaflet targeting the Formby area which will flag up the issue of Squirrel Pox and, most vitally for people that feed Red Squirrels, the need to regularly disinfect their feeders / change feed which is the community's only real defence against cross infection in their gardens.*

Some recent local media coverage has been critical of habitat management on the Sefton coast and has pinpointed this as being a pivotal factor in the outbreak of Squirrel Pox virus and the decreasing Squirrel population in Formby. I would like to make it clear that this is not a view shared

by the landowners and managers of the Formby area and is not based on scientific fact or research. I would however, share the concern of local residents that excessive car speed and driving without due care and attention could have been a factor in the 25 (18 in Formby) cases of Traffic related Mortality in Sefton this year, a huge increase from the 8 cases in the whole of Sefton Metropolitan Borough last year.

Across the borough and in West Lancs, we are receiving more encouraging reports of Red Squirrels in the gardens of people in Maghull, Thornton, Shirdley Hill, Aughton and Scarisbrick, in some instances where they haven't been seen for twenty years.

There is a significant Red Squirrel population in Bunsand which is closely monitored by resident volunteers in the area from The Little Crosby Red Alert Group.

We have also embarked on a Red Squirrel re-colonisation survey of Ainsdale National Nature Reserve following casual sightings, observation of significant feeding areas and an encouraging period of Autumn Monitoring on this site. Many people will be aware of the Pox outbreak that occurred on Ainsdale NNR. from Autumn 2006 and resulted in a reduction in the population level by 90 %.

All the partners involved in Red Squirrel Conservation work would like to thank the volunteers and volunteer groups in Sefton that are vital in providing the information and practical assistance we need in order to work on protecting the species in the area.

Thanks again for your support.



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## DICKENSIAN DAY'

**SATURDAY 6th DECEMBER 2008**

As last year, we will be running a Civic Society stall in the village between 9.30 am and around 3.30 pm to publicise our activities, encourage new members, sell Sibley drawings, photographs, notelets etc and generally talk to people who are interested in what we do.

Dickensian Day is an excellent opportunity to publicise our activities to the people of Formby. In other years, we have recruited several new members and at the same time raised some money to help with the running costs of the Society.

If you are in the village please drop by for a chat and if you could help for an hour or so to man the stall you would be doubly welcome. Dickensian costume is not essential, but something warm and cosy probably will be.

If you can help or would like more information please contact any committee member or ring Alan Burton on 876454.

**We look forward to seeing you on the day.**

### FUTURE PROGRAMME

(All at Ravenmeols Community Centre at 8pm unless otherwise stated)

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> November, Doug Elliot, *Coal Mining in West Lancashire*

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> Dec., Dr. Mona Duggan, *The birth of the Sugar industry in the NW*

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> Jan., **Archive Evening,**

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, Alan Foxall, *Botanic Gardens Southport — The Four Seasons*

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> Feb, Pamela Russell, *"You get used to it"— Liverpool Children in WW2*

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February, Lucy Pengelly, *The 'Jewel of Persia'- Isafahan*

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March, Mr J. Halsall, *The Halsall's in the Civil War*

### **Art Group Programme (Further details from Barbara Mossop)**

8 - 22 November The Mill House Gallery, Parbold. Sir Peter Blake Exhibition

14- 23 November, Rollinson Gallery, Ribchester. (This has not been held for a year or two).

27 - 30 November, CHET, Little Crosby. - Hope to see some of you there.

13- 14 December West Lancashire Craft Guild - Rufford Old Hall.

14 January Annual Get-together, Lydiate Hall Farm 12 pm. Please let me know by 7th January if you wish to attend.

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