

Formby Civic News

The Newsletter of the Formby Civic Society

www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk



February 2008

Sand-winning Project - digging things up!



(Left), One of the first large-scale extractions was here at 'Death-duty Hill', Lifeboat Road.

(Right), On the South side of Lifeboat Road another area was left level for the Formby Point caravan site.



(Left), To the west of the Power Station a ramp brought huge quantities of sand from Cabin Hill to the railway (Photo T. Bonney)

Inside this issue:

Planning Matters	2
Wildlife Notes	3
Dickensian Day	6
The Flying Governess	7
Red Squirrel Report	9
Professor Gray	10
History Group	11
Art Group	11

Annual Dinner

Saturday 15th March, at Tree-Tops Resaurant, Southport Old Road.

Menu and Booking Form enclosed.

The Guest of Honour is to be Philip Love

Feel free to bring your own guest(s) to this pleasant Social Event!

The Story now to be revealed.....

This important project was the subject of a History Group meeting on Thursday 13th December when after a brief introduction by Reg Yorke, further details of current research were provided by Jack Gore, (interviews), Phil Smith, (wildlife, Jennifer Lewis, (landscape changes) and

Pat McGrehgor on searches through Formby Times newspaper files by Anthea Royden and herself. John Houston expressed his pleasure at the useful contribution of Society members to this important on-going project. Further information is in our special supplement-



Altmouth Pumping Station, 1975, one of the most powerful in Europe

There has been disappointing progress in obtaining information about the intentions of the Environment Agency (EA) for the refurbishment of the Altmouth pumping station. My enquiries made in October and November last year never received a response. However, Cllr. Mike Coles, of Formby Parish Council, fared rather better, in that his enquiry, made in November, did receive a reply which, regrettably, did not contain any significant new information. The present situation is that the pumping station is and will remain for the next several years, if not longer, our sole defence against flooding by the lower Alt. We know that the EA has approved and funded the refurbishment project and that it is anticipated the work will be completed in December, 2010. We know also that the Halcrow Group has completed its comprehensive revisiting of the issues that will determine the final stages of designing the details of the new installation (the first review of these issues was carried out by Atkins in connection with the EA's planning application for a flood control basin at Lunt Meadows in August, 2006, which was approved by the Council, but the scheme failed to obtain approval within the EA itself and is now in limbo). It was, therefore, with considerable anticipation that we looked forward to the presentation to Formby Area Committee on 10th January by Mr. Ian Rowlands, the EA's NW Central Area Flood Risk Manager. In the event, other

than confirmation that the refurbished station would be entirely electric, no significant information was disclosed – not even the maximum pumping capacity of the station. There was concerted questioning by the Chairman of the Committee and from the floor, especially on the crucial issue of

backup, but no progress was made. After the meeting, Jack Gore (who recently joined the Amenities and Planning Subgroup) and I had a constructive conversation with Mr. Rowlands, as a result of which we are hopeful that we shall receive at least some of the sought for information.

We are concerned by the proliferation in Formby of external solid/perforated shutters covering the entire frontage of shops. Such shut-

“The pumping station is and will remain for the next several years, if not longer, our sole defence against flooding by the lower Alt”.

ters create a depressing and alienating ambience to an area and for this reason they are contrary to planning policy as set out in the Council's Unitary Development Plan and in its Supplementary Planning Guidance, which require that shutters, preferably internal, should be of the open linked variety so as to allow visibility into the premises and light from the premises to brighten the street scene. When

solid/perforated shutters were installed without planning permission at *Living Doll*, 58 Browns Lane, we referred the matter to the Council's Enforcement Unit. As a result, the Council required that planning permission be applied for retrospectively and when the application was made, we opposed it; we are pleased to report that the application has been refused. This has been a crucial case, because, had it become known that solid external, frontage covering, shutters were permissible, it would have been open season for their installation more widely in Formby Village. We also referred to the Enforcement Unit the recent unauthorised installation of external, frontage-covering, solid/perforated unpainted galvanised steel shutters at *Uni-formby*, 45 Piercefield Road and, in the same parade of shops, the rather older similar shutters at *Prestige Comforts*, 53 Piercefield Road. In both these cases, because the premises are in a Conservation Area, external shutters of any kind are prohibited. It is regrettable that the Embassy Building, which is also in the Conservation Area, does not conform to Conservation Area standards and we are anxious that this adjacent parade of shops should not also be allowed to decline visually without regard for the aspirations that the Conservation Area status implies. The Council has ordered in both cases that either retrospective planning permission be applied for or the shutters be removed within two months. (Contd. P5)

Prohibited shutters in Piercefield Rd.



Wildlife Notes Winter 2007/8 by Dr. Phil Smith

November

Always reluctant to give up plant-hunting as the autumn progresses, I spent the first half of November recording hybrid willows on the sand-dunes. "Get a life" I hear you say, but actually willows are one of the most interesting groups of plants on the Sefton Coast. We have around 30 different kinds compared with about 26 lowland willows in the whole of Cumbria, a county said to be particularly rich in these trees and shrubs.

Willows are well known for their promiscuity, producing lots of hybrids that can be a challenge to identify, several of them being very rare. In total, we have four nationally rare hybrids in the sand-dunes, all involving the abundant **Creeping Willow** (*Salix repens*) as one of the parents. The rarest of the lot, found in only about six places in the British Isles, is ***Salix x doniana*** (no English name), which is Creeping Willow crossed with **Purple Willow** (*Salix purpurea*). I was very pleased to find two new bushes at Lifeboat Road, one at Cabin Hill and nine at Hightown dunes to add to the ten or so already known for the coast. The hybrids keep their leaves longer than the parents, so they become easier to spot amongst the dense stands of Creeping Willow. *Doniana* is a particularly attractive small shrub with bright red stems, bluish leaves that turn yellow in autumn and red-tinged



Salix x doniana photographed at Lifeboat Road

catkins in spring. It would make quite a decorative garden plant.

Bird-watching tends to replace botany in the winter. At this season we see lots of species from Arctic breeding areas, such as the 1400 **Common Scoters** and 45 **Red-throated Divers** counted on the sea off Formby Point on 12th November. A **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** from northern Canada was spotted on Birkdale shore and a **Little Auk**, perhaps originating in Spitsbergen, was picked up dead at Crosby Marina, while up to six **Snow Buntings** were an attraction on Ainsdale beach.

Derek Forshaw tells me the "Lancashire" goose count on 11th November totalled 38,478 **Pinkfeet**, the third highest November total. On the mosslands east of Formby, large flocks can often be watched at fairly close-range using a car as a hide. But these wary birds, hunted over most of their range, will not tolerate a person on foot within several hundred yards, so it is important to stay in the vehicle. A particular skill is to find the occasional fellow-traveller with the Pinkfeet. I searched a flock of about 4000 geese at Downholland Moss on 17th November but failed to find a **Tundra Bean Goose** from Siberia reported with the same flock that day. In my defence, Bean Geese are hard to spot, their plumage being very similar to a Pinkfoot. They have orange legs, often hidden in the vegetation, and an orange band on the bill instead of a pink one.

Derek reported a **Ross's Goose** with Pinkfeet on Plex Moss on 11th November. Being mostly white, this species is not going to be missed but it is more likely to be an escape from captivity than a truly wild bird from the Canadian Arctic.

Feeding garden birds is a popular pastime in winter and can

help them get through a cold snap, not that we have many of those these days. I was reminded how mild the autumn has been so far by hearing a **Song Thrush** in full song just outside my window while writing these notes on 26th November.

The new "Birds of Lancashire" book is soon going to print and can be ordered for a pre-publication saving of £10 by free-phoning 0870 0100700.

December

The last month of the year is also one of the least productive for the wildlife enthusiast, the sand-dunes in particular being quiet. However, time can now be found to write-up those summer observations and submit the data to the various regional and national recording schemes. This is a vital task, providing the necessary background information for effective wildlife conservation programmes.

John Edmondson of World Museum Liverpool kindly sent me a copy of his paper on the nature diaries of the great Southport Naturalist, Fred W. Holder (1891-1963). The diaries comprise over 70 notebooks with detailed records of natural history observations covering almost 51 years, on which the Museum has compiled an important database. I never met Fred Holder but, having read some of his diaries, I feel a good deal of empathy with him. On 11th May 1913, he wrote: "*There is no pleasure so entertaining as a day spent on the sand dunes; here to the eye of the casual observer nothing but a barren waste of sand can be seen, but to the naturalist the hills teem with life and your senses must be keenly on the alert to see and behold everything.*" Spot on, Fred!

Has anyone with garden feeders noticed more Blackbirds than usual? Our garden birds are often supplemented by overseas visitors and this month a big influx of Blackbirds has been reported, probably from Scandinavia and other parts of northern Europe.

Wildlife Notes (Continued)



Formby Sand Dunes - teeming with life!

Marshside saw another, more predictable, invasion as the reserve's grazing marshes began to flood at the start of December. Duck counts included 17,500 Wigeon and 1150 Pintail, while wader numbers rose to 2600 Lapwings, 2100 Golden Plovers and 2200 Black-tailed Godwits. These are impressive figures, testament to the way the marshes are being managed by the RSPB.

Other winter-visitors to Marshside and the adjacent Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve included Hen and Marsh Harriers, Merlins, Peregrines and a rare American Green-winged Teal, presumably the same individual that wintered here last year. Meanwhile, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's Martin Mere refuge attracted 1400 Whooper Swans, a few Bewick's Swans and, briefly, a Cattle Egret from southern Europe. As usual, Southport Marine Lake had impressive numbers of Coot. My highest count was 1278 (just below the record), but nearly all of them disappeared for about a week when the lake froze – an unusual event in recent winters.

It is sad and worrying to hear about the outbreak of parapox disease in the Red Squirrels at the National Trust's Formby Point property. About a dozen dead or dying squirrels have been found so far and volunteers are out searching for other infected ani-

mals. A similar outbreak affected Ainsdale National Nature Reserve last year and seems to have caused a fall in the population there. However, according to the Red Squirrel Monitoring Report 2007, numbers for the Red Squirrel Refuge as a whole show only a small reduction this year. Despite what has been written in the local press, there is little doubt that the disease is being spread to the Reds by invading Grey Squirrels and that measures to control the latter are key to the future survival of our local Red Squirrel

Wildlife Notes January 2008

Inclement weather meant few opportunities to get out into the field this month. Instead, I spent some time updating the *Inventory of Vascular Plants for the Sefton Coast*. This is a sort of "Domesday Book" of all the higher plants (flowering plants, conifers and ferns) identified on the Sefton Coast as a whole and in the sand-dune system since people began to write down their discoveries about 200 years ago. You might think that all the plants would have been found by now, but actually new ones are still being added most years; for example as many as 25 in 2005/06 and 18 more in 2007. Research for the *New Flora of South Lancashire* has also contributed historical records of about 50 plants previously overlooked. The latest Inventory lists 1265 different plants, 1129 of which were recorded in the duneland. Around two-thirds of them are native to Britain, the rest having been introduced, including a growing number of garden-escapes. The good news is that, unlike most of the countryside, we seem to be gaining more flowers than we are losing; indeed, only about 50 kinds have become extinct here since records began. Certainly, our coast is exceptionally rich botanically, perhaps the richest of its kind in Britain. It is difficult to make comparisons because few other areas have been studied in such detail. But, for example, Newborough Warren in Anglesey, a dune area about the same size as ours, has around 600 vascular plants, while Braunton Burrows in

Devon is said to support about 500.

Sands Lake at Ainsdale is usually worth a visit at this time of year. The wintering flock of **Tufted Duck** peaked at 144 on 9th January after a gale, when the 39 **Shovelers** present was probably a record count. Two **Water Rails** were occasionally seen or more usually heard squealing away in the reeds, but the best bird was a **Yellow-legged Gull** on the 1st January. This is the western Mediterranean version of our Herring Gull, distinguishing features including its dark mantle colour and yellowish legs. It has been reported twice on the beach since then. As usual, numbers of **Coot** on Southport Marine Lake began to decline from their December peak, with 1100 on 5th and 860 on 9th January. Marshside was good value, with regular sightings of raptors such as **Hen Harrier**, **Merlin**, **Peregrine** and even **Marsh Harrier**, while **Little Egrets** were ever present. The much rarer **Great White Egret** was reported a couple of times and three **Greenland Whitefronts** were spotted with the regular **Pink-footed Geese**. Martin Mere had its usual spectacular flock of wintering **Whooper Swans** – peaking at around 1600, with **Buzzards** and other raptors usually on view. I counted an impressive number of 775 **Shelduck** there on 12th January. Finding **Snowdrops**, already in flower before the end of the month, whets the appetite for riches yet to come. I noticed **Common Snowdrop** (*Galanthus nivalis*) and much rarer, broader-leaved **Green Snowdrop** (*G. woronowii*) at Hesketh Road, Marshside on 30th January. Many different spring-flowering bulbs can be found in the next few months on patches of waste ground and on the inner parts of the sand-dunes, where they have escaped from gardens.



Green Snowdrop

Planning Matters—continued



Flame's Licence application causes much disagreement.

There have been significant developments concerning the Society's position with respect to its right to comment on licence applications (see the last issue of Newsletter). When the Local Licensing Authority (LLA) declined to accept our submission concerning the recent application by the proprietor of *Flames*, 35 Brows Lane for an extension to his licensed opening hours on the grounds that we are not an *interested party* within the meaning of the Licensing Act 2003, and when the Council's Legal & Administrative Department rejected our legal arguments as to why the decision was unsound, we complained to the Chief Executive and, through the agency of Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas MP, we asked the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to comment on the Council's decision. In response, the Council sought Counsel's Opinion and the DCMS referred the matter to its lawyers. We also sought legal advice from the Civic Trust, knowing that its Chairman, Mr. Philip Kolvin, is a leading barrister specializing in licensing law, only to discover he was otherwise engaged acting for Sefton Council in this very matter! We have now had definitive statements, based on the legal advice they have received, both from the Council and from the re-

sponsible minister, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, MP; both give essentially the same interpretation of the law. They state that the Society is an interested party if it has one or more members living in the relevant vicinity and that it is then entitled to make representations to the LLA in that capacity

"we have always sought to represent the interest of the wider community rather than that of individuals"

without further formality. The Council has conceded that it was in error when it refused the Society's submission, because the Society satisfied this condition. The Council has also conceded that it was mistaken in refusing the submission of the Formby Parish Council (FPC) concerning the application, although, in that case, the published official Guidance of the DCMS clearly specifies that a Parish Council is intrinsically an interested party. Because of these errors by the LLA, both we and the FPC requested that the LLA reconvene the Licensing Committee so it could rehear the case, but now in conformity with the Act; our requests have been refused on the grounds that the Act makes no

provision for the rehearing of a case. If none of the Society's members lives in the relevant vicinity, but non-members who do ask the Society to represent them, we may do so, but now merely as their agent, not as an interested party in our own right. We are disappointed by this interpretation of the Act, because we have always sought to represent the interest of the wider community rather than that of individuals; however, where these interests coincide, we are prepared to act as an agent if necessary. We have learnt from the secretary of the National Organisation of Residents Associations that some LLAs recognize Residents Associations which draw their membership from a wide area, while others do not; this is consistent with the Minister's statement to us that, when the meaning of the Act is unclear, its interpretation is a matter for the LLA. Unfortunately, on the issue whether a Civic Society qualifies as an interested party in the generic sense, as we argue it should, contention will continue until the matter is settled in the courts. However, courtesy of *Grass Roots Online*, which is e-mailed to every Civic society registered with the Civic Trust, we are in the process of trying to find out how other Civic Societies have fared in their dealings with their LLAs.

We learnt of the threatened closure of the Freshfield post office on the same morning as the official notification was received by its proprietor, so we were able to discuss with him without any delay the available options for resisting closure, thus enabling him successfully to engage with the Formby Parish Council, which met that evening, and with Sefton Council through the concern of the Borough Councillors who were in attendance at the meeting. We made a submission to the Post Office arguing that their geographical coverage criteria for closure were too crude and setting out the reasons why this community post office should be allowed to continue in business.

Planning Matters—continued

We have made comments to the Planning Department on a number of planning applications and several decisions on earlier applications have been announced. As usual, there is insufficient space available in this report to give an account of the details, which is a pity, because a good deal of our effort goes into this aspect of our activities; however, information is available on the Society's website. Reference here to just a few cases must suffice. The application for a large vertical extension to the cottage at 32 Timms Lane, opposed by us and refused by the Council, has been appealed to The Planning Inspectorate, making it the fifth case on appeal with which we are currently engaged. Thanks to the efforts of the Planning Department's case officer, the management of the appeal of the test case of unapproved high wall and

gates at 5 Argarmeols Road (see the last issue of the Newsletter) has been rationalised, so now both the planning and enforcement components have the same Inspectorate case officer and will be decided by the same Inspector using the Written Procedure for both. The proposal for two large ultra modern houses on a site at 18 Derby Road has occasioned much controversy. We have opposed the application on the grounds that the style of these proposed dwellings would make them incongruities in the street scene and the buildings would be excessively dominating by virtue

of their scale and design. We asked that the case should go to the Council's Planning Committee so it can be assessed and determined by the widest possible spectrum of opinion, and that is what is to happen. Finally, it is pleasing to be able to report that the slow progress of the Society's application to make Lunt Lane a *right of way* took another step forward when the Formby Area Committee, at its January meeting, unanimously supported the application. We now await the Council's issuing a Definitive Map Modification Order which would serve to define Lunts Lane as a *public footpath*. A single objection to the Order would suffice to cause the matter to go to The Planning Inspectorate for determination, something we fervently hope will not happen.

“the slow progress of the Society's application to make Lunt Lane a *right of way* took another step forward”

Dickensian Day



The FCS Stall attracted attention and gained new members

The Society supported Dickensonian Day in Formby on 1st December for the third year in succession with a stall which aimed to give the general public an insight into the wide range of things that we get involved with within Formby. Six display panels covered membership offers, our website, the History Group, planning matters, our meetings programme for the remainder of the winter and sand winning. We also offered publications for sale including Muriel Sibley drawings and photographs, Discovering Formby guides, packs of our notelets and last but not least a free lucky dip for the young children who visited us.

The weather was kind to everyone this year and did not rain but a keen wind made visitors and ourselves grateful for the plastic end wall on our gazebo which gave us some additional shelter.

The event was well supported with probably even more people than last year and although sales are really secondary to informing everyone about our activities we raised £69 for the society funds. More importantly our special offer of discounted membership resulted in ten new members on the day and many more took our application forms away with them.

We extend a very warm welcome to these members as this will be their first newsletter and hope that they will enjoy coming along to our various meetings. Finally thank you very much to everyone who helped on the day to put the stall up, manned it so that others had a break to see the rest of the event, grab a coffee or better still a glass of mulled wine, or finally dismantled it and put everything away.

By Alan Burton

'Formby Roots' - The 'Flying Governess', by Sara Lane



The earliest family connection with the Formby area I can find is a letter from my great grandfather, Thomas Anderson, dated 1837, addressed to his sister Janet at the family home, Kilblain House, Greenock. At this time he was a Liverpool merchant and still a bachelor. He married late in life - he had been born in 1797 - and produced four children: two daughters and then twin sons; one of these was my grandfather, Andrew Malcolm Anderson. I don't know where the family lived at this time. Thomas Anderson died when the boys were quite small and my great grandmother took the family to Germany and they lived at Stuttgart for some years, where the boys went to school. The twins returned to Liverpool in due course, and my grandfather was well settled and a member of Thompson Anderson, Co. merchants and shipowners, of Fenwick Street, by the time he married my grandmother in December, 1899. He gives Chapel Lane, Formby, as the address on their marriage certificate, though the West Lancashire Coast Chronicle describes him as Andrew Malcolm Anderson of Kilblain, Freshfield. So maybe he already had the house. My grandmother, Katharine Eleanor Carr, was from Scremerston, Northumberland, but she too had a Formby link, since she is described in the paper as the niece of the late Mr. Arthur Ashton, stockbroker, of Dale Street Liverpool, and of Firwood, Formby. (Perhaps she was visiting him when

she met her future husband?)

My mother was born at Kilblain in 1902 and spent a happy Edwardian childhood at Freshfield. I know it was a happy time, because she loved to talk about it, and I enjoyed looking at the old photographs she kept in a silver box. She would tell me about the people in the pictures and, particularly, stories about what she and her younger sister, Marian, got up to when they were small. They were taken out for walks by their much-loved nursery governess, Ger, who was always ready to play with them. Later on, they had a donkey cart and were allowed to go out in it for day-long adult-free expeditions with their friends. Children had a lot of freedom in those days.

There was one story, however, which I never heard until my mother was into her nineties, shortly before she died. Once, when I was visiting her, she mentioned that there had been a Flying Club at Formby, on the sands, where they used to go with Ger to gaze at early flying machines. One day, she said, a dashing young airman

offered to take Ger up for a spin, and she accepted! I think she must have told the children never to tell anyone (I suppose she may have feared she might lose her job) and the children never did tell - at least not until my aunt was dead and my mother a very old lady....

A few years ago, one of my cousins produced two old photographs of Kilblain. We have friends in North Wales whom we visit periodically, and we had a visit due, so we decided to route ourselves via Liverpool, and spend a couple of days there to have a look at the city and explore the Anderson connections. On Tuesday 24 July we took an early train from London, arriving at Liverpool in the late morning. It was a beautiful day so we checked in at our hotel, ate a sandwich and then took a train out to Freshfield armed with one or two old



Sara Lane's mother, aunt and governess on the shore at Freshfield..

The 'Flying Governess', Continued



Five pilots flew at Freshfield in 1910, one third of all those in the UK at that time. If you look beyond the biplane lower wing, you see two small girls and their governess!

Freshfield armed with one or two old photographs from the box and the two pictures of Kilblain, my grandparents' house, together with a photocopy of the Chronicle's detailed account of their wedding at Holy Trinity, Formby in December, 1899. We wanted to see if the house was still there. So we made our first inquiries at the local post office-cum-chemist at the corner of Old Town Lane and Gores Lane where - friendly and kind like everyone we met that day - they directed us to Pritchard's bookshop in Formby who, they thought, might put us in touch with Joan Rimmer, who has published several books about old Formby. This indeed Pritchards did (and while they were kindly telephoning on our behalf, we walked across the road to look at the outside of the church where my grandparents were married). Then we walked to Joan Rimmer's house and she took us off to see Dr. Reg Yorke, and we showed him the two photographs of the house. It is a large semi-detached house and we had seen nothing like it, but Reg thought College Avenue would be a good place to start looking. So we all got into Joan's car and off we went. The first house we looked at did not match our photo-

graphs, but Joan had moved along the road to the next pair of houses and drew our attention to No. 2. We could all see that this was it. Although the adjoining house had been altered somewhat, No. 2 had changed very little structurally, though a garage had been built and the back garden walled off. There was no-one at home, though the house was inhabited, so we all stood in the front garden comparing features of the house with the photos and I felt very moved to be standing in the very garden where my mother and aunt played so happily as children and to which - as far as I know - they never returned. Shortly after the first World War my grandparents and their daughters moved south.

After this thrilling discovery, Joan Rimmer very kindly dropped us off at the red squirrel reservation where we saw several squirrels, their beautiful feathery tails glowing in the evening sunlight. It was so peaceful we could hear the squirrels cracking their pine nuts. Then we walked down through the dunes to the sea. Suddenly I realised that many of the old photographs in the silver box, which I had thought to be holiday pictures, were in fact taken very close to home, since I recognised their backgrounds in the

dunes, the beach and the pines. We walked back to Formby along the shore.

Since our return I have been in correspondence with Reg Yorke, who informs me that Kilblain was still known by that name, and unoccupied, in 1925. He has also confirmed that there was indeed a Flying Club on the sands at Freshfield, and that at least three hangars were built there. Reg referred me to Chris Aspin's *DIZZY HEIGHTS; THE STORY OF LANCASHIRE'S FIRST FLYING MEN*, and he very kindly sent me a delightful photo (1910) of a group of interested spectators inspecting a biplane on the sands. Standing behind the plane are two little girls and a lady who just might be Janet and Marian Anderson with the intrepid Ger.....

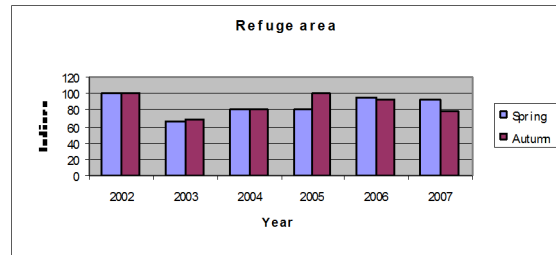
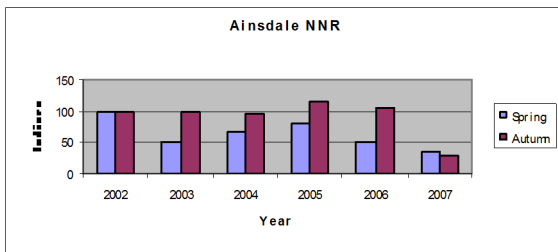
We will never forget our wonderful day in Formby, nor will we forget all the kindness and trouble people took to help us find my mother's old home in an impossibly short time. It is so good to feel we have a link with Formby and I hope we'll be back one of these days

Sara Lane.

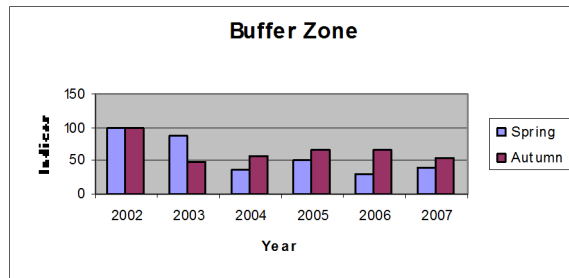
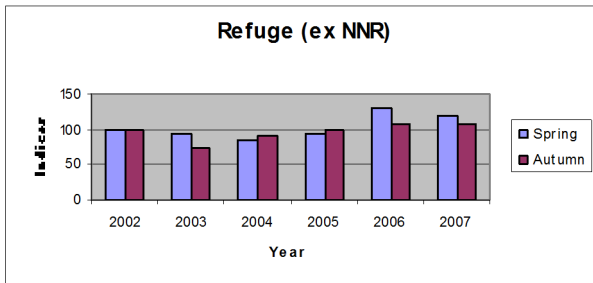
Continued vigilance for Red Squirrels by Fiona Whitfield

Volunteers in our local community continue to battle to try to maintain red squirrel populations in the woodlands and urban area. Autumn 2006 saw the first squirrel pox outbreak in the coastal woodlands, on Ainsdale Sands National Nature Reserve (NNR). Volunteers and staff from Natural England, The Wildlife Trust and Save Our Squirrels Project joined together and carried out daily searches of the woodlands. Whilst we managed to remove sick and dead Red Squirrels in the woodlands we did not manage to maintain the population. Annual monitoring of the woodlands has picked up a massive decline in red squirrel numbers on Ainsdale sands NNR – approximately 70% in autumn 2007 compared to the last five years. This is devastating for the site and worrying for the squirrel pox outbreak at present on the adjacent site of the National Trust.

The graphs below show the results of the monitoring as an index, showing changes over time. Baseline 100 in 22002



This massive decline is not shown by the overall Refuge area graph or the following graph which is the indicating a successful breeding monitoring data for all other refuge sites excluding Ainsdale NNR. It appears that the upward trend in spring numbers noted in 2006 was maintained in 2007, probably indicating improved winter survival due to successive mild winters. Autumn numbers were also high presumably season.



Monitoring is also carried out in the main buffer zone woodlands; it does not take in to account the population living in the urban area, as there is no practical monitoring technique that can be applied here. The buffer zone graph shows a recovering population in the buffer zone woodlands, the decline in 2003 was due to a squirrel pox outbreak in the Ince Blundell and Little Crosby woodlands during the autumn of 2003. The monitoring appears to show that numbers have stabilised. As I hope you are already aware we are unfortunately in the midst of a squirrel pox outbreak at Formby National Trust. There have been 13 casualties to date. We have recruited a number of volunteers to search the National Trust woodlands on a daily basis and would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank all volunteers who have given their time to help with these searches so far. These volunteers help to monitor the woodlands for sick or dead squirrels that are then removed to either be treated or sent for post mortem. This is to help remove possible source of infection from the woodlands and gain more information about the transfer of the disease between squirrels. If you would like to help with squirrel pox searches on the National Trust Property, Life Boat Road or Ravenmeols then please contact fwhitfield@lancswt.org.uk or telephone on 0151 9203769.

Sand winning study nears completion; by John Houston.



The Dunes between Wicks lane and Lifeboat Road were one of the first , (and last) areas to be 'quarried'. Photo Reg Yorke

After several months of study our local 'time-team' has amassed an impressive amount of information about sand-winning at Formby. As scars heal it would be easy for future generations to have no idea

about the extraction industry which changed the landscape forever. Before this knowledge was lost we have carried out archive research, archaeological field walking and assessments of the impacts of extrac-

tion on biology and geomorphology. The special supplement with this issue of Formby Civic News is a record of some of the information recently unearthed by Civic Society members as part of the project. We will be working with Sefton Coast and Countryside Service to prepare interpretive materials on the sand-winning story. The project has been supported by Natural England through the government's Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund, a programme which allows local communities affected by mineral extraction to apply for grants linked to research and conservation.



Supported through Defra's Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund

Professor T. Cecil Gray, CBE, KCSG, FRCP, FRCA.

It is sad to report the loss of one of the Society's most distinguished members, Emeritus Professor T. Cecil Gray who died peacefully at home in Formby, aged 94 years on 5th January. A requiem mass is to be held at the Metropolitan Cathedral on Saturday 26th January, to be followed by private interment at Prinknash Abbey, Gloucestershire.

Professor Gray was born in Liverpool in 1913, trained in Liverpool and became a consultant anaesthetist in Liverpool in 1941. He later founded the Department of Anaesthesia in the Faculty of Medicine and subsequently became the first Post Graduate Dean and later Dean of the Medical School.

He saw active service in the RAMC, 1942 – 44 and being invalided out, became a Civilian Consultant. He was one of Liverpool's most distinguished clinicians and was well known internationally for his work in anaesthesia. He was President of the Liverpool Medical Institution in 1974.

He came to live in Formby following retirement and took an active interest in the work of the Society, memorably acting as host at a luncheon at the Liverpool Medical Institution several years ago. His particular interest in Formby was the Formby family connection with the establishment of the Liverpool Medical School, founded by Dr Richard Formby,

eldest son of the Revd. Richard Formby, Parson and Squire. Professor Gray wrote an excellent account of Dr. Richard Formby published by the Royal College of Physicians in 2003.*

His international reputation was based on his introduction of the muscle relaxant d-tubo-curarine to anaesthesia in 1946. He was also interested in old books, music and drama; a man of great professional distinction, culture and also humour. Our sincere sympathies go to his wife, Pamela and his family.

*Gray, T. C. "Dr Richard Formby, Founder of the Liverpool Medical School"; Royal College of Physicians, 2003. R.A. Yorke.

History Group Report by Barbara Yorke

Since our last report we had a very interesting meeting on Thursday, 8th November., when David Brazendale, gave us an account of *'The History of St Nicholas' Church, Liverpool'*

Since Christmas the History Group has been working hard on the *'Sand Extraction in Formby'* project. which was the subject of a meeting on Thursday, 13th December, with John Houston, Jennifer Lewis, Phil Smith and others which in view of it being our last meeting of the year was followed by sherry and mince pies! In pursuit of sand winning information two members, Pat McGregor and Anthea Royden, have been looking through back copies of the *Formby Times* in the library. We are fortunate to have this resource available, but this is very time-consuming and only one person at a time can use the machine. The two researchers, are nevertheless finding it very interesting and have to date covered the period from 1930 – 1950 in spite of getting frequently side tracked!

We had a good response to a request for information placed in local newspapers and several other members

including Jack Gore and Tony Bonney have been recording interviews with local people who have been associated with sand-winning in the past, Although we have heard a lot about the narrow gauge railway that ran down to Cabin Hill we have so far been offered no photographs!

"Apart from our published lecture programme plans are being made for some very interesting future events"

We are adding all this information to our archives. Sorting this out and recording it is an ongoing task. It is worth it as it is amazing how much historical information we are asked for, particularly by people who find our society website.

Thanks to Tony Bonney's 'digitisation work during the last year, we can now find photographs much more easily. We showed a special PowerPoint presentation of old photographs, some from glass slides and glass negatives, some taken by Muriel Sibley at a special Archive

evening on Thursday, 10/1/08.

Next we must do the same with our paper archives. We have the technology and must learn to use it. Apart from our published lecture programme plans are being made for some very interesting future events. Hopefully these will include a special meeting on Sand-winning to be held at St Luke's Meeting Room during National Local History Week in May, a Guided Walk, during National Archaeology Week on July 13th down the Wicks Lane Manorial Boundary, established between the Formby and Blundell Warrens in 1697. We hope to use the opportunity to search for a lost boundary post! The lowest post is now well into the inter-tidal zone so the walk has been timed to take place at low tide! Plans are also being hatched for an event linked with Liverpool's Capital of Culture Year to be held in October. More details about this in our next issue!

Our next meeting is on Thursday, 14th February when Mike Stammers, (former Keeper of Shipping at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, will talk about the remarkable *'Mock Corporation' of Sefton.*

Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

With so much going on around Christmas, since the last Newsletter, our programme has consisted mainly of visits to local Exhibitions. The long awaited return to the Liver Sketching Club is due to take place on 23 February. Our annual get-together was held at Lydiate Hall Farm on Saturday 13 January. We enjoyed the company, the food and also the opportunity to discuss together our future programme. We hope to hold our Annual Exhibition in the village on Saturday 28 June. The group all look forward to this event. Surely we are due for fine day at last! Whilst I will give all the help I can, I do not

intend remaining as Art Representative after the A.G.M, so I hope someone will come forward to take over at that time. Please give it some thought. There may be someone in the Society who does not come to the Group events, but who is interested in Art and Art Appreciation, who would consider becoming more involved.

St Luke's churchyard is a picture in the Spring and we are to visit on Tuesday 18th March, when hopefully there will be a lot of colour. It is early in the year to go sketching, so wrap up well and when we have fin-

ished, we can go into the church meeting room to warm up with a cup of tea and a cake! In April we are going to visit Croston to make quick sketches and take photographs to help towards future paintings. We will return in the Summer to complete these. We will have lunch before we return to Formby. As Liverpool is the Capital of Culture in 2008, we intend holding an Exhibition relating to this, at some time during the year. The time and venue have not yet been arranged. May I ask that all members try to produce at least one item for this Exhibition any size and any media.

SOCIETY OFFICERS

Chair; Dr Ray Derricott,
17 Harington Road, Formby,
01704 876661

Hon Secretary; David Willis,
5 Phillips Close, Formby.
878994

Treasurer; Mike Belshaw,
38 Graburn Rd, Formby. 01704
874940

Programme Secretary;
David Willis

History Group;
Barbara Yorke

Art Group Rep;
Barbara Mossop

Amenities Secretary;
Dr. Desmond Brennan,
9 Browns Lane, Formby

Newsletter Editor;
Dr Reg Yorke

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN! By David Willis.

Hopefully you will all be marking Friday 25 April into your diaries to ensure you make it along to the Society's Annual General Meeting. Notice of the agenda and all the formalities will, of course, go out in advance as usual (together with details of the speaker and presentation that will follow the AGM).

In some ways this year's meeting will be a little different from previous AGMs as we know already that at least one member will be leaving the committee, we are already one short and, because of the terms of the constitution, others will have 'over-stayed' their welcome! In short, our problem is to find new faces for the committee.

Please, if you feel you can contribute in any way just mention it and one of the existing members can explain all! In fact you may not even need to become a committee member, if you don't like the idea of 'committees'. We could do with someone to help produce the quarterly newsletter, someone else to maintain the website and someone to help put together the winter and/or summer programmes. There are quite a few, relatively small tasks like these which, taken separately, don't involve much commitment of time and effort but which, if loaded on to one person, can become onerous. So... volunteers please!

Future Programme

Thursday, 14/2/08, History Group; Mike Stammers, '*Sefton 'Mock Corporation'*'

Friday 22/2/08 '*Sand Extraction at Formby Point*', John Houston - Sefton Coast Partnership, and Alan Crosby - Honorary Research Fellow, Universities of Liverpool and Lancs.

Friday Wed 12/3/08, 430pm, '*Coastal Flooding and Protection - the Policy Implications of Climate Change*' at Formby High School (FCS Contribution to National Science and Engineering Week); Dr. Kevin Horsburgh, - National Tidal and Sea Level Facility, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory, University of Liverpool

Thursday, 13/3/08, History Group; Mr J. Halsall, '*The Halsalls of Halsall 1212 – 2002*'

Thursday, 20/3/08 '*Natural England - People, Places and Nature: the local perspective*' Nick Haigh, - Natural England, Ainsdale Sand Dunes NNR. **NB Change of Venue! (See insert!!).**

Thursday, 10/4/08, History Group; *Members' Evening*

Friday April 25th *AGM* followed by talk – '*The Literature of Formby*' Tony Higginson; Pritchards' Bookshop, Formby

Art Group Programme. (*Details from Art Representative 01704 873920*)

23 February - *Liver Sketching Club* .Going by train.

18 March - *Painting - St Luke's Churchyard*. Meet at 2 pm., at the church.

13 April - *Sketching and photographs in Croston*. Meet 11 am, by the bridge.