

Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society
Newsletter

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Photo: Rachel Parks

Formby in the Snow

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Photo;(left) T. Bonney



Photo: P. Smith



Photo: T. Bonney

Minister responsible for planning acted unlawfully

by Desmond Brennan

Following an application for judicial review by the Scottish developer, Cala Homes, the High Court ruled on 10 November 2010 that the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government, Mr. Eric Pickles, acted unlawfully when he revoked all the Regional Strategies (RSs) last July; the effect of the ruling is to reinstate the RSs. Mr. Pickles's response was immediate and robust; he issued a statement saying the ruling changed very little and the Government's soon to be introduced Localism Bill would sweep away the RSs (the bill was laid before Parliament on 13 December and is expected to pass into law at the end of 2011).

When, on 27 May 2010, he had first announced his intention of abolishing the RSs, Mr. Pickles had advised Local Authorities that they should regard the announcement as a material consideration in their future decision making. In parallel with the Secretary of State's statement of the 10 November, the Government's Chief Planner wrote to all Local Authorities confirming that they should continue to regard the May statement as a material consideration.

Carla Homes, fearing that continuing to make the statement a material consideration would circumvent the High Court ruling, then applied to the Court to rule that the statement should not be treated as a material consideration. In response, the Court at first placed a stay on the Chief Planner's letter, but subsequently lifted it, and now the application will be heard in the week beginning 17th January. These developments have served only to increase the current uncertainty and anxiety surrounding everything to do with planning to which I referred in Planning Matters in the last edition of the Society's newsletter.

The RSs, which have statutory force,

were (are?) intended to have essential roles in both the determination of planning applications and the generation of Local Development Frameworks by Local Authorities. Although the policies specified in the RSs cover the full range of planning issues, there is no doubt that by far their most contentious feature has been their requirements for new houses over the next 15 years and the associated need for the land on which to build them. How best to increase the nation's housing stock, and particularly the number of affordable

These uncertainties come at a particularly critical time for Sefton Council as it is about to present its emerging Core Strategy to the public for consultation

homes, is fiercely debated; it is not only a political issue, it also has large commercial implications.

Thus, Carla Homes has been motivated by the refusal of its application to build 2000 homes in Winchester and its dependence on the South East Regional Plan to justify its appeal to the Planning Inspectorate; the Home Builders Federation wrote to the High Court in support of the Carla Homes application for judicial review. The sensitivity of housing construction to the Secretary of State's scrapping of the RSs was underlined by a study commissioned by the National Housing Federation which reported that plans for almost 85,000 homes had been dropped by Local Authorities within weeks of his announcement.

These uncertainties come at a particularly critical time for Sefton Council as it is about to present its emerging Core Strategy to the public for consultation and it is anticipated that the final draft will undergo Examination in Public towards the end of the year. The Core

Strategy is at the heart of the Local Development Framework, which is the set of planning documents which will determine future development of this community.

After pressure from this Society and others, the Council has commissioned an independent assessment of its housing needs for the next 15 years. Should the new study result in a figure different from that specified in the reinstated RS, will the Council be permitted to use it in its Core Strategy? . Opinion is divided as to the answer to that question. Some commentators point to statements made by the Secretary of State when, following his May statement that he intended scrapping the RSs, some Local Authorities stopped work on their Core Strategies. He said then that Local Authorities should continue to develop their Core Strategies and, if their policies were based on sound evidence, they would be able to defend them at the Examination in Public. However, this did not satisfy other commentators, who pointed out that the RSs were supposed to be based on sound evidence and had been subject to Examination on Public. Some planning lawyers put the emphasis on the Carla Homes decision and say the RSs once again have legal force and the law is the law. Their view receives support from the decision of the Inspector who dismissed an appeal in July for a windfarm in Leicestershire; his decision statement said he had taken the East Midlands Regional RS into account, and that notwithstanding the Secretary of State's statement in May, let alone the reinstatement of the RSs.

A possible resolution of all this uncertainty as far as Sefton's Core Strategy is concerned is that slippage in the timetable for its emergence will mean it is not completed until after the Localism Bill has become law and the RSs no longer exist.

Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

The keenly awaited Localism Bill was published just before Christmas. Its purpose is to formalise the Coalition Government's core policy of decentralising administration by empowering local communities right down to neighbourhood level and its measures are very radical; they will profoundly change the way the nation is administered. The Bill is a large document (over 400 pages) and, although many of its measures are planning related, in this short article I will be able to review only a few of the more important policies as they relate specifically to local planning.

Once the Bill passes into law, there will no longer be a Regional Authority, a Regional Strategy or a Regional Government Office to constrain a Local Authority in devising its strategic local plan. At present, local plans must be consistent with the extensive set of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance documents which set out government policy and seek to balance the conflicts of interest inherent in planning. Although far from perfect, not least because they have accreted over time and been changed piecemeal to accommodate changes in government policy with the result that they contain harmful complexities and inconsistencies, these documents, in my view, nonetheless constitute a body of valuable planning principles; indeed they are

the basis of many of our representations to the Council relating to unwelcome planning applications. The future status of these documents is now very much in doubt. What is certain is the government's intention to introduce very soon its National Planning Policy Framework; this will be a short document (probably less than

A Neighbourhood Plan so approved will then automatically become part of the Local Authority's strategic local plan

20 pages) which will set out the fundamentals of government planning policy and will be pre-eminent in that all local plans will be required to conform to it. The Examination in Public of strategic local plans will still be conducted by planning inspectors, but they will no longer have the power to direct Local Authorities to amend their plans; instead they will merely be able to return the plan to the local authority with advice as to how it should be amended. This is all very relevant to Sefton Councils, which is at a critical stage in developing its emerging Core Strategy (see my other article in this *Newsletter*).

Where one exists, as it does in Formby, a Parish Council is identified in the Bill as a significant administrative

unit. The Parish Council will have the power to create a Neighbourhood Plan (its neighbourhood is defined as its electoral constituency) and the Local Authority will be expected to assist in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan will be subject to "a light touch assessment" by an independent assessor (not a planning inspector) and, if approved, will then need to receive a simple majority in favour in a neighbourhood referendum; it is not clear how the details of the plan will be communicated to the electorate. A Neighbourhood Plan so approved will then automatically become part of the Local Authority's strategic local plan. The Parish Council will also be able to issue a Neighbourhood Development Order defining specific developments or types of development which will have automatic planning permission without the need for any application to the local authority; it is not clear who will check that the development conformed to the Neighbourhood Development Order.

The government's declared intention in introducing Neighbourhood Plans is to incentivize development. Local communities will not be permitted to inhibit development (with respect to new housing, for example) that is in accord with the strategic local plan or with national policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Formby Point Signage

The term 'Formby Point' is increasingly misunderstood and in particular it has recently come to be most closely identified with the National Trust property at Victoria Road. The fact that this term does not apply to a single location is very apparent from an examination of maps and charts and it has always known to Formby residents that the term indicates the promontory of land extending from the mouth of the Alt, north to Fisherman's Path. This is confirmed by the Coastguard Agency. This misapprehension is clearly shared by Sefton

Council Technical Services as evidenced by a paper on 'Directional Signage Issues in Formby' presented to Formby Area Committee three years ago. In this Victoria Road is perceived as the only way to reach Formby Point! Not surprisingly this false impression is aggravating the traffic problems down Victoria Road, and expected again this summer. Thus although the NT property includes much of Form by Point, it is certainly not the whole of it. The Lifeboat Road area is very much part

of Formby Point and the site of the Old Formby Lifeboat Station is probably its most important feature. Thus whilst the National Trust Property is at Formby Point it is not the whole of. This is indeed agreed by the former NT Property Manager, Andrew Brockbank. Unfortunately, many visitors to Formby who do not know the area simply follow the Technical Services signs and all end up trying to get down Victoria Road. We feel these misleading signs should be replaced.

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

by Diana Pearce, Assistant Director, Environment Group, Government Office NE

This landmark bill is intended to push power down from Whitehall and the regional level, to the lowest possible level, empowering local communities and giving them the tools to be part of the 'Big Society' by ending unnecessary top-down controls. It is expected to receive Royal Assent in late 2011.

Its six main packages are:

Strengthening local democracy – including giving councils a general power of competence, replacing the current system whereby they can only do what is explicitly authorised.

Giving local people and communities real power – including Community Rights to Challenge, and Community Right to Buy

Radically reforming planning – by introducing Neighbourhood Planning which will enable communities to shape their local areas, and removing the Regional Spatial Strategies and Infrastructure Planning Commission

Support for Business – enabling local government to attract and keep business by letting councils set business rate discounts locally

Taking action on housing – by reforming council housing and introducing the Community Right to Build

A new settlement for London – devolving greater powers to its elected leaders

Key issues for Civic Societies and other groups interested in local planning, development and heritage are likely to centre around the new Community Rights and planning reform. So looking at these elements in a little more detail, the Bill proposes:

Community Rights

The Community Right to Challenge will enable communities - voluntary and community sector bodies, charities, local authority employees and parish councils – to express an interest in running a local authority service where they believe they could run it differently or better. This could trigger a procurement exercise by the local authority, so the challenging body would have an opportunity to participate.

The Community Right to Buy will give communities more opportunities to bid for and save or transform buildings. It will require local authorities to maintain a list of land and buildings of community value. When any of these come up for disposal communities will have the time to develop a viable bid to buy it.

Community Right to Build will give communities the power and freedom to bring forward a proposal for a site-specific development where the benefits would be retained for the local community, and apply for an order granting approval for that development.

Neighbourhood Planning

This is a radical new element in the planning system in England. Local community groups – where designated as neighbourhood forums - and parish councils will be able to bring forward proposals for a development plan for their area, or for an order granting planning permissions in that area. The local planning authority would have a duty to support this activity and take the proposals to independent examination, then hold a referendum on whether the draft plan

or order should be brought into force. If 50% of voters at the referendum support the plan or order, the local planning authority must bring it into effect.

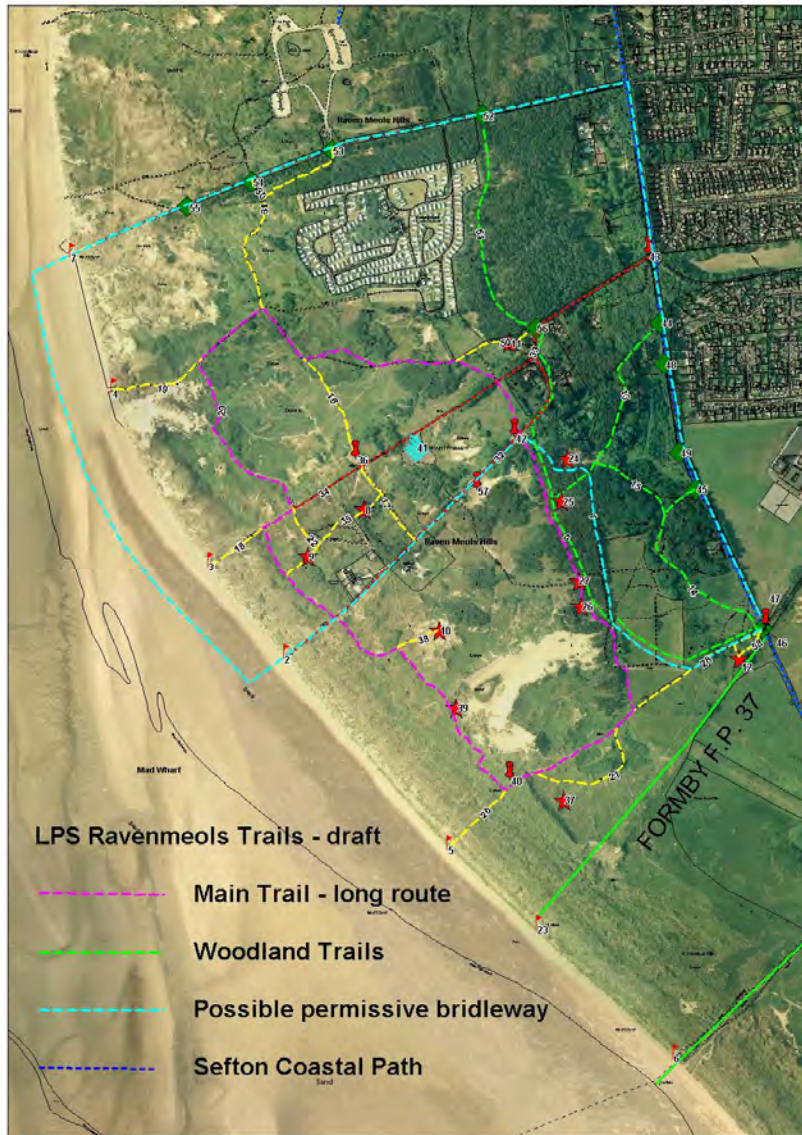
The Department of Communities and Local Government is intending to provide financial assistance to a number of local planning authorities through the neighbourhood planning vanguards project, and will also be funding advisory organisations to provide advice, guidance and assistance to communities and community organisations through the 'Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning Scheme'. The advice will be free, and available throughout England from April 2011.

Greater engagement and accountability

Residents will have the power to instigate local referenda on any local issue. Councilors will have to take these into account although they will retain responsibility for balancing the various views in reaching their decisions. Developers will have to consult local communities before submitting planning applications, and take account of comments received. This will enable changes to be made in response to local concerns, before formal submission. Neighbourhoods will be able to benefit from a share of the Community Infrastructure Levy as the local planning authority will pass down some proceeds, which can be used to cover running costs and maintenance costs, as well as capital investment. The Government welcomes input to the debate on greater decentralisation and localism from anyone with an interest and expertise in the matters raised.*

* e-mail to decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Ravenmeols Heritage Trails by Reg Yorke



As part of the Sefton Coast Heritage lottery funded Landscape Partnership Scheme, several Heritage Trails will be way-marked and interpretation activities prepared including signage, visitor notes, etc. The History Group have already had some experience in recording local memories in connection with the 'sand winning', which took place in that particular area. Another important but largely overlooked historical development was the attempt in the late 19th century to create a high-class residential area there to be known as Formby-by-the-Sea. This included the 1000 foot split level promenade which still exists, although now almost entirely covered by the dunes.

A protocol for the next and most important stage of work has been prepared including estimates of time needed, costs and other support. The support of the Formby Civic Society will be very important to the success of this scheme and I would invite the committee and individual members of the Society to give it their full

Map (left) Ravenmeols Local Nature Reserve, courtesy Sefton MBC

Some time ago the Formby Civic Society offered to assist Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership's History and Archaeology Task Group in information gathering and raising public awareness of the Ravenmeols area of the Sefton Coast. Work on this actually started in 2009 with two guided walks, the first provided a general introduction to the area as part of the program of that year's Coastal Forum and the second was organised as a contribution to the 2009 Festival of British Archaeology.

A further visit last Spring was fo-

cusced on the Black Poplar population in that area, when we enjoyed the specialist knowledge of Phil Smith.

A much wider public exposure was in the first programme of the TV series Country Tracks last summer which featured the large dune blow-out, known as the 'Devils Hole'. Despite all this, Ravenmeols remains one of the least known and visited of all Sefton coastal areas and it will be an enjoyable task to help raise its profile and public appreciation of its special history and natural features.



Dr Phil Smith and Black Poplar photo Reg Yorke

September



Datura ferox fruit.

No “Indian Summer” this year, unsettled weather continuing for most of the month and resulting in very few dragonfly records for the Atlas Project. Apart from the occasional Migrant Hawker and the usual **Common Darters** (in small numbers) I saw hardly any. Similarly affected were late summer butterflies, though a rare sunny day produced two **Painted Ladies** on a garden Hebe in Spruce Way, Formby, while a large patch of **Michaelmas-daisy** on Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve was graced by **Commas, Red Admirals** and a **Small Tortoiseshell**. However, despite the inclement conditions, I continued to find **Northern Dune Tiger Beetles** throughout the month. This has been the best year we have ever known for this iconic rarity. By writing down a GPS grid reference for every sighting, I produced a database of 277 records showing a clear division between the spring and summer generations.

There are still plenty of interesting sand-dune plants to find in September, Patricia Lockwood drawing my attention to a previously unknown colony of **Field Gentians** in Ainsdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve south of Discovery Centre. We counted about 1000 plants in a large slack, these being additional to the 140,000 we recorded last year in the adjacent

National Nature Reserve. I was also delighted to find about 700 plants of the closely related **Autumn Gentian** in slacks at the northern end of Birkdale Sandhills. Both these beautiful wild-flowers are sadly declining in the wider countryside but are thriving on the Sefton Coast.

By chance, on 3rd September I was shown a strange, spiky fruit from an unknown plant that had turned up in a garden on Jubilee Road, Formby. Recognising this as an extremely rare **Long-spined Thorn-apple** (*Datura ferox*), I arranged to go and see it with friends the following day. A spectacularly large specimen, over five feet tall, the plant has appeared spontaneously, perhaps from bird-seed. Realising that it might be of interest, the garden’s owner did not treat it as a weed but allowed the plant to grow to maturity. This is only the 32nd time that Long-spined Thorn-apple has been recorded in Britain, so several local botanists went to visit it and were duly impressed.

Another of the month’s highlights was the organised release of 34 young **Sand Lizards** at Freshfield Dune Heath on 5th. Over 40 spectators turned up for this auspicious event, including several children who were enthralled by the baby lizards that had been specially bred in captivity from Sefton stock. This is the start of a three-year project to increase the range of this nationally endangered species on the Sefton Coast.

As a north-westerly gale was raging on 15th, I decided to park on Ainsdale beach for a couple of hours in the hope of seeing some storm-driven seabirds. This proved to be a good move, as I was treated to 20 **Leach’s Petrels**, some very close, two **Manx**

Shearwaters, a **Black Tern**, 35 **Guillemots**, 75 roosting **Sandwich Terns** and a splendid **Great Skua** (or **Bonxie**) feeding on a dead bird on the shore. Even more passing seabirds were seen by the hardy watchers at Formby Point and Seaforth.

Finally, on 18th September, with news of an **American Pectoral Sandpiper** at Marshside, I braved the Southport Airshow traffic to enjoy remarkably close views of the sandpiper from Nel’s hide, together with seven **Spotted Redshanks**. However, several low-level passes over the RSPB reserve by the “Red Arrows” caused thousands of ducks, assorted waders and Pink-footed Geese to panic, the latter exploding upwards into the flight path of the aircraft. Fortunately, no collisions occurred but the outcome might easily have been different.

October

The first Saturday of the month saw me at Preston for the Lancashire Wildlife Trust’s Volunteer Conference and Annual General Meeting. It was great to see such a large crowd of enthusiasts, with over 180 people attending. Our hard-working Freshfield Dune Heath volunteers were awarded the Volunteer Group of the Year prize, sponsored by the Community Gateway Association. At the AGM, I confirmed my decision to stand down from the Trust’s Council after 40 years. Time for someone younger and with the necessary business and financial skills to take over.

October usually presents opportunities to do some late season botanising. A visit on 8th to Crosby Marine Park with Patricia Lockwood was rewarded with a new young plant of one of our rarest species, the Dune

Wormwood. First found here in 2004, this plant grows in only one other place in Britain. There are now five individuals at Crosby, the original plant being nearly 4m in diameter.

A friend's phone call alerted me to another interesting plant, the spectacular **Thorn-apple** near Wicks path, Formby, which I went see on 10th. I was delighted to find several huge specimens complete with trumpet-shaped white flowers and large spiky fruits, these looking superficially similar to those of the much rarer Long-spined Thorn-apple seen in September. Originating in the Americas, these exotic members of the potato family are highly poisonous.

A few warm, sunny days in mid-month gave a boost to autumn insects, a visit to the Birkdale Green Beach and Ainsdale Sands Lake area on 11th producing a good count of 40 **Common Darters** and eight Migrant Hawks. Even better was the discovery of a baby **Natterjack Toad** under timber on the Green Beach. This was the first (and only) confirmation of breeding success this year. Also during this period, I recorded three **Northern Dune Tiger Beetles**, probably the latest ever seen on the Sefton Coast. Several kinds of butterflies were still active, with three **Red Admirals** and a **Comma** feeding on Ivy flowers at Ravenmeols. Another good find during the warm spell was a handsome **Black Darter** on a scrape at Ainsdale Sandhills. The smallest of our true dragonflies, this species is usually associated with peat bogs but often disperses in late summer and may then turn up on the coast.

Ainsdale was graced by a new insect for Sefton on 6th when John Dempsey reported finding an **Oak Bush-cricket** in his garden. This attractive species is quite rare in northern England, the nearest records being in

north Cheshire, south Manchester and east of Preston.

This October seems to have been a relatively quiet month for local bird-watchers. Nevertheless, the usual influx of **Pinkfooted Geese** produced record numbers roosting at Martin Mere and I found about 3000 on a stubble field at Lydiate on 22nd. Great views from the road allowed me to search through the flock with a telescope to pinpoint two biscuit-coloured leucistic **Pinkfeet** and a superb adult Green land **Whitefront**, with dark-chocolate plumage and a characteristic white blaze at the base of its orange beak. Several **Lapland Buntings** were spotted on the coast but none came my way. The month ended with reports of a huge invasion of **Waxwings** from Scandinavia; a bird to look out for on berried trees and shrubs and enough to brighten up any winter's day.

November 2010

It's not often that November produces a new wild-flower for the sand-dunes.



Visiting Birkdale Common on 1st to complete a botanical survey, I spotted a low-growing plant that I didn't immediately recognise. It turned out to be **Annual Knawel** (*Scleranthus annuus*), thought extinct in South Lancashire since 1986 and not seen in Sefton since 1914! Looking a bit like a Pearlwort (*Sagina*) with small greenish flowers, this is a fairly widespread plant in Britain but has declined so much since 1950 that it is

now Red Data Book listed as "Endangered".

Birkdale Common lies near the eastern fringe of the dune system where centuries of rainfall has washed the lime out of the soil, producing a dry acidic grassland, this being exactly the habitat favoured by Annual Knawel. During the month, I made further visits with friends to record more details. We counted about 250 mature plants, mainly on the western slopes of a large sandy mound. The habitat is maintained by occasional mowing, recreational trampling and summer drought, creating a short sward with plenty of bare patches suitable for colonisation by this short-lived plant. Other notable species found on the Common include **Narrow-leaved Parsley-piert** (*Aphanes australis*), **Bird's-foot** (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) and **Corn Spurrey** (*Spergula arvensis*). In addition, Dave Earl tells me that **Hoary Cinquefoil** (*Potentilla argentea*) grew here from at least 1950 to 1995 but has not been seen in recent years. We must look out for it next summer.

The Common is not designated for its wildlife interest and perhaps merits inclusion in Sefton Council's register of "Sites of Local Biological Interest" under the Unitary Development Plan.

On 10th, I went to see the Council's scrub clearance project on Birkdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve. Concentrating mainly on the invasive **Sea Buckthorn**, the staff have an enormous job on their hands bringing the area back to how I remember it 40 years ago, when the landscape was much more open, largely free of scrub and rich in duneland wildlife, such as the Natterjack Toad. Walking back along the Green Beach, I had superb views of nine **Redpolls** feeding in the Alders. This bird used to be much commoner in the dunes than it is now, the British population having declined by 89% between

Wildlife Notes, continued.

1970 and 2001.

An adult **Hedgehog** foraging on my lawn on 18th was a surprise, as it should have been hibernating. I hope it returned to its hideaway before the cold weather set in a few days later.

Calm, clear weather on 22nd provided ideal conditions for a Formby Point sea-watch. Derek Forshaw tells me he hit a "purple patch", with **Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, 10 Scaup, 14 Eiders, 100s of Common Scoters, 4 Shags, 5 Red-throated Divers, 13 Great Crested Grebes, several Guillemots, Razorbills, Gannets and Red-breasted Mergansers** and a single **Kittiwake**. What a selection!

Plenty of rain during October and early November flooded some of the deeper dune slacks but, as a result of the earlier winter and spring drought, we still have a long way to go to get back up to normal water-levels. Nevertheless, I was pleased to find 97 **Common Snipe, 3 Jack Snipe** and a **Water Rail** during a visit to Cabin Hill on 19th. The salt-marsh at Weld Road, Birkdale, can also be productive at this time of year. Slogging across the marsh in freezing conditions on 26th, I counted 34 **Common Snipe, single Jack Snipe and Little Egret, a pair of Stonechat** and, finally, a flock of about 90 mixed **Linnets and Twite**. Yelping **Redshanks** kept flushing the flock, so I couldn't get close enough to distinguish between the species, though from the calls I reckoned they were mostly **Twite**. Unfortunately, the national Waxwing invasion had still not reached us by the end of the month, the nearest flocks I heard about being in Preston and Horwich.

December

Extreme weather dominated the

month, this being the coldest December since either 1910 or 1890, depending on who you believe. Locally, around ten inches of snow fell during the night of 17/18th, the most I have seen in Formby over a 40 year period. Sea-ice was reported near Blundell-sands Coastguard Station. Certainly, there has been nothing like it since 1981 when ice-flows washed up on Formby beach; however the snow wasn't as deep that winter.

Struggling out onto the dunes on 22nd revealed a spectacular ice-age landscape, pines heavy with snow, some being broken down by its weight. Covered in ice crystals, the snow surface sparkled like diamonds in the low winter sun. There were few birds to be seen, except for about 20 **Fieldfares** seeking out the few remaining Hawthorn berries at Ravenmeols dunes, while a dozen **Long-tailed Tits** were active in bushes alongside St Luke's Church Drive.

Although many put food out for garden birds, in the freezing conditions it is also important to provide water. I watched **Robins, Dunnocks** and **Blackbirds** regularly coming to drink from a dish just outside my lounge window. Later, during the thaw, a **Song Thrush** took the opportunity to have a bath, splashing around in evident enjoyment. Elsewhere, there were many reports of **Bramblings** and **Blackcaps** visiting garden feeders.

Our local wetlands were pretty well frozen solid from early in the month but flocks of waterfowl on Sands Lake and Southport Marine Lake managed to keep small areas ice-free. Sands Lake had 40 **Shovelers** on 5th and an impressive flock of 240 **Tufted Ducks** on 16th. Black masses of **Coot** on Southport Marine Lake largely defied accurate counting, except on 11th when they were more

spread out and I achieved a record figure of 1470. With them were 308 **Tufted Ducks, 63 Pochards** and 243 **Mute Swans**. Highly dependent on food provided by the public, the swans increased to 259 by 28th. This may also be a record, as the largest winter count I can trace in the literature is 251 in December 2006. On other occasions, there were even flocks of **Gadwall, Wigeon and Pintail** on the lake, the latter reaching a peak of 70. Annoyingly, I managed to miss a young **Iceland Gull** which was coming to bread at the Marine Lake early in the month.

Other avian highlights during December were a **Rough-legged Buzzard** photographed by Derek Forshaw as it flew south over Marshside on 1st and a **Firecrest**, which spent several days at Hesketh Park, Southport, from 8th. I managed to see it briefly on my third visit. This well-wooded park was full of birds, mixed flocks of tits and **Goldcrests**, together with the occasional Tree **Creepers** and **Nuthatches**, adding to the interest. Less welcome were up to five **Grey Squirrels**, Southport being within the buffer zone set up to protect the Sefton Red Squirrels from their North American competitors. Meanwhile, Martin Mere reported its highest ever count of 2100 **Whooper Swans** on 30th.

I visited Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve on 17th to see the excellent progress made on clearing birch scrub close to the area where Sand Lizards were introduced in September. This has opened up a section of old boundary bank or "cop" which should provide ideal habitat for the lizards. While on the heath, I was pleased to see a flock of 15 **Redpolls** and also a **Woodcock**, several other bird-watchers reporting sightings of this elusive wader during the cold weather.

The Big Tree Plant



Black Poplar Trunks, Albert Rd.

The overall target of this national scheme is to plant one million trees by April 2015, which it is aimed to achieve through projects which receive grant funding. Through the strength of the partnership behind this campaign, the organisers aim to inspire people to exceed the one million target.

The government is committed to increasing the number of trees and The Big Tree Plant is part of the government's wider strategy on trees, woods and forests. In recent years, annually the rate of trees being planted in urban and semi-urban areas across the country has declined, and could decrease further, unless action is taken to reverse this trend.

The Big Tree Plant is intended to raise the national profile of urban trees and the benefits they offer, encouraging people to get involved in local tree planting schemes, and bringing together and supporting a wide range of people and organisations already involved in urban tree planting.

It will focus on increasing the number of trees being planted in urban and residential areas as it is consid-

ered this is where they can bring the most benefit to the majority of people.

The scheme will run until the end of the current Parliament (in 2015) and will have different phases of activity – focusing on encouraging people to plant

trees during winter which is when most tree planting takes place, ensuring that we care for the trees properly during spring and summer, so that the young tree plants grow to maturity.

The black poplar tree, thought to be Britain's most endangered native timber tree, has been in decline for the past 200 years. The Crown estate has been taking cuttings as part of conservation efforts to save the tree. Once mature, the cuttings will be planted

back into landscapes where the trees can mature. Last year more than 200 cuttings were taken, which are now growing in different locations across the Somerset area. Here in Formby the Civic Society hopes to link to The Big Tree Plant by virtue of the (hopefully) successful propagation of a number of Black Poplar cuttings taken during our 'Black Poplar Guided Walk on 25th April 2010.

If successful, this experiment will be repeated and it is hoped that these young trees will then be transplanted to the periphery of Duke Street Park where a number of old and unhealthy Lombardy Poplars have in recent years been felled. We have also registered this on the Tree Council website.

For more information about the campaign see The Big Tree Plant website www.direct.gov.uk/thebigtreeplant

Below - Unfortunately a mature Black Poplar, which had stood on the same site (now Harington Road) since the area was farmland, recently had to be felled because it had become unsafe



Demolition of ancient Black Poplar. Photo; Tony Bonney



The need for a Magistrates Court in Formby was established in 1912 when Birkdale and Ainsdale were being amalgamated with Southport.

One of the first cases to be heard at the Formby Court, which was held in the then Council Offices, Moorhouse Building, on the corner of Old Mill Lane and Church Rd. on April 6th 1912, when several people were convicted for non-payment of Poor Rate having been reported by the Overseers. Another person was fined seven shillings and sixpence for not having a dog licence and a burglar was sent to prison for one month. A case of speeding resulted in a fine of 5 shillings plus costs with the alternative of 14 days in prison.

On July 6th 1912, a Banks resident was prosecuted for having a dog without a licence, another for having an expired driving licence having "forgotten to get a new one". The case was dismissed. Another person was convicted for being asleep in

charge of a horse and cart and another of using obscene language. Further cases later concerned trapping wild birds, cycling on footpaths, not paying a railway fare and not having a fireguard.

In 1923 there were 11 licensed houses in Formby which then had a population of 8,800. This meant one licensed house per 1,100 population and one off-licence for 2,200 population. There were six licensed public houses but only one conviction for drunkenness. The overseers of Formby and Banks applied for a number of residents to be excused from paying poor rate on the grounds of poverty, age and infirmity. In 1923, a driver was prosecuted for having passed through a measured half mile on the road in one minute 23 seconds which was equivalent to 20 miles eight hundred yards per hour. For this serious offence he was fined £4. The driver of a steam lorry was similarly prosecuted for a speed of 18 miles 320

yards in one hour. The driver replied that he didn't think his lorry would go that fast! In addition there had been no name on the lorry, and perhaps it had no speedometer?

Other cases involved the moral obligation of a son to help his mother pay the Poor Rate after advice from the Overseer. Another for not sending son of 12 yrs to school (St Lukes), 17 out of 90 times. The mother, being in good circumstances, was given a 20 shilling fine.

On March 10th 1923 the death of Magistrate Sir Charles Scarisbrick was reported. The Chairman remarked that Sir Charles had not sat on the Bench for some time. He had been interned during the war and since then had been "too infirm to attend". On April 7th a man was summoned for ill treating his horse, a bay gelding, by causing it to pull a cart load of turf when it had canker and the vet said it should be put down. The owner was fined £5 and a

Formby Magistrates Court (continued)

down. The owner was fined £5 and a farmworker 10 shillings.

On May 5th 1923, Mr Thomas Dickinson, newly elected Chairman of Formby UDC, made the "usual declaration" and took his seat as a Justice. A driver of a steam wagon was prosecuted for going too fast and damaging the road surface by so doing, having been travelling at the excessive speed of 9 MPH, (limit 5 MPH). He explained in mitigation that if he adhered to the speed limit he would be unable to complete the round trip to Southport and back in the same day!

A more serious case came up on 9th June when a lady clerk in the Post Office was prosecuted for sending a "grossly indecent postcard" to herself. The Magistrates decided that she should be sent to quarter sessions and fined £3 x 3.

New Court for Formby.

On December 14th 1927, the Formby Council Offices in Freshfield Road were formally opened by Colo-

nel J. F. Formby of Formby Hall. The design for these purpose-built premises included Council Offices, Library, and Committee Rooms, as well as the Magistrates Court which was also used as the Council Chamber. It served well until Local Government reorganisation in 1974. Its design was said to reflect the "old historic atmosphere combined with the simple quiet dignity" required of a public building.

Colonel John Formby died in 1933, aged 81. Among his many public offices, his obituary states that he was a County Magistrate for both Lancashire and Westmorland, his appointment being made in 1889. He was one of the senior Magistrates for the West Derby Hundred. He was the senior Magistrate for the Southport Petty Sessional Division and frequently presided at the sittings of the Bench at Birkdale and latterly (since amalgamation) at Formby. He was one of the Magistrates specially summoned to attend the Liverpool Quarter Sessions.

He is an example of Magistrates not

having to retire at 70, as they do today. Compulsory retirement to the Supplemental List at the age of 75 was commenced in 1949 but the age was reduced to 70, as today, in 1968.

With the creation of the North Sefton Bench, courts for the Division were held at Southport and for a short while in Formby, but, after alterations to Alexander Hall in Crosby. Courts were finally able to be held in Crosby. As early as 1900, pleas were being made in the Crosby Herald asking for local courts but this had to wait over 70 years. As in Formby, emergency occasional courts were held in police stations such as Seaforth and Formby. The Crosby courts were closed in 1992 and now it has been decided the Soutport Court will also close.

Unfortunately this means that soon all Magistrates Courts in Sefton will be held in Bootle.

Communications by Reg Yorke

Following discussion and inspection of several other Civic Society Newsletters submitted for the recent Civic Voice competition the committee agreed to reduce the number of issues of the Newsletter to three per year but increase the number of pages in each issue to 16. This would mean that the total number of pages per year would remain as at present. The newsletter will now normally go out in January, March and September.

With regard to format and layout it was agreed that we increase the size

of illustrations, maintaining relatively high resolution and use full-colour throughout. To allow larger pictures we might need to reduce the total amount of text. Other suggestions included trying to avoid articles running on over several pages. This might mean shorter articles.

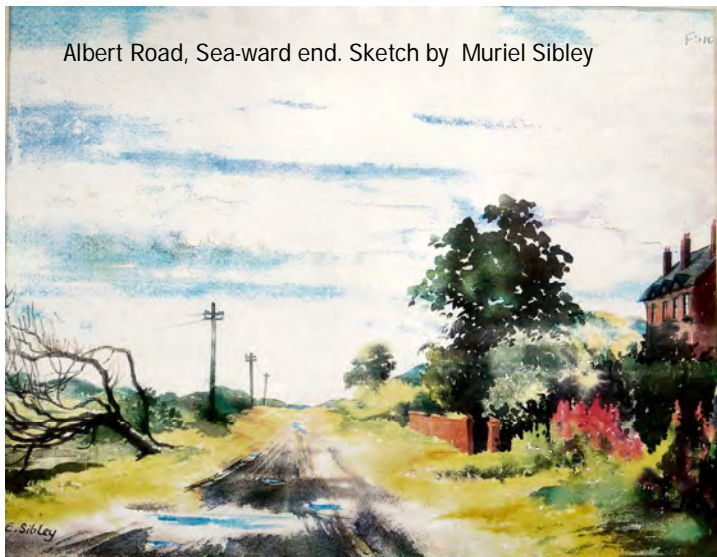
Tony Bonney has looked at several suggested ideas for an improved Website but has not found one which fulfils our particular needs. It was agreed that should a new website be designed and introduced the histori-

cal content of our present website should be retained for reference purposes.

We feel that it is very important that we develop a Local History section to the website as soon as possible and was suggested that should this be difficult using our present site an additional twin site could in the short term be established to run side-by-side with our present site specifically to carry local history content. We need to have some 'feed-back' from members on this idea.

History Group Report by Reg Yorke

Albert Road, Sea-ward end. Sketch by Muriel Sibley



Barbara is as you know unfortunately out of action at present. This being the case I have “taken over” as History Group Secretary. Barbara's role is now after many years, Chair of the Group.

As Secretary I would now like to form a small committee to help organise the work of the group, particularly our archives. This has been in mind for some time and will help particularly the organisation and conservation of our historic collections, including of course the irreplaceable Sibley originals.

The need for this was emphasised by the recent hint that our storage facilities may not be available for much longer. We also need to review the indexing, listing, access and where appropriate, computer scanning of the many other historical items we possess. Please let us know if you would be interested in helping.

As reported in the last issue, last Summer's activities included the organisation of a successful visit to the little known site of the old Formby Lighthouse as a contribution to the 'Festival of British Archaeology'. Mike Stammers, maritime historian, and Mark Adams, archaeologist, assisted with this and Major Hunter

off the beach at Freshfield, our historic photographic display went on public view at the Southport Air Show where it was seen by many people. I am very grateful to Jack and Peta Gore for their help in manning the display.

Our winter programme began on 14th of October with a talk by Mark Sargent and Matthew Tinker on the local history archive held by Sefton Library Services, now based, (conveniently for us), in Formby Library. This was followed by an illuminating talk by Ben Rees on Father James Nugent the remarkable 19th-century Liverpool social reformer who died in Formby. Our most recent presentation, on 13th January, was by well known fellow member John Houston who gave a very interesting illustrated talk on the Altcar Rifle Range.

We continue to receive

Commandant of the Range, has now marked the (previously unidentified) site with a special marker.

Following the celebration of the centenary of the first successful flight

regular enquiries on local history, one recently from as far away as Chile another from California. A recent analysis of the 'hits' on our website reveal a preponderance of interest on aspects of local history, particularly local buildings, These enquiries highlight the need for a local history section on the website.

We are always very glad to help other individuals and organisations with an interest in local history and recently exchanged information with St. Lukes regarding a register of graveyard burials. We already have two such registers, one compiled by former history group secretary, Jennifer Lewis in the 1980's and another compiled 10 years later now computerised by Tony and searchable by surname.

Another presentation will be a display in Duke Street Library in May on 'Ravenmeols'. This will show something of the history of this area, including 'Formby-by-the Sea' – the resort that never was! This will link in with the Ravenmeols Heritage Trails (see p 5). A previous display at the library last summer on 'Early Aviation at Freshfield' was well received.



Ravenmeols—old asparagus fields

Arthur Barry Sykes—The Donor of Duke Street Park



Dr. A. B. Sykes, photo courtesy
National Portrait Gallery

Any Formby resident will be familiar with Duke Street Park, but what they may not know is that some time in the 1930s, when it ceased to be a farm a builder wanted to develop that area with a mass of small houses. Living just opposite, at Ashurst, Dr. A.B. Sykes, then one of Formby's senior GPs, negotiated the purchase of the land for himself and then presented it to the Urban District Council, on condition it would remain a

park for all time. From that time, it has provided a marvellous site for the former open air Formby Show, the occasional circus and of course somewhere to play a few games, walk the dog, play bowls or tennis.

One of Dr. Syke's sons, David who became an Aircraft engineer, visited Formby some years ago and presented the Society History Library with a copy of his autobiography "Aeroplanes in my Briefcase" which among other things contains interesting observations about life in Formby in the 1930s.

One of Dr. Syke's grandsons, Michael Sykes, who now lives in California and being interested in his family history, is trying to collect information about his grandfather. Dr. Sykes was baptised Arthur Barry Sykes at St Peter's Church on 25 Jun 1876 the child of Benjamin Sykes and his wife Sarah. He died in 1962 but his place of burial is not as yet known. The Ashhurst garden was about three or four acres and had

been planted by Dr Syke's father with about four hundred fruit trees. He served at sea in WW1 and started his practice with a pony, 'Tink', and trap, but he later had a very majestic car, a Belgian Metallurgique and later again a bull-nosed Morris Cowley, nicknamed the 'Patent Leather Boot'. Apparently, years later, it was still going. Sadly its wheels had wooden spokes and one of these rotted under the layers of paint. A.B. was proceeding down the road outside the house when a wheel came off and knocked an old gent off his bicycle. He was a patient who was reasonably forgiving. The car looked very sad on three wheels and had to be replaced by a Morris Oxford Coupe. Members of the Sykes family would now like to know a little more about Dr. Sykes. There are probably quite a few older residents of Formby who remember him and we would very much like to hear from them. Please phone or e-mail yorke@briardale.co.uk or drop us a line.

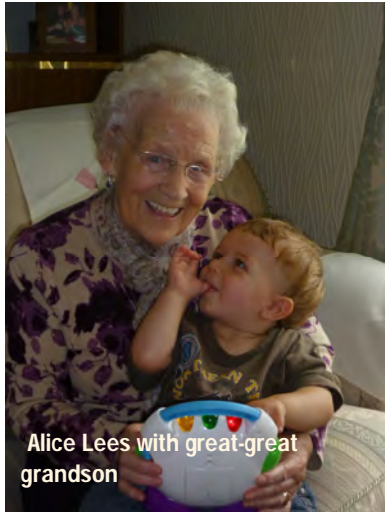
Jim Winthorpe

We record with profound regret the loss of Jim Winthorpe, husband of Society Life Member, Elsie Winthorpe. He was born in Birkenhead in 1935 into a ship building family and, being evacuated to North Wales in 1939, soon decided to come back home. He teased Elsie Milnes at school, but later they fell in love whilst attending confirmation classes and were confirmed together when they were 16 years old. They got married in September 1957 at All Saints Church in Childwall. Their family grew with the arrival of daughters Christine and Carol.

Jim started work as an apprentice electrician at Liverpool University. He also served in the R.N.V.R. for some years. He worked for many years for a big electrical company and managed major electrical jobs in Liverpool such as The Royal Liverpool Hospital, the Atlantic Towers Hotel, the theatres, and Wallasey Mersey Tunnel. With Elsie, he went to the opening of the tunnel and met the Queen. He then went on to establish A&B Electrical Contractors, which he ran until his retirement in 1998. Outside of family and work, Jim's passion was golf at West Derby Golf Club where he was honoured

with the roles of both Captain and eleven years later as President for three years. Jim supported Elsie in her invaluable work as Newsletter Distribution Secretary. We offer her and her family our sincere condolences.





After reading Tony Costello's report of his years at the home in 1940, I thought you might be interested in a girl's point of view of the home in the same period of time. My younger siblings and I arrived in early autumn of 1940 after being orphaned in July of the same year, we came from Oldham. There was myself Elizabeth (Alice), Lucy, John, Kathleen, and Pricilla, (Phyllis) a young girl of nearly 11 yrs old my first impressions were not very good, it seemed to regimented, the daily routine was chapel, breakfast, and school, but we soon settled in and got used to it.

The girls were taught at the home by the nuns, but as there was only one classroom, the senior girls attended class at 9.30 am till lunch and afternoon classes was for younger children, we also had to attend school on Saturday mornings, sister A was a very good teacher (strict but fair) and if pupils showed an interest in certain subjects she would encourage them. After lunch if the sister's didn't need us to do chores we were free to follow our own pursuits, the playground consisted of sand hills surrounded by the woods, I loved playing in the woods and we soon learned about

the different types of trees and shrubs, red squirrels were prevalent in those days and very tame, they would come and eat out of our hands (it is sad to read about how they are being decimated, I hope that something can be done about it). From the main gate of the home was a lane that ran for approximately a quarter of a mile to a cross roads, there was an army camp there.

I think all the land in that area belonged to the Brook's family who were farmers, I remember we children got into trouble playing hide and seek in the corn field behind our playground, we were marched up to the farm and had to apologise to Mr Brook's, we got a sharp lecture on the economics of food resources and what we were doing was not helping the war effort. In the summer we would go to the beach to play, there were long posts pushed into the sand every few yards in case of invasion, there was also an Ack Ack and search light battery on the sand dunes.

The soldiers stationed there were friendly and used to wave to us as we passed. As the war escalated evacuees began to arrive from Liverpool and soon our dormitories were so full that some younger children had to share a bed, even the nursery didn't have enough cots so some babies had to sleep in prams.

Sister B was in charge of the nurse-ry and pharmacy as she was a medical practitioner, I was often asked to help her in the pharmacy, we had to boil bandages as there was a shortage of medical supplies due to the war, sister also showed me how to mix herbs and powders with a pestle and mortar (I hoped I would never have to try these concoctions) sometimes I would go to the beach to col-

lect types of seaweeds, these were used to make some form of iodine, it was a case of make do and mend. A doctor would visit the home once a month to check up on children with chronic illnesses. Eventually the over crowding was eased as an annex and extra dormitory was built which was a relief.

The sisters took in children of every race, creed, and colour, but only the catholic children like myself went to chapel, the others attended the village churches.

I do remember Sammy a small Jewish boy who was very ill when he came to the home, the story was that his father had escaped from the Nazis and he and Sammy travelled across Europe till they reached this country, his father had to leave Sammy with the sisters as he was taken to a hospital near Liverpool. Sadly Sammy died a few days later (that little boys face is still with me 68 years later).

On a lighter note I remember quite a few of the girls and boys of that period, Tony Costello's sister Pat (Betty) as I new her was one of my best friends, we got into quite a few scrapes together, we were also in the choir together.

Christmas was always a nice time of the year and Santa always paid a visit on Christmas day. Tony mentioned the Americans that visited but I think that was the village school as I don't remember seeing any Americans in uniform at the home, in my opinion I think that it was the local rotary club backed by the Lord and Lady Mayoress at the time, anyway they made it an enjoyable day. I had to leave after my 14th birthday, and it was a very sad parting, but everything the sisters taught and did for me has stood me in good stead!



Chapel Lane after rain.

By John Robinson of the Formby Civic Society Art Group

Today, with snow on the ground, it seems a long time since we painted outdoors, at Ince Blundell Hall, however, I am sure it looks even more beautiful now with frost on the trees and the lake frozen.

The local Art Exhibitions that are held annually, running up to Christmas are now all over. Congratulations to three of our members who were voted either by fellow members of the Association of Formby Artists, or by members of the general public, to have painted the most popular pictures in their recent successful Exhibition.

Next year, our Exhibition takes place on 25 June, which is also National Civic Society Day. The Society would therefore like us to display at least two paintings per member, with a local theme 'Beautiful Formby'. Our committee will meet in the Spring, to discuss this, and other plans for the day. Full details will appear in

the next Newsletter.

Our annual Get Together is on Sunday 23rd January, at Lydiate Hall Farm, . Please note partners are also very welcome.

The West Lanes Craft Guild's new Centre will be open shortly and we intend visiting it in February. It is in Burscough, near the canal. In fact we may visit it again later in the year, as I believe a boat trip on the canal may then be available. It is some time since we went to the Mill Gallery, Parbold , to see James Bartholomew's latest paintings, which are always worth seeing, so we will go there in March.

In March, we will meet at Cafe D'Art, to discuss the 2011 Exhibition, as now that there will be only three Newsletters a year, details will have to go in the next publication.

DIARY DATES

Thursday, 24th February; *Visit to West Lanes Craft Centre*, Burscough. Meet at Centre 11 am. Phone me 873920 for directions, if needed.

Thursday, 17th March; *Visit to The Mill Gallery*, Parbold, Burscough. Meet at Gallery 10.30 am.

Wednesday, 6th April; Cafe D'Art, Formby 10.30am. *To discuss Exhibition etc.*

Barbara Mossop

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**History Group Chair
Barbara Yorke**

**Art Group Representative
Barbara Mossop**
Newsletter

**Distribution Secretary
Elsie Winthorpe**



Photo; Phil Smith

Future Meetings Programme

General Meetings

28th January; Dr Phil Smith, *Wild orchids of the Sefton coast*

25th February; Mr J. Leston, *The History of T. J. Hughes – a Liverpool Landmark*

25th March; Mr. Bob Jones, *Liverpool's connection with the American Civil War*

History Group Meetings.

10th February, Canon Val Jackson, *The Liverpool Cathedral Lady Chapel.*

10th March, Charles Crosbie, *The Heskeths of Rufford Hall.*

14th April, David Russell, *The residents of Lydiate Hall - an everyday story of Country folk.*

All meetings are held at Ravenmeols Community Centre starting at 8pm unless otherwise stated.

For more information see our website www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk