

Formby Civic News

The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

Registered charity no 516789

Formby Flying Centenary.



February 2010



A 'Planes Ltd' Biplane on the sands at Freshfield 1910.

May 2010 marks the 100th anniversary of flying off Formby beach and outline proposals for how this event could be celebrated are being considered.

It is proposed that a flypast of aircraft, dating from around the early 1900's, will take place over Formby Point. Aircraft owners will be contacted to stimulate interest and to check availability of aircraft. After the flypast, the aircraft could land at RAF Woodvale to form a display for invited guests/enthusiasts and the press.

There is also an option to land these aircraft on the beach at Formby in the location where take off's and landings would have actually taken place 100 years ago, but it is felt that this would not be feasible due to the in depth planning required involving various organisations such as the National Trust and the Civil Aviation Authority which would need to be contacted for their input, advice and permission. Relevant insurance would also need to be in place which would be the responsibility of the National Trust.

A photographic display/exhibition is to be located in Formby Library to inform the local community of this historic event. A leaflet will also be produced and be distributed to the schools and also be available at Formby National Trust and other outlets throughout the year. The celebrations may later be extended into September at the Southport Airshow by means of an exhibition or display in the Aviation marquee with talks to engage the general public. As in 2009, there will also be a display of aircraft on the beach, relating to this period of time.

Further information about the Centenary will be displayed on our website, the Southport Airshow and the National Trust's website. KEEP ALERT FOR UPDATES!

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Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

Regrettably, the Environment Agency (EA) have not released to us information concerning the Altmouth pumping station which they had promised to make available and which is essential if we are to have a proper understanding of the level of protection which the refurbished station will provide. We have now made a comprehensive FOIA enquiry seeking information of relevance to our concerns both for the pumping station and more generally for flood protection in the lower Alt.

Our report and recommendations to the Formby Area Committee on these issues has now been appended as an addendum to *Watercourse Maintenance & Flooding Working Group's* report to Cabinet.

The Formby Area Committee, in response to our question to them at their Open Forum, has made enquiries of the EA concerning the possible installation of the refurbished original diesel storm pump. This is the pump which has been created from the parts of the two retired original storm pumps, and which we have been pressing for many months should be installed to supplement the two old storm pumps which are all we have to rely on for flood protection at present. The EA's statements on the pump range from at one time saying that the pump was being refurbished and would be installed, then that they did not know what was being done, if anything, about it, and then that it had been refurbished and was being tested prior to delivery to a local depot, to finally that it would not be installed for budgetary reasons. The EA's answer to the Area Committee has come in the name of a person with whom we have had no dealings before in our several encounters with representatives of the EA. The answer consists of two elements, one to do with the Lunt Meadows flood storage area and the other with the third storm pump.

Concerning the installation of the pump, we were very surprised to be given what appear to be sound engi-

neering reasons for not installing it. However, that raises other questions for us, viz. since these engineering reasons will have always been relevant, why was the very considerable expenditure incurred in refurbishing the pump in the first place, why was no one in the project team aware of them and why were we given a budgetary explanation for the decision not to install?

Concerning the Lunt Meadows scheme, the answer to the Area Committee states that the EA have in mind the contribution of the flood storage area when deciding the degree of resilience required for the pumping station. Originally, the Lunt Meadows washland and the refurbishment of the pumping station were a unified scheme, but when that scheme failed to obtain EA approval in August 2006, the decision was made that the pumping station was to be refurbished as a stand alone unit. The computer modelling study, on which the specification of the refurbished station is based, does not include the flood storage area and currently there is no sound understand-

“we remain anxious that there should be carried out an analysis to the standard required by planning policy”

ing how such a washland would affect flows at the pumping station. The last information we had concerning the Lunt Meadows scheme was that the computer modelling study for it had not been completed and the case for it was still in preparation; the project team were hoping to be able to commence the protracted approval process for it early in the New Year. So we are left to wonder how a scheme still at the design stage, and with no certainty of approval, could be used to influence the specification of the refurbished pumping station. It is important to understand that the refurbished station has been specified with reference to historical storm frequencies and intensities, while the

Lunt Meadows scheme is intended to protect against the more extreme storm events anticipated due to climate change, as well as to provide experience of managing this potentially more power efficient but uncommon way of providing flood protection. I have submitted to the Area Committee our response to the EA's answer, setting out the inadequacies and uncertainties of the EA's position.

As I explained in the Society's November *Newsletter*, the Council is required by the Regional Spatial Strategy for the NW of England (RSS2008) to build 500 houses per annum for the next 15 years and, in order to find the necessary land, the Council is to undertake an immediate review of its green belt land. Because this is such a serious matter, I have made enquiries both of the Council and 4NW, which is the regional authority responsible for the RSS (along with the North West Regional Development Agency (NWRDA)), as to how the 500 units pa figure was arrived at. There is some ambiguity in the replies I have received, but my understanding is that, essentially, the figure is in fact Sefton's own estimate of its housing need, while the House Builders Federation favoured the figure of 550 units pa, but that neither estimate was based on the kind of formal analysis required in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 3: *Housing* (PPS3). The Council has defended their figure, saying it was approved by the Panel responsible for the Examination in Public of the draft RSS2008 and ultimately by the Secretary of State. That may well be so, but we remain anxious that there should be carried out an analysis to the standard required by PPS3, which says Local Planning Authorities should plan for a mix of housing on the basis of the different types of households that are likely to require housing over the RSS plan period. This is to include having particular regard to current and future demographic trends and profiles, to the accommodation requirements of specific groups, in particular, families

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Draft NW England Shoreline Management Plan by John Houston

Our coastline has always changed and it always will. However, until about ten years ago there was no national overview of coastal change and how it affects people, the economy and the environment. In the 1990s the Government introduced the concept of Shoreline Management Plans to make an assessment of trends and identify coastal management options which ranged from 'holding the line' to 'do nothing'.

Now, ten years on, a second generation of Shoreline Management Plans is being prepared. The coast of England and Wales is divided up into coastal cells with the coast from Great Orme's Head in Wales to the Scottish Border being Cell 11. Within this cell the coast is further subdivided into sub-cells based on coastal processes. Formby Point lies within Sub-cell 11a Great Orme's Head to Southport Pier and within this sub-cell more detailed policies are derived for areas. The lowest level of detail is therefore 'Formby Dunes' covering the area from the River Alt at Hightown to Southport Pier.

A draft Shoreline Management Plan has been prepared for our area with the overall policy of 'managed realignment' to allow the dune coast to respond to changes in the coastline and sea level without the need for hard engineering. The Shoreline Management Plan process sets out a policy approach, based on risk, for 0-20 years, 20-50 years and 50-100 years. The proposed policy for 'Formby Dunes' for the next 20 years is - 'Allow the dune system to evolve naturally with minimal intervention to manage dunes, and manage adaptation in the erosion risk zone (such as relocating paths and car parks) subject to consents'

The Formby Civic Society maintains an active interest in the management of the local coastline and has responded to the consultation. Further development of the Shoreline Management Plan policies will require consultation with the community and in our response we have expressed

our interest in taking part in this process.

A summary of some of our points is given below including our response to the two questions in the response document:

Do you agree with the policies set out in the Draft SMP?

Yes, in general. Previous historical warming periods resulted in relatively rapid sea level rise but towards the end of the warming period and not at the beginning so, in a sense it is important to build adaptation into long term land-use planning looking ahead at least 100 years and we would support the links between SMPs and land use planning

What areas are of concern to you?

Throughout the document phrases are used which can be interpreted in different ways to different people, whether they be a coastal engineer, a Natural England officer or a local resident. We have a number of concerns with regards to the draft policy recommendations, their implications

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and outline of the draft action plan.

Draft Policy

The managed realignment is the most suitable policy as it is desirable to prepare a coordinated strategy for dune management. However, within this there should be zones where the approach is almost one of 'do nothing' except monitor. Currently we see very different approaches to dune management between the National Trust, Natural England and the Sefton Coast and Countryside Service. Whilst each approach has its advantages and disadvantages we would like to see a coordinated approach

rather than a uniform approach to dune management.

Residents may have different understandings of terms such as 'natural evolution', 'minimal intervention', 'local problems', 'roll back', 'dune management', 'manage adaptation' etc. Hence our view that we need much more open debate on many of these issues and according to the 0-20 year scenario we are fortunate to have time on our side. The social, environmental and economic impacts are generally medium to long term and if these considerations can already be identified in land use plans some of the long term implications may be avoided.

Predicted implications

Surprisingly there is no mention of Formby Golf Club in the documents. The Club took appropriate action to re-locate in the 1970s and future re-location, if necessary, could be built into land use plans.

We are surprised not to see the landscape character being more recognised. Although not a Heritage Coast or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Sefton Coast is a unique countryside character area on which the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership is being based.

In the documents there is no mention of the potential impacts of coastal change on the dune aquifer which forms a core component of the overall coast defence preventing salt water intrusion to the hinterland. In terms of nature conservation issues we would like clarification of the term 'natural rollback'.

Draft Action Plan

There are gaps in the proposed action plan which we hope will be filled in consultation with local communities. We recognise the need for a balance between a do nothing approach (especially in areas of high recreation pressure) and an over-managed approach of dune building.

Green Lane Conservation Area Appraisal.



Desmond Brennan, Amenities Secretary, first announced the proposed 'appraisal' of Formby's Green Lane conservation area in the August issue of this newsletter when he described the background of the exercise and invited volunteers to join a small working party to carry out the basic review in conjunction with Sefton Council Planning Officers. Desmond wrote in the December issue that this is an excellent opportunity for the Society to contribute to the preservation of this important Area and by so doing, enhance the Society's reputation. He then made a *a renewed appeal for members (or others!) with historical or planning interests, or just a sense of place (but otherwise with no special expertise), to offer their services to help.*

A small working party has now been formed consisting of interested members of the Committee together with Peter Lucas, (a former Chairman and actively involved in the original designation in 1983) together with Tony O'Donnell a member of the Society who actually lives in one of the few listed buildings in the Conservation Area.

This small working party has now had two meetings with Eddie Taylor and Helen Whale of the planning department as a result of which practical survey work is now about to begin.

The purpose of a *Conservation area* is to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the

designated area and to provide a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future through the development of management proposals.

The main purpose of the Appraisal is to define the 'special interest' of the area. The distinctiveness of an area may derive from more than

its appearance. Character and Appearance must be considered separately although they may in some cases be the same thing. As well as recording the physical aspects of the area, its defining character or 'special interest' involves understanding the value of the area and the values attached to it by the local community. Initially the 'study area' will extend beyond the existing conservation area boundary.

Any extension of the Conservation Area should be contiguous with

"understanding the value of the area and the values attached to it by the local community"

the existing area and it also needs to be coherent in terms of the character and historic development of the area in order to provide a context for the area. We also need to look at how development around the conservation area relates to the area itself.

The Society will look at the historic origins and development of: Formby/Freshfield in general and Green Lane in particular, when buildings first appeared, architect, developer, original purpose, if, how and when they changed, what buildings have been lost, the origins and nature of boundaries - including walls, fences etc. To what extent historic boundaries are reflected in the current layout

of the area and the nature of their origins. (Looking at historic maps is particularly useful in this case), when, how and why did streets, lanes and footpaths first appear. How have they been altered or altogether lost? Again, historic maps may provide answers.

A feature of the CA is its abundance of trees. While the origins of individual trees is only likely to be relevant to the appraisal if the tree is quite old, it would be of interest if it can be shown that particular groups or lines of trees are old, even if the trees themselves are not that old. Are there certain materials which have traditionally been used in the area? For example - maybe the roads have cobbles underneath or a modern building may have some materials salvaged from an older building. Maybe all the houses in a row have been built from a particular type of brick that was typical for that area or that period. Or perhaps a path has been paved with a particular type of stone.

There may be many other features that are of interest in the area which may be worth including. These can include things like mounting stones, traditional red phone boxes, street lamps, sign posts.

This work is likely to involve a combination of desk-top study and field work, comparing various maps, photographs and illustrations of different ages and seeing how they relate to what is there at present to determine the historic development of the area.

The Tithe map with its schedule (now digitised) may answer some of these questions as would our extensive collection of illustrations and photographs. Also Census Returns, Street and Trade Directories will be very helpful.

From a Historical and Practical point of view this is promising to be a very interesting exercise.

The Pathfinders Project by Graham Lymbery, (Project Leader, Coastal Defence).

It was officially announced by Hillary Benn on 1st December that Sefton Borough Council “will receive £337,000 for a community outreach project to provide education on the changing coastline at Formby Point. Adaptation planning and a boardwalk project will explore how a community can have continued enjoyment of a changing natural environment”. This will run until spring 2011.

Sefton is thus one of 15 successful coastal change “pathfinder” authorities exploring new approaches to planning for, and managing, adaptation to coastal change in partnership with their communities.

Between now and spring 2011, these 15 pathfinders will explore a range of approaches to both building capacity and finding practical solutions. These approaches include new ways to engage local communities, helping them to plan for how the coast could change; ways of retaining community vitality by planning for and managing change, for instance through roll-back of dunes and buy to let schemes for properties at risk from coastal erosion; and capital projects that enable continued enjoyment of changing coastal environments, for example building and maintaining boardwalks and beach infrastructure.

The pathfinder programme is all about learning and, throughout it, lessons learned will be shared so that other coastal authorities and organisations can benefit.

We will be working with a number of Partners to deliver this work, they include the National trust, Edge Hill University, Liverpool University, North West Coastal Forum and from within the Council the Coastal Defence Team, Coast and Countryside Service and the North Sefton City Learning Centre. The work will focus on Formby Point given its rapidly changing nature with rates of erosion up to 4 metres per year and will include examining parking issues at the coast, development of a strategy for dune slacks, construction of board-

walks, creation of dune slacks, appointment of a Community Engagement Officer and engagement with schools and other key communities on the coast.

As a Pathfinder a key element of this work is to capture the lessons learnt and disseminate these findings through our Partners Edge Hill University and North West Coastal Forum. Edge Hill University will work with Partners to document the projects and present the results from a research perspective and the North West Coastal Forum will organise a conference to be held in Sefton in early 2011 that will bring together all the Pathfinder projects to share their lessons learnt.

Sefton Council is also developing a Borough wide Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change under the Performance Indicator 188. The Coastal Defence Team are also participating in a European Project (IMCORE) examining the specific issues of developing Adaptation Strategies to Climate Change at the Coast and are also working with the

“The pathfinder programme is all about learning and, throughout it, lessons learned will be shared”

Coast and Countryside Service testing sand dune management techniques at Lifeboat Road as part of a two year project jointly funded by the Council and the Environment Agency.

The Sefton Coast includes a significant extent of sand dunes that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. They are internationally important as a

habitat and as such require a long term strategy for their management. As part of the Sefton Coast adaptation study; the Lifeboat Road sand dune management project seeks to: "Quantify the effectiveness of sand dune management techniques for slowing down the rate of erosion and encouraging accretion in order to inform the assessment of adaptation options for the sand dune system"

There will be a two year programme of sand-dune management works over a 2.6 km length of the coast in order to test the effectiveness of the methods. This will be measured against data captured during the previous two years and also against data for adjacent lengths of sand dune during the two year period; these data are being captured by the Council as part of their monitoring programme.

Sand dune management.

Works will be tested in four areas, both within the frontal dunes and to the front of the dunes, on an eroding frontage and an accreting frontage (the study area covers both accreting and eroding areas). The methods tested all work with the natural formation of dunes through wind blown sand and will include fencing, thatching and marram grass planting

The Coastal Defence Team will lead on the Pathfinder Project. My e-mail address is:-

graham.lymbery@technical.sefton.gov.uk.



Lifeboat Road Car Park board-walk.

Brighter Living Partnership



The Brighter Living Partnership is a local charity now in its third year. It has a wide range of activities which aim to improve the lives of local residents and reduce health inequalities.

This involves running a fruit and vegetable co-operative within North Sefton aiming to provide fruit and vegetables to every resident at affordable prices.

Sarah Lloyd, its voluntary Coordinator/Project Worker explained; "This is currently done through three co-operatives based in Crossens, Southport and Ainsdale, and also a delivery service across these three areas and Formby. At present it supplies 600 bags of fruit and vegetables per week. Much of this is locally produced but to add variety, some more exotic items are bought in such as Passion Fruit and Chinese Pears. A bag selling for £2.50 would cost £6.50 at a supermarket.

The content of the bags varies from week to week to allow people to try a wide range of produce. The delivery

service is 25p per bag or £1 for four or more bags. They also sell local free range eggs at £1.20 for six.

A base in Formby is being sought for use on one day per week but already phone orders can be taken on Thursdays before 3pm. for delivery the next day; (see website <http://www.brighterliving.org.uk/>).

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Peter West.



Members of The Society were very sorry to suddenly lose a popular and valued member, Peter West, husband of Joy, recently.

Born in London, Peter had worked for Royal Insurance from the age of 18 and was for many years their resident inspector at Southport and Chair of the Local Committee of the Insurance Institute. He was a very keen sportsman and picked for the Olympic Basketball team in 1939 but immediately on the outbreak of the second World War, Peter enrolled and joined the Royal Artillery.

He was in the Operations Room in Scapa Flow, then the D-Day landings and finally in Germany until the end of the war.

He and Joy came to Formby in 1972 and Peter retired in 1980. He was a Cricketer, Rugby player, Sailed, Golfer and Snooker player, member of Formby Lions and was Treasurer of the Formby Civic Society for three years.. An amusing aspect of his ancestry was that his great grandfather was manager of the Bendigo gold mines in Australia and was the last man that Ned Kelly held up at gunpoint!

We shall all miss him and we offer our condolences to Joy and family.

Reg Yorke.

History Group Report by Barbara Yorke



The Devil's Hole, Ravenmeols.

Formby and Freshfield Through Time.

Prichard's bookshop report that our new book *Formby and Freshfield Through Time*, largely based on the society's photo archive is selling well -- over 400 copies since early December when it was launched at the Formby Pool Centre.

Published by Cotswold based Amberley Publishing, this is one of a new series in which comparisons are drawn between old photographs of interesting local places and their present appearance. In our case, all the old photos are from the society's archive, many originally taken by Muriel Sibley. The new ones specially taken for this work will now themselves become part of the visual record of how Formby and Freshfield are changing and developing.

This ongoing process often goes without notice so the contrast between old and new is sometimes quite stark and thought-provoking.

All profits from the sale of this publication will come to the society.

New light on the 'Devils Hole'!

Even some local people are not famil-

iar with this striking geomorphological feature of the Ravenmeols dunes, one of the countries largest dune 'blowouts' but until now the reason for its formation has been speculative. Featured at the beginning of a recent TV programme, Country

"the effects of a landmine dropping on the dunes would have been significant"

Tracks, a previously unknown explanation has emerged. Local resident Major Ellis Dean thinks that it may have been started as a result of enemy action during World War 2 during which years Altcar Training Camp was home to Western Command Small Arm School. In 1944, during his own army service he became acquainted with a former Warrant Officer Instructor from the school. He remembered an incident during his time at Altcar when he and several other members of staff inspected a massive crater that had resulted from a land-mine dropped by a German bomber during the previous night. This was in May 1941, the time of the German 'blitz' on Merseyside.

Adjacent to this site there was in fact a 'Starfish' decoy intended to attract enemy attention there instead of on the docks. It apparently worked!

Certainly the effects of a landmine dropping on the dunes would have been significant and as this area is very exposed particularly to west and north-west winds it is very conceivable that that incident may have resulted in the very large 'blow-out' we see today.

Future Programme.

There are still two meetings left in the current history group programs. On Thursday 11th March Dr. Jen Lewis is to speak about recent archaeological research at Lathom House, abandoned by the Earls of Derby, following the Civil War but where recent research has revealed hitherto more ancient occupation.

On 8th April we have our annual Member's Evening, when there are usually three contributions. This year Dr Phil Smith will give a short introductory account of his recent research on (until recently unrecognised) Black Poplar in Formby and Mrs H. Broadfoot will talk about her former old thatched farmhouse, 'The Elms' which stood in Brows Lane on the site now occupied by Pritchard's Bookshop. Our summer programme is being prepared and may include a visit to the site of the former Formby Lighthouse on Altcar Rifle Range when we will have an opportunity to discuss the reasons for its construction there in the early 18th Century and search for any remaining foundations left after it was demolished during WW2.

Civic Voice

The Civic Society Initiative is launching a new national body for the civic movement – Civic Voice – after an intensive debate with civic societies and others that followed the demise of the Civic Trust in April 2009. Hundreds of civic societies, volunteers and others expressed their views, provoked discussion, provided funding and helped build a new momentum of support for the civic movement that will make it stronger than ever before.

Civic Voice is being launched publicly on Saturday 17 April and all civic societies registered with the Civic Society Initiative and other partners will be welcome to attend. There is further information on the launch and how to book your place available on the Civic Society Initiative website at www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

Joining Civic Voice

A majority of civic societies responding to the discussion supported funding on the basis of a levy per member. The cost of membership in the first year is £1.50 per member to be paid by each society (excluding life members and up to a cap of £500). Civic societies which can afford to are being encouraged to make a donation in excess of £500 where possible so the momentum necessary to fund an independent voice for the civic movement can be built up. Family and joint memberships will both count as two members for the purposes of calculating the fee. Corporate and other membership categories should count as one. Civic societies joining as “founder members” before the end of May 2010 will receive a 10% discount on the membership fee and their membership will run till the

end of April 2011.

It is recognised that life members do not provide a regular source of income to civic societies and it is asked that a single donation is made equivalent to £1.50 per life member in the first year and for new life members in subsequent years.

It is expected the levy will be increased to £2 per member from May 2011 and the cap raised to £800. This will allow time for civic societies to adjust to the new arrangements. **It will be for Civic Voice’s board to make the final decision on any change.**

Partnerships

Civic societies joining Civic Voice will benefit from a number of exciting partnerships with benefits for them and their members. These include partnerships with the National Trust, Bluefin insurance, The Co-operative Bank and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

There is more information about

“It is expected a Civic Forum will be established to involve more civic societies in debating and discussing issues”

these partnerships on their website and there will be more information provided to civic societies joining Civic Voice.

Governance and structure

Civic Voice will be a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It will be a federal organisation with civic and amenity societies as its members. Its structure will be broadly as proposed in a discussion paper issued in December with some important changes to reflect the feedback from civic societies and the desire for stronger civic society input and a grassroots feel.

The key changes are:

The number of civic societies needed to raise an issue at an AGM will be halved to 10

- There will never be a majority of trustees not elected by civic societies when the governing body is working
- Civic societies will have votes weighted according to the size of their membership up to a maximum. This will be one vote per 100 members up to (initially) five votes. The cap is broadly linked to the cap on the membership fee (initially £500). Weighted voting will apply to members of Civic Voice and not to the ballot among civic societies for its initial trustees

The number of members needed to call a General Meeting is reduced to 5% of the voting rights

It is expected a Civic Forum will be established to involve more civic societies in debating and discussing issues and priorities in addition to the AGM and annual convention. Civic Voice will also have provision for 10 not-for-profit partners to nominate a single trustee between them if desired as previously proposed. Each of these issues will be for Civic Voice’s Board to decide. We expect Civic Voice’s first AGM to be held in Autumn 2010.

The name

Civic Voice has been chosen as the name of the new body. It was selected by civic society volunteers from a shortlist of options that best expressed the intended purpose and style of the new body. It was more than twice as popular as the nearest alternative.

The ballot received 636 responses. For those indicating a first choice Civic Voice was preferred by 55%; Civic Vision 26%; Civic Matters 15% and C3 (championing civic causes) 3%.

Formby Lighthouse by Reg Yorke.



Formby Lighthouse features strongly in Formby folk memory and its image is indeed incorporated in the medallions of the current Parish Council Chairman's chain of office and the road sign situated on the Altcar boundary. One of the earliest nautical structures erected to help improve the safety of the Port of Liverpool, it was erected soon after the opening of the first dock. Nicholas Blundell noted in his diary on the 17 September 1719

that his wife and he "rode out to see the landmark as it is building at the Grange".

Although now remembered as a Lighthouse, the 120 foot structure which survived until destroyed by the military in 1941 was actually only used as a Lighthouse for a relatively short part of its life. The rest of the time it stood proudly overlooking the dangerous approaches to the river as a valuable sentinel landmark.

It worked in conjunction with a lower mark the position of which had to be altered from time to time due to the continually changing courses of

"One of the earliest nautical structures erected to help improve the safety of the Port of Liverpool, it was erected soon after the opening of the first dock."

the natural channels prior to the discovery, dredging and fixing with re-ventments of the present day Crosby Channel.

It was in fact the Port's first marine surveyor, Commander Denham, who in 1831 following a very thorough survey of the Mersey approaches arranged for the Formby Land-Mark to be converted to a Lighthouse which then worked with a new Formby Light vessel guiding shipping through the new channel. The

cost of conversion came to £300 including an attached dwelling for the keeper and £40 for a light reflector. The keeper appointed at a salary of £20 per annum was also put in charge of the already well established Formby Lifeboat Station.

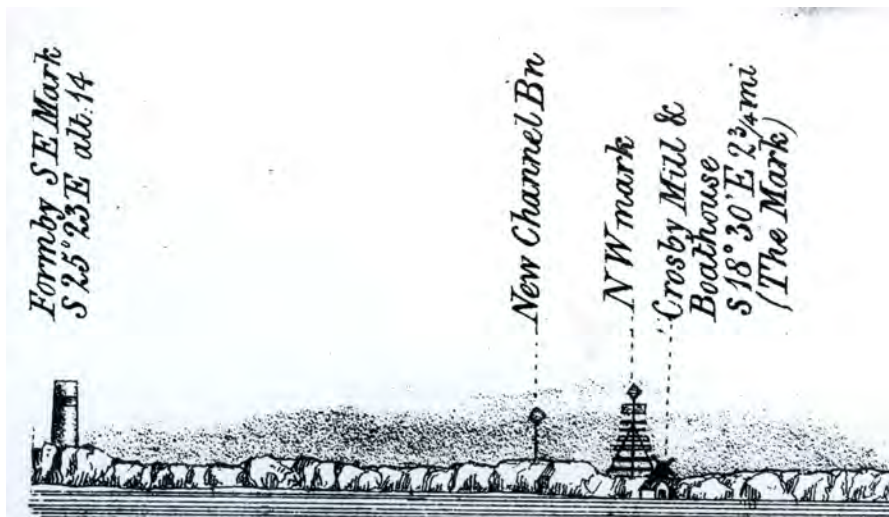
After further changes in the channels, it ceased as a Lighthouse for a period from 1839 but was lit again between 1851 to 1856 following which date the light was removed to a new Lighthouse at Crosby.

Unfortunately the first period as a Lighthouse was marred by the tragic death of the first keeper Lt. Walker, who in his role as keeper of the lifeboat went out with the boat leaving his servant girl to 'mind the light', (and his children), in a severe gale during which the lifeboat capsized and the keeper's life was lost along with several other members of the crew.

The old Lighthouse then referred to as the "Methuselah of local nautical structures" was finally demolished in 1941 following the May Blitz on Liverpool when it was thought that German bombers were using it as a useful beacon to Merseyside.

Plans are afoot for a guided visit to the almost forgotten Lighthouse site as part of a two week Festival of British Archaeology to be held during the last two weeks of July. Details in our next issue.

Right: How the lighthouse/ landmark appeared to shipping using the then important approach to the Mersey - the Formby Channel in the mid-19th Century. Other official landmarks are also depicted, including the New Channel Beacon, the NW Mark (the predecessor of the still existing 'Formby Landmark and of course the Lifeboat Station, with Crosby Mill on the horizon behind it. Navigation at that time relied on visual 'sightings' and depth soundings.



Planning Matters continued.

with children, older and disabled people and to the diverse range of requirements across the area.

4NW have confirmed that they and the NWDA do not intend to undertake a strategic review of the Green Belt as part of RS2010 (which is to supersede RSS2008); nor are they able to say whether 4NW/NWDA will undertake any strategic review of the Green Belt in the future. Because only the regional authority has the power to release green belt land, this means we have time to continue our enquiries. We also hope to engage the Campaign to Protect Rural England in exerting pressure to the same end at the regional level.

Regular readers of the Society's *Newsletter* will recall the report in the November 2008 issue on plans for the redevelopment of the Powerhouse building and site at the end of Hoggs Hill Lane, which were consulted upon at an exhibition at Formby Pool. These plans have now matured into a formal planning application which will be decided by the Council's Planning Committee on 10 March.

the interior of the building would be a huge central glazed atrium extending over the four storeys from ground level to roof for the full length of the building, so during the day it would be flooded by natural light. It would be crossed at different levels by a number of walkways, and at ground level there would be waiting and resting areas and a large shallow pool water feature for the enjoyment of residents and their visitors. On either side of the atrium and accessed from it, there would be 60 apartments, 6 of them with one bedroom, 40 with two and 14 with three; 2 apartments would have access to private roof gardens. The later extensions to the original building, which were added at different times to facilitate the various industrial activities carried out in the building after it had ceased to generate electricity for the Liverpool to Southport railway, have already been demolished, and there would be a new extension, commensurate in design with the dignity and scale of the original building, to serve as the main entrance and reception area. At



The shell of the original building would be retained and all its window openings, many of which have been bricked up, restored to become again distinctive features of this striking building, which has so long dominated the southern approaches to Formby. A very striking feature of

ground floor level, there would also be a swimming pool and gymnasium for the use of residents. The extensive site would include a screened car park and semi-private and communal open space within landscaped grounds which would have wooded areas, walkways and a cycle way.

Access to the site was originally solely from a railway siding connecting to the main line, but, after power generation had ceased, access has been by a single track lane quite unsuitable for the HGVs and vans which serviced the industrial activity at the site. Under the proposal, access would continue along a resurfaced Hoggs Hill Lane, which would have passing places, and, at its junction with Belvedere Drive, there would be a remotely controlled gateway. Pedestrians, and we hope cyclists, would be able to bypass the gateway to access a right of way adjacent to the lane and connecting, one day, with the intended path along the R. Alt, which flows close to the site. Traffic modelling studies indicate that there would not be any issues relating to traffic flows, even at peak times.

The proposals, however, are not without problems. The site is located in Formby's green belt and that gives rise to special constraints (please see the last issue of the *Newsletter*); indeed, were the application to be approved by the Council, it would have, on that account alone, to be referred to the Government Office of the North West, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, for the final decision. Another difficulty is that the site is rated a Flood Zone 3a (High Probability) and that has to be a matter of concern, notwithstanding the finished floor level would be 1.24m above the 1 in 100 year fluvial flood level.

Despite these and several other problems, we warmly welcome these imaginative designs for the building and the site. We like very much the way the original features of this imposing historic building have been preserved, while at the same time giving them a new elegance commensurate with their transformed purpose. We hope that what at present is an environmental and social problem will become an asset and credit to this community through the eventual implementation of these proposals .

Wildlife notes by Dr Phil Smith

November 2009

Everyone tells me we have had a really wet November – not so; the deluges that flooded Cumbria only about 50 miles away completely missed us. Something to do with the rain shadow of the Welsh mountains, I guess. In fact, the water-table in the sand-dunes is as low as I can ever remember at this time of year. On 26th, there was no surface water in the slacks at Cabin Hill and only 5 **Snipe** where last year at this time I saw 63. Some of the scrapes contain shallow water and I was pleased to see two **Water Rails** there on 8th, only the second time I have spotted this elusive bird at Cabin Hill in nearly 40 years. A **Chiffchaff** was calling from nearby willow bushes. This summer warbler normally migrates south to Africa in autumn but wintering in the Formby area has become regular in recent years, with as many as 40 being reported in 2001.

A low dune water-table is bad news for our **Natterjack Toads** as they will not breed successfully if the slacks are too shallow next spring. A meeting of our Natterjack Monitoring Group on 11th received detailed annual reports for 2007 and 2008, funded by the National Trust and

Natural England. These show that 2007 was a good year for Natterjack breeding but 2008 was poor, largely due to a spring drought which caused many slacks to dry up prematurely. To maintain the continuous record now stretching back to the mid-1980s, it is hoped to find the cost of a 2009 report. Much of the monitoring work is done by volunteers and more are needed if this important work is to continue. In 2010, we are due to measure samples of adults to check the age-structure of the population. As they age, the toads get bigger, so a

high proportion of larger individuals would mean too few younger animals are being added to the population, perhaps due to poor breeding success. As Natterjacks are legally protected, a license is required to handle them.

The mild November weather encouraged me to get out to Formby Point and complete the survey of **Black Poplars** which has been ongoing for over a year. The grand total is now about 620 trees! I found quite a lot of previously overlooked specimens, for example in the area north of Lifeboat Road where sand was extracted commercially many years ago. I wanted to find out when these trees were planted, so I went to Merseyside BioBank to look at the 1945 aerial photographs. These can be viewed through a stereoscope to give a 3D image. Sure enough, the poplars were visible as tiny bushes in the floor of the sand-quarry. We know that very little sand-working took



Fallen Black Poplars at Albert Road

place during World War II, so the trees were probably planted in the late 1930s, making them now about 70 years old. Using other sources, including early Ordnance Survey maps, there is evidence that some of the heavily weathered poplars at Formby Point are veterans of more than 120 years.

Driving back from Ormskirk on 6th, I had the thrill of seeing a **Red Kite** fly over my car at Hillhouse near Great Altcar. This is still a rare bird in our area, despite the many successful introductions in other parts of the

country. Other good birds during the month were a flock of 45 **Twite** on the shore at Weld Road, Birkdale which I saw on 9th and a **Shorelark** which graced Southport beach for about a week. I finally caught up with it on 15th when assembled watchers on the seawall were enjoying good views until a jogger inadvertently flushed the bird.

December 2009

Inclement winter weather during December meant fewer trips out and more time spent on writing up summer field work, including the major study on **Black Poplar** which has occupied Patricia Lockwood and me for over a year. Coincidentally, as I completed the manuscript of a paper to send to a scientific journal, I received a copy of *British Wildlife*, an excellent magazine to which I have subscribed since its inception in 1989. This edition includes a major article on Black Poplar, from which I gleaned some useful snippets of information and several new references to include in my paper. The article stresses that, because the Black Poplar has mainly been grown from cuttings, it has a low genetic variability, only 15 clones being found during a national study involving DNA fingerprinting. This may make the trees more susceptible to the fungal disease which is currently devastating thousands of "Manchester Poplars". The Formby Point Black Poplars, now totalling about 650 following further discoveries, have an interesting landscape history, their ages ranging from about 40 to over 120 years. However, some of the older trees are dying and an understanding of local genetic variation would be useful before attempting to propagate them for the future.

My tide-table encouraged me to visit Birkdale shore at Weld Road on 5th. Here I had my best ever views of a flock of 58 **Twite** as they were pushed by the rising water to the foot of the seawall. Several of these ginger-faced finches have been colour-ringed, perhaps at Heysham or in Scotland. If someone can read the

Wildlife Notes continued

sequences, we may find out where they come from. Other good birds during the month included two **Little Auks** at Formby Point, a **Great White Egret** on the Ribble marshes, several **Shags** at Crosby Marina and Southport Marine Lake, a couple of **Snow Buntings** on Ainsdale beach and a male **Hen Harrier** at Marshside, which I enjoyed watching from the coast road on 29th. The usual influx of **Whooper Swans** totalled about 1600 at Martin Mere.

I went to Freshfield Dune Heath on 10th to see the scrub-clearance work which is ongoing to improve conditions for **Heather** and its associated wildlife. An energetic visiting group of seven workers from a national body, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, joined six of the regular local volunteers and two members of the North Merseyside Amphibian & Reptile Group to make inroads into some large **Gorse** clumps, the cut material being chipped by a machine provided by Sefton Council. It was disturbing to see several used shot-gun cartridges on the reserve. Fiona Whitfield tells me this is a weekly finding which has been reported to the police. I must say you have to be pretty bare-faced to take firearms onto a well-signed nature reserve!

At last, there is some better news about our local **Red Squirrels**, whose population crashed by 85-90% in the



Gorse infestation at Freshfield

last few years due to squirrel-pox disease carried by **Grey Squirrels**. This year, numbers are thought to have roughly doubled following a good breeding season. Monitoring the recovery will depend on the efforts of dozens of enthusiastic volunteers who go out in all weathers. To

report sightings and for other information, visit the excellent Save Our Squirrels web-site: www.saveoursquirrels.org or phone 0151 920 3769.



Woodcock, photo Dot Jones

January 2010

The Met. Office tells us that December/January was the coldest winter period since 1981/82, when I recollect huge ice-flows were washed up at Formby Point. There was nothing like that this winter but the weather did have effects on our wildlife.

There were several reports of **Woodcock** turning up in odd places and Dot Jones sent me a superb photo of one in her Huyton garden, taken through a patio window on a mobile phone! Flocks of winter thrushes,

“some better news about our local Red Squirrels, whose population crashed by 85-90% in the last few years”

mainly **Fieldfare** and **Redwing**, were also on the move with 2000+ reported flying south at Fisherman’s Path on 9th. Dave Hardaker drew my attention to a flock of **Skylarks** on a field next to Liverpool Road, Formby. I counted 1200 there on 10th, feeding on a strip of unharvested wheat, while Graham Clarkson recorded 1780 Skylarks at Crossens Marsh the following day. These are amongst the largest gatherings of this nationally declining species seen in our region for many years. On 7th, Catherine Highfield spotted two **Jack Snipe** and two **Little Egrets** on an unfrozen dyke on the otherwise icy Freshfield Dune Heath. Much rarer was the **Black-necked Grebe** that

spent several days on Crosby Marine Lake at the beginning of the month.

Another apparent weather casualty was a **Bittern** which delighted watchers during the week or more it spent on the saltmarsh near the coast road at Marshside. This area also provided good views of **Hen Harrier** (up to two males and a female), **Short-eared Owls** (I saw four, but as many as 10 were recorded), **Merlins**, **Sparrowhawks** and **Peregrines**. Fellow-travellers with the **Pink-footed Geese** feeding here included two **Greenland Whitefronts**, several **Barnacle Geese** and a **Brent**. Elsewhere, I had great views from the car of 4200 Pinkfeet at Downholland Moss on 1st but couldn’t find any other goose species with them. The same day produced 550 **Whooper Swans** on Halsall Moss, again close to the road, a high-tide roost of 3000 **Oystercatchers** on Ainsdale beach and a Short-eared Owl nearby. Another large flock was the 5500 **Wood Pigeons** feeding on a rape crop at Altcar Withins on 16th. I don’t think these would have been popular with the farmer!

As usual, Sands Lake at Ainsdale attracted lots of duck, my peak counts being 230 **Tufted Ducks** on 22nd and 53 **Shovelers** on 4th, on which date the lake was almost completely frozen. I was also delighted to beat my all-time record for **Coot** at Southport Marine Lake, 1428 being present with 108 **Mute Swans** on 26th. A female **Red-crested Pochard** there from 18th attracted some attention, but its tameness strongly suggests an escape from a waterfowl collection rather than a genuine wild bird from southern Europe.

In hard winters, feeding birds in the garden is thought to help their survival. Local bird-ringer, Ian Wolfenden, tells me that, of a sample of more than 20 birds trapped in his Crosby garden at the height of the freeze, all but one skinny **Robin** were plump and healthy. Evidently, they were being well-fed.

Merseyside Red Squirrel Survivors Project by Tim Dale.

Squirrel Pox has decimated the local Red Squirrel population throughout the Merseyside area. From October 2009 a team from Liverpool University, headed by vet Tim Dale, has begun research into the infection and immune status of the surviving Red Squirrel population, with the aim to determine if the surviving red squirrels have encountered the virus and survived or simply being lucky enough to avoid it.

The research, so far, has involved the capture, sampling, tagging and release of the individuals found within the Ainsdale NNR and Formby National Trust sites and has proved successful with the procedures being well tolerated by the squirrels without the use of anaesthetics. Over the next month the project will be entering its second phase, moving onto the Squirrels found in the urban/garden areas of Formby.

There was a concern that trapping in gardens may have caused the squirrels to vacate the gardens however in the few gardens where sampling has occurred already, in the majority of cases, the squirrels have returned to the garden after a few days. However to get a complete view of the disease status more samples and thus more volunteers are needed to allow the capture of squirrels in their gardens.

The project is proposed to run for 3-4 years and is funded by the Natural Environmental Research Council and the National Trust. The long term aim of the study is to use the information gained to develop future conservation strategies to keep Red Squirrels in the local area and throughout the British Isles.

If you are interested in participating in the project by allowing the capture of red squirrels in your garden then please contact Tim Dale on 07807106803 or e-mail t.dale@liverpool.ac.uk.



Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop.

Having recently held our annual get together at Lydiate Hall Farm, we have now arranged our programme for the next few months. In February we are going to visit Chapel Gallery, Ormskirk to see an Exhibition of etchings, printing and woodcarvings featuring the works of 13 artists from Manchester Academy of Fine Arts.

As a complete contrast, in March we will go to the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool to see the works of the Guyanese artist Aubrey Williams . These show his global interest and readiness to question an assumed division between figurative and abstract art. After the cold weather this Winter, we are hoping for a warm Spring and in April we will go to The Ship Inn, Burscough, to sketch and following lunch, will proceed on to the grounds of Rufford Old Hall.

In May we are going further field, to Salmesbury Hall, to see the Exhibition of the West Lanes Craft Guild, followed by painting in the grounds of this lovely old Hall.

The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

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Formby Civic Society

Annual Dinner

Treetops, Old Southport Road, Formby;

Friday, 12th March 2010

Our Annual Dinner is to be held at Treetops Restaurant on Friday 12th March 2010 at 7pm for 7.30pm. This occasion held at the excellent venue of Treetops is in many ways the highlight of our year and very well supported. This year our Guest of Honour is to be Dr Jennifer Lewis accompanied by her husband Anthony. Jennifer was for a long period Secretary of the Formby Society History Group. She then took a degree in archaeology, has carried out much good work locally, written extensively and is now Chair of the History and Archaeology Group of the Sefton Coast Partnership.

Tickets are £17 per person, to include a glass of wine on arrival. Dress informal;

We do hope you will be able to join us. Friends of members will also be very welcome. Please reply before Tuesday 9th March to Dr Reg Yorke.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Thursday 11th Mar: *Lathom House – The Story of the abandoned stronghold of the Earls of Derby*, Jen Lewis,

Friday 26th March: *Out of the Habit*, Sister Goldie, Sisters of Notre Dame.

Thursday 8th April: *History Group Members Evening*

Friday 23rd April: **Annual General Meeting.**

May, (Date to be arranged) *Formby Flying Centenary Commemoration*

ART GROUP

Thursday 18th March: Visit *Walker Art Gallery*, Liverpool. Meet Formby Station 9.25 am.

Thursday 15th April: **Sketching at Ship Inn, Burscough and Rufford Old Hall.** Meet Ship Inn 10.30 am.
