



October 2012

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings are held at the Ravenmeols Centre, Park Road, Formby, at 8.00 pm on Thursdays

General Meetings - 2012

25th October	Photography of the Seasons	Trevor Davenport
22nd November	'Fracking'	Prof. Richard Worden

2013

24th January	Freshfield Dune Heath	T. Jackson and Fiona Sumner
28th February	The Mersey Forest	Paul Nolan
28th March	The Sack & Bag Industry of Liverpool	R. Williams
25th April	Annual General Meeting	

History Group Meetings – 2012

11th October	Marshside Fishermen	Gladys Armstrong
8th November	Ravenmeols Heritage	Dr. Reg Yorke
13th December	Thomas Fresh, Inspector of Nuisances (from whom 'Freshfield' takes its name)	Norman Parkinson

2013

10th January	Women in WW1	Brenda Murray
14th February	Liverpool Children in the 1950s	Pamela Russell
14th March	Viking finds on Merseyside	Robin Philpot
11th April	Incredible Liverpool	Elizabeth Newell

All meetings are now held on Thursdays, starting at 8.00pm, and are open to members (free) and to guests on payment of a small admission charge (£2).

SOCIETY NEWS

The summer programme culminated with the Heritage Open Day event on 9th September when over 160

people visited the site of 'Formby-by-the-Sea', many walking the trail from the bottom of Albert Road, where archaeologists were excavating remains of the old promenade, up to Firwood and back by Alexandra Road, viewing the sites of 19th century houses some of which still stand.

Other highlights were the walk on Altcar Rifle Range on 11th July over the fields and sand dunes of the Range, with their amazing diversity of wild flowers and plants, on a beautiful summer evening closing with a spectacular sunset, the visit to Townley Hall, Burnley, on 8th August, the wildlife walk on Cabin Hill on 18th August, and an evening walk on 22nd August to the 'Hakirke' hidden in the mysterious woods of Crosby Hall.

Our website gives detailed information about the society and all its activities, past, present and future. This includes the Sibley Collection, showing photographs of most roads in Formby, taken mainly in the 1960s, research activities and studies in local history and the Society's publications, and detailed notes produced each month by Dr. Phil Smith on our ever-changing coast, its bird life and its plants and flowers. A recent addition is a map of the Ravenmeols Heritage Trails with their criss cross-trails and a walking route. If you have access to the internet, all this can be found by typing in 'Formby Civic Society' in a search engine, clicking on it, and then clicking one of the tabs on the left hand side.

Newsletter Editor

We are in urgent need of a newsletter producer and editor. The newsletter is of particular importance to those members who do not have internet access and we want to continue to produce it on a regular basis. If you think you might like to take on this role (with scope for your creative talent!) we should be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Reg Yorke, tel. (01704) 872187.

TOCKHOLES VILLAGE AND TOWNLEY HALL



On Wednesday, 8th August, twenty-eight members set off on a lovely summer day, no sign of rain and none forecast, on our visit to East Lancashire. After we left the motorway, we travelled through some enchanting scenery on the narrow winding roads to our first stop at Vaughns Country Café. A choice then had to be made, either to go on a short walk or stay at the Cafe and have coffee and watch the variety of birds feeding through the one way glass window. The walkers then had a five minute drive to the village where the walk began. We saw some interesting cottages and were told why the cellar at one cottage had two fireplaces, because that was the level of the road many years ago, the proud owner of the cottage was happy to tell us. On to old inns nestled down a slope, all of whom brewed their own beer. On either side were panoramic views across the valleys. Those with good eyesight could see Heysham Power Station and Blackpool Tower. Then there were weavers' cottages where the occupants wove woollen cloth. The Elizabethan house, Higher Hill Farm, complete with 'garderobe' and original mullioned windows delighted everyone. As it is private property we could only admire it from the gate. We retraced our steps and stepped carefully through a field of cow pats, there were no complaints and thankfully no falls. Well done everyone.

Back to the Cafe to enjoy a tasty homemade meal, and fully refreshed, off to Townley Hall.

The Hall dates from the 14th century, now owned and run by Burnley Council. It is set in 400 acres of beautiful parkland. Apart from the fine period rooms it has an Art Gallery and a Museum. The Stable

Cafe sold drinks and snacks.

Tired, but happy, after an enjoyable day, we joined the coach, went home and reached Formby on time. We thanked our excellent driver who did a great job on the narrow roads.

VISIT TO LITTLE CROSBY HALL

On the evening of August 22nd a small group of members visited Little Crosby Hall. We were welcomed by Alice who has worked at CHET (Crosby Hall Educational Trust) for quite a few years and was able to pass on a great deal of information about the whole site. We then set off straight away to tour the attractive private gardens of the Blundell family (where we discovered some unusual old trees including a large medlar and a strawberry tree) and then the grounds. Our main aim was to see the Harkirke, a chapel built on the site of a burial ground. This burial ground was dedicated by William Blundell (1560 - 1638) for Catholics who had been refused burial. After 1753 the site was forgotten about until 1889 when Colonel Nicholas Blundell built the present Harkirke Chapel. Inside is a list of all the people buried on the site. Three undamaged headstones were incorporated into the north wall.

To get to the Harkirke we used a shorter cut which was very overgrown, thanks to the wet summer. En route we passed the old Gamekeeper's summer cottage where pheasant chicks were reared in part of the ground floor while the gamekeeper slept immediately above. As we left the Harkirke, the sky clouded over and the light rain made our return through the woods very atmospheric. Now we know exactly what lies behind the walls past which most of us have driven many a time. We returned to the CHET buildings (which are based on the original Home Farm) for a drink before having to negotiate our way out of a padlocked entrance gate (it was soon opened again to let us out!) We would like to thank Dru Haydon for organising a very enjoyable and interesting evening.

PLANNING MATTERS

Jeremy Tickle

The owners of the 17th century cottage at 1 Southport Road, which is in imminent danger of collapsing, have submitted a planning application for its renovation. This has been a long-running saga with the Society heavily involved throughout, in trying to make sure that another piece of local Formby history is not lost, including involving English Heritage, to ensure the cottage was not left to fall into ruin. The good news is that the cottage will be renovated and will look much as it does today, the bad news is that little of the older, original cottage (the lower left hand side of the building when looking from Southport Road) can be restored as it has been so neglected over the years. The Society has made a representation to the Planning Officer about the inclusion of incongruous skylights and we await the decision of the Planning Committee. Full details are available on the Sefton website (<http://www.sefton.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=5297>) under application number S/2012/0812 (and S/2012/0811 for listed planning consent).



Morrisons are to return to the Village! They have applied for planning permission to reuse the former Marks & Spencer shop at 1a Chapel Lane. The proposals include seating area on the pavement outside for customers to use after purchasing food and drink (including alcohol). Whilst this is good news, with another major retailer in the Village and an unoccupied shop put back into use, the application is for the shop to be open from 6.00 to 24.00 and for alcohol to be sold during those hours. As the shop is very close to residential properties, including the flats above the shops in Brows Lane, Brows Lane itself and Elbow Lane, the Society has made a representation to both the Planning

Officer for delivery times to be restricted and to the Licensing Authority for a similar restriction to be placed on the times when alcohol can be sold and when it can be consumed on the premises. Again, full details are available on the Sefton website (<http://www.sefton.gov.uk/Default.aspx/page=5297>) under application number S/2012/0739.

Whilst not yet a planning application there is a proposal to develop land bounded by Formby bypass, Liverpool Road and residential SE Formby (Sefton Green Belt Study Land parcel S048). This is a large joint development by Barratt and David Wilson Homes and involves the construction of between 300 and 400 homes on Green Belt land. This is likely to be a highly contentious issue as evidenced by a massive turnout of people attending a consultation event at the Gild Hall on the 9th of August. The Campaign for Rural England (CPRE) are actively opposing such a development and once the detailed plans become available, expected in October, then representations are likely to be drafted. There are major issues to deal with here such as access - hundreds of additional commuters trying to access Liverpool Road at rush hour, the land regularly floods during periods of heavy rainfall and the fact that the land is high grade agricultural land. In the meantime if you wish to know more see the Sefton website in particular - http://www.sefton.gov.uk/pdf/PERD_DraftSeftonGreenBeltStudyMay2011Appendix1.pdf.

SUMMER 2012 WILDLIFE NOTES

Dr. Phil Smith

Following a series of winter and spring droughts, summer 2012 went on record as the wettest in a century. This had a considerable impact on the local wildlife. For example, our **Natterjack Toads**, having experienced hardly any successful breeding in recent years, were able to spawn as June's rain flooded their shallow duneland pools. By August, much later than usual, tiny yellow-striped toadlets were emerging in several places along the coast. Now the race is on to gain enough weight for successful hibernation.

Duneland flora also responded well to the damp conditions. It was one of the best summers on record for **Bee Orchids**, while the colourful marsh-orchids often produced much larger flower-spikes than normal. I measured some **Southern Marsh-orchids** on Seaforth Nature Reserve that were up to 90cm tall, the largest I have ever seen. By July, vegetation in the drier dune areas often shows signs of drought but not this summer. During a walk through a profusion of flowers on the Ravenmeols sandhills, a friend was heard to mutter "You couldn't grow a garden like this!" The downside was that coarse grasses and scrub also responded, leading to the overgrowth of bare sand, crowding out the smaller, often rarer, species that need open conditions. Nevertheless, Patricia Lockwood and I found patches of a tiny white-flowered clover at Ainsdale that turned out to be the first record in the region of **Rough Clover** (*Trifolium scabrum*), a plant of coastal areas mainly in the south and east.



Despite the cool weather, many of our sand-dune butterflies did surprisingly well, local specialities like the **Dark Green Fritillary** and **Grayling** occurring in expected numbers, while **Meadow Browns**, **Gatekeepers**, **Small Skippers** and **Small Coppers** were abundant. A particular highlight was the discovery of a small colony of **White-letter Hairstreaks** at Ainsdale, an elusive butterfly that I had never seen before on the coast. **Black-and-red Narrow-bordered Five-spot** and **Six-spot Burnet** moths were also numerous, while the rare iridescent green **Forester** moth also attracted attention at its Ainsdale colonies. All these day-flying moths, as well as many butterflies, use Ragwort as a nectar source, emphasising the value of the unjustly maligned plant to a great variety of insects.

As usual, many local people enjoyed guided visits to see the spectacular Sefton Coast wildlife. One of the most rewarding was an August walk to the Devil's Hole, a spectacular blow-out in the Ravenmeols dunes. The floor of the blow-out is now a seasonally flooded wet-slack that has recently been colonised by thousands of one of our choicest wildflowers, the **Grass-of-Parnassus**. Sefton is a hot-spot for this nationally declining plant and the Devil's Hole colony could well be one of the largest in the country.



Every now and again one of my trips really sticks in the memory. An example was a visit to the Green Beach on 20th August. My arrival at Ainsdale coincided with a high tide that had pushed a roost of 3500 **Sanderlings** up the shore. This was one of the largest gatherings of this species I had ever seen. Two groups of dog-walkers were persuaded not to disturb the waders. Having just arrived back from breeding in northern Canada and Greenland, I thought they deserved a rest. The nearby embryo dunes were alive with **Northern Dune Tiger Beetles**.

Several baby **Natterjack Toads** were running about on a footpath, while the adjacent slack, flooded almost to winter levels, had **Short-winged Coneheads**, vying for attention with numerous **Graylings**, **Common Blues**, **Peacocks**, **Six-spot Burnets**, etc. Finally, I reached the main target of my visit, the frontal dune-slack no. 47. Its scrapes were re-profiled back in March to make them more attractive to pond plants and animals. It certainly seems to have done the trick, as I found seven species of dragonflies, including eight **Ruddy Darters**, 30 **Emerald Damselflies**, two **Emperors** and single **Brown Hawker** and **Southern Hawker**.



Sunnier conditions towards the end of August led to late-summer butterflies appearing in good numbers. **Peacocks** were especially numerous and were joined by the equally colourful **Small Tortoiseshell**. Once a common sight, the latter species has been hard to find in recent years, so it was a delight to see about 40 nectaring on **Water Mint** and **Common Fleabane** on the northern section of Birkdale Green Beach. The month ended with a big hatch of **Migrant Hawkers**. I counted 16 flying around the Natural England offices at Ainsdale on 30th, while others posed for photographs on the Green Beach **Alder** bushes.

HISTORY GROUP

Dr. Reg Yorke

'Formby, Then and Now'

Our new publication is currently with the printers and we are told will be in the shops by 1st November, courtesy of the History Press, who we think have made a very good job of design and layout. We have inserted a sentence at the beginning of the book to say that this publication represents this society's (somewhat late) contribution to Civic Day.

Ravenmeols Heritage Trails

A very successful Heritage Open Day event was organised by the Formby Civic Society jointly with Sefton Coast and Countryside service on Sunday 9th September. The theme was 'Formby-by-the-Sea, Rediscovered', and attended by over 160 visitors. The feedback from visitors has been rewarding and encouraging, particularly as some had personal memories and knowledge of the area. This meant that it was also a learning experience for the organisers! We were particularly grateful to former residents Brian Brankin and Phil Clulee for joining us, and to Jonathan and Molly Rathbone for allowing us to visit their back garden on a couple of occasions in order to discuss the history of Sandhills Cottage, a listed (Grade 2), late 19thC listed building, a rare example of the work of Arthur Macmurdo, a highly regarded member of the 'Arts and Crafts' movement. There was also an archaeological dig by Mark Adams (Liverpool Museum) to examine the supposedly still intact remains of the lower 'deck' of the promenade now



completely buried by blown sand. This event was organised in conjunction with Sefton Coast Partnership.

As far as the rest of the Ravenmeols Heritage Trails go, since the beginning of this project I feel we have gone through several phases (not necessarily in the right order):- Exploratory, both on the ground and background research. Trying to understand what we have found on site, in historical photographs and in documentary sources. Relating this information to present day landscape using it to identify, record, understand and explain what is to be found on the site today. Mapping and testing

physical routes (trails) relating the more significant locations and features, past and present, is ongoing. Location types in Ravenmeols are mainly :- Natural landscape (including Sefton Coast's biggest 'blow-out' and a NNR at Cabin Hill). Cultural landscape (conifer plantations, former asparagus fields). Residential, present and past (including the building designed by McMurdo). Military (Lookouts, Rifle Range, Radar station site). Industrial (Sand-winning). Maritime (Formby Lifeboat Station remains, Tidepoles, Navigation Mark). Ecclesiastical (St. Luke's Church and mediaeval chapel site). Other local history (like the hidden promenade). In the next six months we have to decide what is special about Ravenmeols and the themes which will be most interesting to our visitors and we still need members to volunteer to help with this.

Archives

Following the recent hasty relocation of most of our physical archives from Swift's shop, where conditions were rather poor, Colin Cooke has kindly responded to a request for help and has already commenced an on-going audit. This has started with the Sibley originals collection. Thanks to the previous work of Jim Hersey, Alan Burton and Tony Bonney, this has all been listed and indexed but I feel it prudent now to go through the originals, item by item, to audit the collection and check the condition of individual items.

In parallel with this, Tony Bonney has offered to photograph the water coloured sketches as the colour rendition achieved by the technology originally available does not do them justice.

Enquiries

We continue to receive many interesting e-mail enquiries mainly from people who have had family connections here, and discovered our website. The importance of a good website has become very clear and I hope we can continue to develop the local history section.

THE ALTCAR RIFLE RANGE

Extract from 'Altcar Training Camp' by John Houston and Jen Lewis

The Rifle Range on the west bank of the Alt was established in 1860 on land known as Bailing's Wharf which had developed on the seaward side of the river as sandy spits accumulated and gradually filled a lagoon. The process can be traced on navigation charts and maps dating from the early 18th century. In 1779 Commissioners were appointed in an attempt to resolve the problem of flooding in the Alt valley by embanking the river, draining the marshes and bringing the land into cultivation. The problem of sand drifting southwards from Formby Point and blocking the river was solved by planting bundles of gorse to trap the sand and by the planting of 'starr grass' (the local name for Marram grass). The process was more or less complete by 1848-9 when the first large scale Ordnance Survey was published. By 1855, 150 acres had been won from the sand flats and this was leased as grazing land'

In 1859 Britain was once again threatened by invasion from France. In response the War Office encouraged the formation of local volunteer artillery and rifle corps. One of these groups, the 5th

Lancashire Rifle Volunteer Corps, was established by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Gladstone and in his search for a suitable training area he was invited by the Alt Commissioners to consider the land at Bailing's Wharf. The tenant, Mr. Clarke, who had found the land poor for grazing, was happy to oblige in setting up a rifle range and the lease was arranged with the landlord, William Molyneux, the fourth Earl of Sefton. The reclaimed land was uneven, waterlogged and access was difficult. To make it suitable as a rifle range it was partially levelled and drained. On 28 July 1860 one target of 1100 yards was available and the first shot was fired by the Earl, Lord Sefton.

The range was first used in earnest on the 20th October 1860, for the Grand Lancashire Rifle Contest. To assist with the development of the ranges Lord Sefton allowed access across the Alt floodgates and the Altcar Range Halt was constructed (the remains can still be seen from the coastal footpath on the estate boundary).

Further land was rented from Lord Sefton in 1862 to provide a rifle range for all Liverpool volunteer units. In 1885 Lord Sefton made an agreement with the Secretary of State for War for the use of the range by the Regular Army and the Militia but ensured that its use was subject to accommodating the volunteers, it being for their 'special use'. The rented land west of the River Alt and that between the River Alt and the railway were sold by the Earl of Sefton to the West Lancashire Territorial Association in 1912 for £88,301. The following year 500 acres of foreshore was purchased from Mr. F.N. Blundell of Little Crosby to provide a suitable danger area. When the Altcar Rifle Range estate was purchased it included 500 acres of farmland, a pair of semi-detached farm workers' cottages, Grange Farm House and the disused lighthouse and cottage.

The 150 acres of the River Alt had already been converted to ranges. A further 135 acres between the river and the railway had been gradually developed as a camp and the remaining area was leased to a local farmer until 1992 when it was developed as a 'dry' training area (a training area using no live ammunition).

Marksmanship practice is carried out by both soldiers and civilians. During the First World War two hutted camps were built for the Command Musketry School. Between the Wars, one was used for weekend training by the West Lancashire Territorial Army Units. There are a variety of ranges, the most modern of which use electronic gadgets. There is an interesting collection of rifle club-houses, several dating from the late 19th century and including colonial-style verandas and stained glass windows.

The drainage work of the adjacent moss lands continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries; a pumping station was installed and the river was canalised and embanked, and feeder ditches were dug. In this way the moss lands were drained and converted into a productive agricultural area.

As the military estate developed, a variety of mainly brick buildings have been constructed, dating back to 1865. Four modern bridges span the River Alt including two Bailey bridges. A tree planting programme which was started in 1938 was completed in 2011.

Originally, the Altcar Range Committee was responsible for both the ranges and the camp. However, in 1966 the camp was handed over to the Regular Army HQ North West District and in 1970 it was re-named Altcar Training Camp. Under a further reorganisation in 1999 the Camp and Training Areas were returned to NWRFCA.

The Training Camp lies partly within the Sefton Coast Special Area of Conservation, the highest nature conservation designation, and in 1985 a Conservation Area Advisory Group, largely made up of volunteers, was formed.

FRESHFIELD HOUSE.



The present day owner's of Thomas Fresh's house have agreed and the Formby Civic Society will now attempt to get 'Freshfield House' listed. In this we are being supported by the 'Chartered Institute of Environmental Health' but will be guided by the DCMS 'principles of selection for listing buildings', English Heritage's 'Good practice guide for local heritage listing' and also their Listing Selection Guide for domestic vernacular houses.

The house and available documents are going to need careful study. With funding from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, arranged by Norman Parkinson (our speaker to the History Group on 13th December) it seems that we can at least organise a Commemorative Plaque.

FLYING AT FRESHFIELD.



Planes Ltd Biplane at Freshfield, owned by W.P. Thompson, Chairman, Liverpool Aeronautical Society.

We have also for some time been inviting the National Trust to erect a suitable commemorative plaque or an 'interpretation panel' to recognise the history of early aviation from the then officially designated aerodrome on the beach at the end of Victoria Road, a little-known aspect of Freshfield's historical heritage. Even old-time Formby residents, let alone visitors to the reserve are interested in the red squirrels introduced in the 1940s but totally ignorant of the fact that in the period 1910 – 12 nine pilots flew from Freshfield, several for the first time.

Early flying also took place from Marshside, now commemorated by an informative panel near where the hangers stood on Hesketh Drive but at Freshfield there is nothing similar.

The aviation history of the site has been written. A commemorative panel would help to tell it.