

# Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter  
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April 2011

## Listed Cottage in Peril by Desmond Brennan



*Eccle's Cottage, Southport Road, 1968; photo M. Sibley.*

The cottage at 1 Southport Road, known until modern times as Eccles Cottage or Eccles Farm, is located on the north side of the road at its junction with Paradise Lane. It dates from the first half of the 18th century and is a Grade 2 Listed Building. The 1968 photograph of the building shows at that time it was in reasonable condition, although, even then, the unevenness of the roof indicates that all was not well with its timbers. The detail from the 1845 Tithe map (see next page) shows that, in its early days, the cottage was surrounded by an extensive patchwork of fields - very different from today. We know from the information accompanying the map that, at that time, the property was owned by Mary Formby and occupied by James Eccles, who also "occupied" the somewhat longer neighbouring cottage further along Paradise Lane which he used as

"Outbuildings and Croft". Reg Yorke suspects the Paradise Lane buildings were a good deal older than the sole survivor of this group of buildings. James Eccles paid 7d Tithe to the Rector for his house and 4d for the "outbuildings".

After several years of neglect, today finds the building in a parlous state, especially the single story with attic part of



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### NEW NOTELETS

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Now available from  
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Tony Bonney

## Listed Cottage in Peril



the building which is believed to be older than the 2-storey eastern end. There has been gross ingress of water to the western part of the building for a very long time; the photograph on the previous page shows the southern slope of the roof, and the condition of the northern slope is no better. As a result, there must be extensive rot of the roof timbers and of the floor of the attic. The south facing wall of the building has bowed out by about 4 inches under pressure from the roof and the attachment of the wall to the western gable is severely impaired, as the photograph shows; the connection to the wall of the timbers supporting the attic floor must also be signifi-

cantly impaired as a result of the outward movement of the wall. Prior to the very recent installation of two timber buttresses, the wall was in imminent danger of collapse. The attic floor has also been secured by strategically placed steel supports. So now we await the answer to the question "What happens next?"

In anticipating the answer to that question, everyone concerned needs to bear in mind that Planning Policy Statement 5 *Planning for the Historic Environment* (see the August 2010 Newsletter) requires that every possible means of preserving an heritage asset must be purposively pursued and that only in very excep-

tional circumstances may harm to or loss of a heritage asset be contemplated. Further, PPS5 protects against deliberate neglect of or damage to a heritage asset with the intention of furthering the possibility of redevelopment of the site; it states specifically that deterioration brought about in this way is to be disregarded when the decision is made whether or not to permit redevelopment. The Council does not have powers to require the building to be brought to a habitable condition, but it does have a duty to prevent the building becoming totally derelict and, through planning development control, the Council has a powerful means of influencing what happens at this location.



Detail from the 1845 Tithe map

Eccles Cottage

There are very few remaining of these historic buildings which connect us to our past and we must do all in our power to ensure their preservation; the other examples in Formby show how it can be done. We appeal to both the owner of the property and the Council to honour their responsibilities to the building and the community in resolving what we acknowledge is now a difficult situation.

## Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

Sefton's emerging Core Strategy, which is a key component of the Local Development Framework (LDF), reached another significant milestone when its foundation Options Paper was approved by Cabinet on 17 February to go for consultation. The Core Strategy is predicated on the extent of new housing in the borough to be planned for in the 17 year period 2010 - 2027 and the purpose of the Options Paper is to inform the debate which will decide the issue.

The Options Paper is based on a number of data gathering studies. The most important of these is probably the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, first carried out in 2008 and updated last year (the updated study has yet to be published in full); from this study, it was concluded that there is sufficient land within urban boundaries for approximately 4850 new dwellings in the period to 2027.

Another important dataset was provided by the Employment Land and Premises Study; it showed that there is just sufficient employment land for the period to 2027; however, it found that there was a need for a new site of approximately 20 ha to replace the Southport Business Park. The determination of the Council to minimize change of use of existing employment land is embodied in the Supplementary Planning Document *Safe-guarding Employment Land* which was consulted on in December; this document, which when finally adopted will become part of the LDF, sets out the very restrictive conditions under which existing employment sites could be redeveloped for new housing or any other purpose.

Particularly controversial is the Green Belt Study, the findings of which have yet to be published in full, but which have been taken account of in the drafting of the Options Paper and some of which are available in very truncated form in the papers for the meeting of Planning Committee on 9 February. Planning Policy Statement 3 *Housing*, recently reissued by the coalition government in a slightly

amended form, requires that at any time during the life of the LDF there should be available sufficient land for housing development for five years ahead. The purpose of the Green Belt Study is to identify sites in the green belt contiguous with urban areas which might be used to satisfy this rolling five-year demand for land with minimum impact on the larger green belt. Without it, the Council would be vulnerable to appeal by would-be developers to the Planning Inspectorate which might then allow development on green belt land outside the context of a coherent long term plan; it has already been demonstrated that planning inspectors can be persuaded by such an approach (but not in cases involving Sefton, which for the moment has sufficient urban land available).

**The consultation on the Council's Options Paper has been deferred until after the May local elections.**

Another very important study is that carried out for the Council by a firm specializing in predicting housing need, the results of which have only just been published. The computer model used has successfully withstood scrutiny at various public enquiries. Amongst the many factors it takes into account are: changes in population size and age distribution, changes in household composition, changes in migration, housing policy relating to affordable and social housing, housing renewal, the character of the local housing market in different parts of the borough, changes in local economic activity. The study entailed making predictions for eleven different scenarios, some of which were chosen to elucidate characteristics rather than for their predictive value. The Options Paper draws heavily on this study.

The Options Paper offers three possibilities; Options One (Urban Containment) and Option Three (Stabilizing Sefton's Population) are limiting cases, while Option Two (Meeting Ident-

tified Needs) is intermediate in character.

### **Option One - Urban Containment:**

The essential feature of this option is that no green belt land would be released for development. This would mean that only  $4850/17 = 285$  new homes would be built annually in the period up to 2027. Because most of the development would be on relatively small sites involving fewer than 15 units, most of the development would not trigger the inclusion of an affordable housing component; consequently, affordable housing needs would be very far from being met. Although the population of the borough is declining, because households are getting smaller, the need for housing is growing, so the restriction on new housing would result in an outflow of population and the remaining population would be declining in age. The result would be a smaller workforce and lower economic activity; in addition, it would not be possible to replace the Southport Business Park because a sufficiently large site would not be available.

### **Option Two - Meeting Identified**

**Needs:** When the several parameters influencing housing demand are assigned their most likely values and allowed to interplay according to the consultant's computer model, the resulting best estimate for the number of new homes required for the 17 years of the plan period is 8160, i.e. 480 per annum, 36 of which would be in Formby. To the plan period total has to be added 360 new homes to allow for unmet demand arising from a restrictive housing policy in the seven years prior to the plan period. Thus, land for 3670 new homes, requiring approximately 150 ha will have to be found in the green belt, some of it on Grade 1 agricultural land, once the 4850 urban sites have been used up; bearing in mind the need for a rolling five-year supply of land for new housing, green belt land will be required in about 2016/2017. This

## Planning Matters (continued)

option would allow the Southport Business Park to be replaced, but not necessarily in the north of the borough. During the plan period, it is anticipated the population will decline by about 7000, but an ageing population would mean the number of people of working age would reduce by about 18,000.

**Option Three - Stabilizing Sefton's Population:** To maintain Sefton's population at its 2010 level, it would be necessary to attract 7000 incomers to the borough and they would require 11,175 homes to 2027, i.e. 657 per annum. This option would make commensurate demands for land in the green belt; it would require the construction of a considerable amount of infrastructure and the crea-

tion of new jobs, all the more so since it is expected that there would be a higher proportion of people of working age in the newcomers. This option would bring with it the danger that green belt land would be developed in preference to urban land and would endanger the regeneration of urban spaces unless special measures were put in place. On the plus side, it would provide best for a much-needed increase in the amount of affordable housing. However, the feasibility of this option has to be in doubt, given that it would require a level of development greater than has been experienced in Sefton in the past 30 years.

There is a great deal more that could be said about these three options;

extensive information is to be found on the Council's website at [www.sefton.gov.uk/corestrategy](http://www.sefton.gov.uk/corestrategy). The start of the consultation has been deferred until after the May local elections; it will involve a program of presentations and forums by the Council, and will last for 12 weeks; individuals will be able to make representations to the Council. At the start of the consultation, the full Green Belt Study Findings and the Sustainability Assessment will be published. At the end of the Consultation, the complete Core Strategy will be drafted and submitted for consultation early in 2012.

## Managing Woodland on the Sefton Coast by Paul Nolan



The 420 hectares of pinewoods, limited to a central 12 kilometres of the dune coastline, are owned by some 30 landowners and users with profoundly different objectives ranging from conservation bodies with contradictory international and national objectives, to internationally im-

portant golf courses and even a military firing range.

In 2003, the Sefton Coast Forest Woodland Forest Management Plan was approved by Forestry Commission. This plan, with extensive public consultation, marked the start of a new way of managing the woodlands after several years of a management

moratorium, to enable the plan to be put in place and for the wider public views to be gathered.

The owners agreed to a series of shared objectives, with a work programme identified to meet these objectives. Each owner has an individual work plan, collectively these plans constitute the Forest Management Plan

Eight years on and funded through Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership Scheme and The Mersey Forest, we are now looking to renew and refresh the plan to take into account lessons learnt from the first period of activity as well as the needs of a changing society and new political priorities – but still focused on the long term sustainability of the woodlands.

### Background

This area has some of the lowest tree cover in the UK and so the woodlands are a relatively isolated, but significant part of the landscape, fulfilling an important environmental and social function.



Fisherman's Path 1969.

As the millennium came to a close a small group of the woodland owners, together with the Forestry Commission and The Mersey Forest began to meet together to discuss how to overcome some of the barriers to management. Although the region was well served with strategic land and coastal management policies and plans, there was no unified woodland management approach for the woodlands. It was decided that a management plan should be written using a Forestry Commission initiative called the Forest Plans, formally introduced in 1999 to 'encourage landowners to prepare a plan that provides a coherent, comprehensive and long term view of their woodland management'.

The woodland owners have continued to deliver this plan, with a review in 2007/8 to check on progress. The renewal in 2011/13 will provide an opportunity to assess progress and take new information into account.

#### What has changed

The delivery of the Forest Plan is coordinated by a task group, linked to the nature conservation task group of the Sefton Coast Partnership. The owners meet periodically to update and share information. Over the first 8 years of the plan good progress has been made, although financial pressures has meant that progress has slowed in recent times.

We have "discovered" through more detailed site assessment that there are more broadleaves in the area than previously thought, including the rare Black Poplar. The renewed plan will have to take this into account. The red squirrel population has crashed as the parapox virus hit the area but it is

now building up again, with numbers back to 40% of pre-parapox levels.

The workshop at Ainsdale has been set up by Sefton MBC to use timber from the coast to make a range of products, seats, signage and benches for the coast and beyond, helping to save money and make good use of the local timber.

A new disease to trees in this country, red band needle blight may be a risk to the large areas of Corsican Pine, we may need to find ways to accelerate the replacement with other, resistant species, that can still provide food for the red squirrels.

#### Process

We are hoping to follow a similar process to that for the initial development of the Forest Plan and the 5 year review, with public consultation and opportunities to comment on the renewal of the plan.

Initially, we are looking to update the plan, identifying where progress has been made or has been delayed.

We are also looking to carry out more research on the historic development of the woodlands and the current nature conservation value. The review will also look to make use of the new information that has been provided as part of the Liverpool City Region Green Infrastructure Framework. This helps to identify key assets and priorities for action at a strategic level and perhaps aid funding bids in the future.

A Sustainability Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment will also help to shape the revision of the Plan, providing a useful way to discuss the widely varying views and discuss the myriad objectives, strategies and policies that impact on the pine woodland area. The new Plan will be ready for implementation in 2013, with another review in 2018. More information or an update on progress can be provided by The Mersey Forest Team, telephone 01925 859604, or e-mail paulnolan@merseyforest.org.uk.

Following the first successful planting of a 2-acre mixed conifer/deciduous plantation on the dunes in Ravenmeols by Rev. Richard Formby prior to 1795, further woodlands, mainly of conifer, were planted by the Formby and Weld-Blundell families at the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s on a much larger scale.

In the 1950s, the estates were broken up and the land sold off to a number of different owners. The national nature conservation body (now Natural England) declared some 160 hectares as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 1965, followed shortly after in 1967 by the National Trust purchasing 80 hectares at Formby Point.

By the late 1990s, decreasing timber prices and low levels of grant funding meant that woodland management costs were not being covered. This forced landowners, especially those with smaller holdings, to delay or neglect woodland operations. With very heavy use by the local community, the neglect fostered an increased sense of 'a common good' with open access.

## Dr. Sumner and the Formby Lifeboat by Reg Yorke

In our book on *Britain's First Lifeboat Station*, first published by the Alt Press in 1982, Barbara and I wrote an account of the services of the Formby Lifeboat in the rescue of the crew of the Liverpool Pilot Boat, *Good Intent*, in 1855. On this occasion, public attention was subsequently focussed on the efforts of one who was not himself a member of the lifeboat crew, Richard Sumner, the village doctor, who nevertheless apparently often went out to wrecks with the Lifeboat crew and exercised his medical skills assisting in the recovery of shipwrecked mariners.

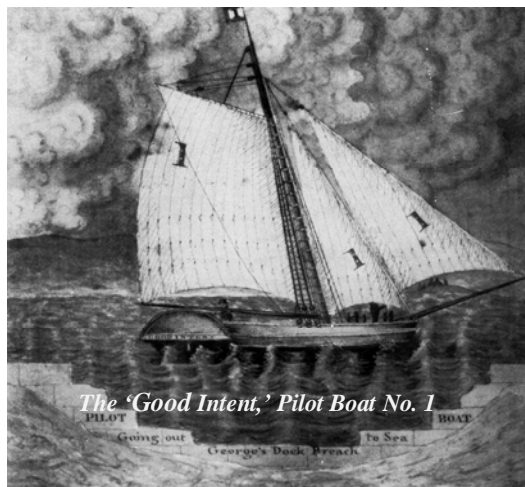
This occurred 1833; five years prior to Grace and William Darling's famous rescue and Richard Sumner was afterwards rewarded with even greater recognition than Grace Darling but has (unlike her) been largely forgotten. We ended the account by saying "yet who now remembers Richard Sumner?"

We are pleased to find that he is in fact remembered with great pride by a descendant in Queensland, Australia, who has recently discovered he was an ancestor and has now made contact with ourselves to find out more.

Pilot Boat No. 1, the *Good Intent*, with 21 pilots and crew aboard, had been caught in a great storm on the night of 19/20th November 1833. In mountainous seas, the crew lost control of the vessel and it was blown on to the beach amongst raging surf a mile or two north of the Boat House. The tide at this time was high and, with the force of the gale behind them waves beat heavily against the Boat House door, delaying for some time the possibility of launching the boat. Finally, the boat was launched, but could not itself get near the distressed vessel as the latter was stranded on one of the longitudinal banks which characterise the Formby shore. A

large crowd watched helplessly but were unable to assist the plight of the crew members who could be seen clinging to the rigging.

Meanwhile, two of the lifeboat crew, who had not gone out in the boat, found the Pilot boat's punt cast up on the beach. They righted and launched it and started out to the wreck. At this stage, seeing the body of a man in the vicinity of the wreck someone shouted from the lifeboat to Dr. Sumner "We are going to need you doctor!"



At this, Dr. Sumner, a strong and brave man then aged 35, plunged into the surf. He was then helped into the Lifeboat. Using the punt two crew members and Dr. Sumner managed to take off the casualties from the wreck and bring them ashore. The surgeon had previously sent a lad for a bottle of rum and used this to good effect as a restorative for those of the *Good Intent's* crew who had reached the limit of their endurance.

It is clear that, in very difficult circumstances, Dr. Sumner had shown great courage and initiative, for which he was subsequently highly commended. The Lifeboat crew had however not been inactive and indeed it was subsequently claimed that without their combined efforts Dr. Sumner would have himself perished. Of the *Good Intent's* complement of

22, only 9 were saved.

For his intrepid exertions, Dr. Sumner received the Gold Medals of both the Royal Humane Society and the 'Shipwreck Institution' together with £50 from Liverpool Common Council. William Formby and R. Kershaw were given £1 each by the 'Shipwreck Institution' and £1 each from the Liverpool 'Marine Fund'.

This was the second Royal Humane Society gold medal to be awarded to a Merseyside doctor, the first one having been awarded to the founder of the 'Liverpool Scheme', Dr. Houlston, in 1782. It is interesting to note that Richard Sumner's 'double gold' was in fact a greater honour than was to be afforded to Grace Darling and her father five years later as although they received the Humane Society's Gold Medal, the 'Shipwreck Institution' only gave them a Silver Medal.

A descendant of Richard Sumner, Greg Nichols of Salisbury, Queensland, Australia has researched his ancestor and discovered that Richard married Jane Tunnell in Preston, Lancashire (twice!) - the first entry in the register, dated 3rd October 1818, was crossed out, with a note in the margin *Richard Sumner being under age and not having the consent of his parents*; the couple were re-married on 1st December 1819".

Greg Nichols found records of eight Sumner children for this couple (1820-1837), from Lancashire on-line Parish records, cross-referenced with Census records. The 1841 Census shows Richard, surgeon 40, Jane 40, Charles, Septimus, Henry and John, a printer. Also of interest, the next Census, in 1851, has consecutive entries for the Sumners and Tunnells. At "*Beech Tree House*" in Brows Lane, the Sumners, Richard, 52, born in Lathom, Jane, 53, born in Yorks, Scarborough, Henry, farm labourer, who moved to Victoria, Australia in 1857, and Fanny, living in *Victoria Cottage* in Brow's Lane.

Jane died in 1855 of chronic bronchitis and it is interesting to note that the signature of the Registrar is that of her husband, Richard. By the 1861 census Richard has a new wife, Sarah, born in Liverpool, and slightly younger than Jane. The 1871 census then lists the family address as *Hawthorn Cottage* 87 Brows Lane (N.B. the Post Office was listed as "88") Richard, 73, Sarah, 70, daughter Fanny, 33; there was a grandson, Edward, 14, and grand-daughter, Mary, 12 (both born in Formby)



The 1881 census has Richard, 83, John Bennet Sumner, son, 59 and Fanny, daughter, 43. Dr. Sumner died on 30th April 1884 at Brows Lane, aged 86. His Probate entry dated 10th June gives his personal estate as £1.269, his spinster daughter Fanny being sole Executrix. At present we are not sure where Richard's grave is.

Formby village has altered dramatically since Richard Sumner lived and practised here. The only buildings

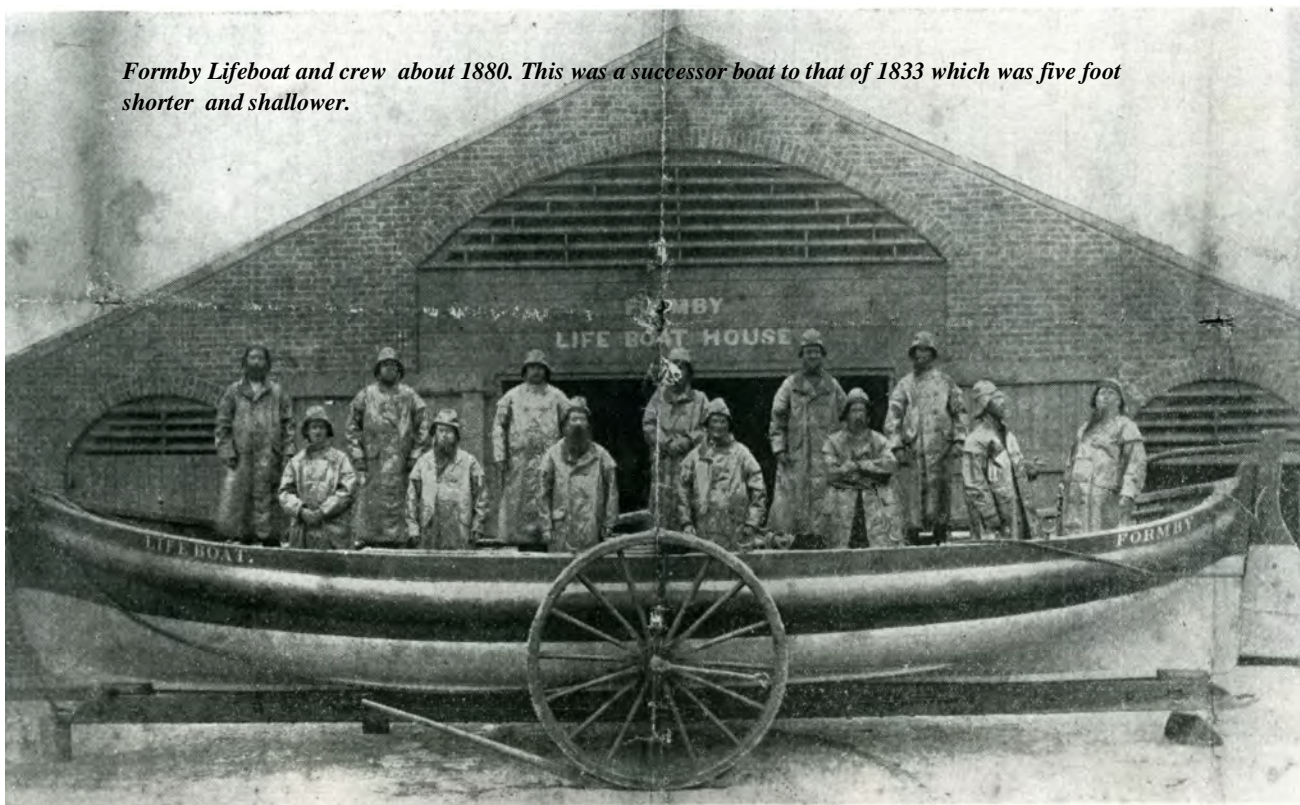
*Greg, Helen and family, descendants of Richard Sumner living in Salisbury, Queensland, Australia.*

present in Brows Lane (which then included what is now known as Chapel Lane) in the mid 19th century were seven cottages, four on one side and three on the other, separated by spacious gardens, arable land and meadow. It was one of these houses *Beech Tree House*, near the corner

with Elbow Lane, that was occupied by Richard Sumner and his family. There were only fourteen other inhabitants in the heart of the village (Brows Lane/ School Lane) in 1851: the parish priest, the doctor's family (which included two sisters-in-law, running a small private school), a lady 'landed proprietor', five farmers, a cow-keeper and four agricultural labourers, one retired. The farmers between them farmed just 64 acres and it is interesting that one of Richard's sons, Henry took up Farming and emigrated to Australia.

By 1900, Formby had changed dramatically. On the south side, all the cottages except one had gone, replaced by a more or less continuous row of houses and shops and two banks. At the suggestion of this Society, Dr. Richard Sumner is now commemorated by the name given to the road which today connects Three Tuns Lane with Elbow Lane between the shops and car-park.

*Formby Lifeboat and crew about 1880. This was a successor boat to that of 1833 which was five foot shorter and shallower.*



## Wildlife Notes by Dr Phil Smith

### January

As usual at this season of the year, a good deal of my time was taken up in writing up records and reports. These include a revision of the *Inventory of Vascular Plants for the Sefton Coast* which lists all the flowering plants, ferns and conifers found on the Sefton Coast, including the sand-dune system, since recording began over 150 years ago. Nine new plants were added to the Inventory in 2010, the grand total now standing at a remarkable 1300 for the coast as a whole and 1172 in the dunes. These figures demonstrate the outstanding biodiversity of this coastline and justify *Plantlife International's* inclusion of the Sefton dunes in its 2007 list of Important Plant Areas (IPAs).

In our region, January is supposed to be the wettest month of the year. However, despite several wildly inaccurate forecasts of "rain, heavy at times" very little actually fell during the month. Thus far, we have experienced the third dry winter in succession, this having major implications for our wetlands, especially the dune-slacks, which rely on recharge between autumn and spring. Summer precipitation has little effect as it quickly evaporates. It wasn't supposed to be like this, climate change being predicted to bring wetter winters and dryer summers!

The big freeze in December seems to have affected some local birdlife, **Stonechats** being noticeably absent from the dunes. My monthly visit to Cabin Hill produced only 22 **Snipe** and one **Jack Snipe**, suggesting that birds displaced by the ice have not returned, though the low water-level in the slacks was no doubt also a factor. Nevertheless, a walk through the Ravenmeols woodland on 19<sup>th</sup> in sunny, calm conditions was rewarded by some delightful early bird-song from **Robins**, **Great Tits**, **Wood Pigeons** and a **Mistle Thrush**, while over 20 **Redwings** flocked in the trees round Asparagus Cottage. Rachael Parks tells me of the first ever **Treecreeper** in her Formby garden, while Ian Wolfenden had both male and female

**Blackcaps** daily on his feeders, with up to 11 **Reed Buntings** and 25 **Blackbirds** at a time. Ian is a licensed ringer and provides fascinating insights into the turnover of birds in his Thornton garden. For example, he has ringed 42 **Blackbirds** since the end of the cold snap, suggesting that many of these birds are not resident but are moving through. Similarly, during 2010 he ringed 297 **Goldfinches**, though no more than a dozen or so were present on any one day. Finally, out of a grand total of 892 garden birds ringed, only 164 (18%) were retraps.

*The big freeze in December seems to have affected some local birdlife, Stonechats being noticeably absent from the dunes.*

The cold weather probably contributed to a large shellfish "wreck" along the shore, consisting mainly of **Rayed Trough-shells** (*Macra corallina*) and **Razor-shells** (*Ensis*), these attracting many gulls. One lucky birder at Birkdale on 22<sup>nd</sup> spotted a very rare American **Franklin's Gull** but, two days later, there was no sign of it as I searched through about 10,000 mixed gulls roosting at high-water. Some compensation was afforded by flocks of 45 and 60 **Twite** at Birkdale and Ainsdale respectively, while 4500 roosting **Oystercatchers** were harassed by a majestic **Peregrine**. Nearby Sands Lake had its usual flock of wintering **Tufted Ducks**, peaking at 151 on 28th.



Waxwing, Bootle

### February

February used to be known as "fill-dyke", the term originating in an old county rhyme:

*February fill the dyke,  
Be it black or be it white;  
But if it be white  
It's better to like.*

For the first time in several years, the month lived up to its reputation. Rain fell on about 18 days and, though rarely heavy, its total was enough to raise the dune water-table to a normal late-winter level. Many ponds on Freshfield Dune Heath were brim full by the month's end, auguring well for dragonflies and water-plants later in the year. I visited the dune heath mainly to see the excellent scrub-clearance work by the hard-working volunteers. While there, I was surprised to find a **Redpoll** on the ground, missing some wing and tail feathers and apparently unable to fly, though still able to run away from me and hide under a pile of brushwood. To help our **Natterjack Toads** in dune areas where surface water is in short supply, a dozen or so new scrapes have been excavated at Altcar Rifle Range, Lifeboat Road and on the National Trust estate. Funded by the Million Ponds and Landscape Partnership projects, these shallow pools with their sandy surrounds



Redpoll, Freshfield, Dune Heath

should make ideal breeding sites.

The North Merseyside Amphibian & Reptile Group organised a management task on 6<sup>th</sup> when I joined seven volunteers at Cabin Hill frontal dunes to create bare sand patches in the dense **Marram** on south-facing slopes. Here, the proportion of open sand has declined from about 40% in the 1960s to less than 5% now. Although mainly for **Sand Lizards**, this work will also benefit rare insects and plants. While catching our breath, we were entertained by huge swirling

flocks of waders being pushed up the beach by the high-tide. They were even attacked by a **Peregrine**, which caught a **Knot** in mid-air before eating it on the shore. The winter shore-bird counts here averaged 77,000, the highest figures ever for this part of the Sefton Coast. While a majority of the birds were **Knot**, there were also spectacular numbers of **Bar-tailed Godwits**, **Dunlins**, **Grey Plovers** and **Sanderlings**.

I took two old University friends from Sussex to see the waders on 23<sup>rd</sup>. They were mightily impressed, especially when, on cue, the **Peregrine** turned up again for its customary snack and another **Knot** met an unfortunate end. They were also interested to see historical features, such as the steps of the old Formby Promenade and the **Black Poplars** planted over 100 years ago. We also visited the spectacular Devil's Hole blow-out, the floor of which was beginning to flood, though not yet up to the levels of 2008.

The **Herdwick Sheep** on the nearby Cabin Hill reserve have now been joined by five **Shetland Cattle**. This small versatile breed, much used elsewhere for conservation grazing, is noted for its hardiness and ability to thrive on a variety of forage. As was hoped, the cows seemed to spend a lot of their time browsing **willow** and **Sycamore** scrub.

**Pink-footed Goose** numbers on the mosses were lower than usual in February; however, on 17<sup>th</sup> near Sniggery Farm, I found a flock of 1000 that included two **Greylags**, while about 3000 Pinkfeet at Plex Moss on 22<sup>nd</sup> contained three **Barnacle Geese**.

The approaching spring was heralded by the first returning **Avocets** at Martin Mere on 13<sup>th</sup>, while **Snowdrops** were plentiful from the middle of the month. I was also pleased to find a wonderful display of colourful **Early Crocus** at Kenilworth Road dunes, Ainsdale on 24<sup>th</sup>. Despite being garden-escapes, these flowers raise the spirits at this time of year.

## March

This is the month when nature really begins to respond to the call of spring. I saw my first **Honey Bee** as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup>, while **Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell** butterflies were out and about by mid-month. More unexpected was a large black-and-red **sand-wasp** (*Ammophila sabulosa*) at Cabin Hill on 27<sup>th</sup>. The following day, one of our national rarities, the **Vernal Mining Bee**, was active on the National Trust dunes and I was delighted to find and photograph a mating pair for the first time.

Bird-watchers always relish the arrival of spring migrants, **Wheatears** and **Sand Martins** being prime targets. The first Sand Martins I heard



*Vernal Mining Bees*

about appeared on 12<sup>th</sup>, when three were at Martin Mere and a single at Marshside. Wheatears started their passage a day later, with three at Seaforth and another at Martin Mere. However, I had to wait until 29<sup>th</sup> for my first sighting of six immaculate males and a female on the dunes at Southport Marine Lake. **Swallows** were relatively late this year, a possible first being at Martin Mere on 28<sup>th</sup>. The now customary influx of **Avocets** continued during the month, with 30-40 at Marshside joining the usual **Black-tailed Godwits**, while Martin Mere had 74 Avocets by 27<sup>th</sup>. Much rarer were the **Smew** which lingered at the same site until mid-month, a **Spotted Crane** reported at Marshside on 18<sup>th</sup> and a **Ring-necked Duck** at Seaforth on 24-25<sup>th</sup>. The first **Osprey** of the spring flew north over Seaforth on 29<sup>th</sup>, while

strong winds here on 31<sup>st</sup> blew in a party of eight **Little Gulls**. Being a North American rarity, the male **Lesser Scaup** at Marshside from 20<sup>th</sup> attracted lots of twitchers though, like most exotic ducks, an escape from a captive collection is always a possibility. Several reports of **Green Woodpecker** from different sand-dune locations during the month were encouraging as this bird is at best a scarce and irregular nester in our area.

I visited Birkdale Sandhills on 14<sup>th</sup> to see the excellent progress made by the council's staff on clearing impenetrable stands of **Sea Buckthorn** and **birch** from the Local Nature Reserve. Sample counts of annual growth-rings on cut stumps showed that most bushes were about 15-20 years old, the largest dating back only 30 years at most, thereby confirming my recollection of a relatively open scrub-free landscape here when the reserve was declared in 1980. As well as extensive areas of scrub woodland at the rear of the dunes, **Hawthorn**, **Holly**, **willows** and other shrubs are being left. This will ensure a rich variety of wildlife habitats when the project is completed in another two years time.

The month concluded with a special study of the **Early Sand-grass** at Southport Marine Lake dunes. Said to be the world's smallest grass, this tiny annual grows and flowers in February and March and then dies off completely leaving only its seeds to germinate in autumn. It was first discovered here in 1996 and, because of its national rarity, was the subject of detailed surveys in 1999 and 2004. Concerned that the plant may be declining, I mapped its distribution with the help of friends. Although some colonies have been lost due to overgrowth of tall vegetation, we were surprised and delighted to find that it has increased overall by about 40% since 2004. The grass is very dependent on open sandy conditions, these being maintained at Southport by **Rabbit**-grazing and human trampling.

## History Group Report. By Reg Yorke



**This year we are organising two events for the Festival of British Archaeology:**

**1) Investigating Crosby Beacon, (seen above),** on Sunday 17th July 18.00 - 21.30 hrs, meeting at the seaward end of Range Lane, Formby, led by Maritime Historian, Mike Stammers, and myself, we intend to walk out (approximately 1.5 mile) into the inter-tidal zone at low tide, returning at about 21.30 hrs (N.B. Low water is at 19.09 hrs GMT). Thus we will be able to spend about 1 hour on site to inspect the structure as it is today, discuss its history and significance for Navigators since the first beacon was first erected there early in the 18th Century. We can also inspect various other adjacent features, including the remains of earlier beacons.

We will be walking through the Altcar Rifle Range 'danger zone' but will have safety clearance to do so. Participation will need to be pre-booked and numbers limited. The site is very exposed and suitable clothing and footwear are essential. We will have 4x4 Land Rover backup in case anyone needs help with transport out of the inter-tidal zone!

**2) A visit to Formby Lifeboat Station remains,** on Saturday 23rd July, 15.00 - 17.00 hrs, with an emphasis on Formby's pioneering role as Britain's 'first' and discussion of exactly

how the boat was launched. (Rather different to the sort of mechanised launch we see on the news-reels today!).

Unfortunately, only the remains of wall foundations now remain (and fast disappearing) but its exposed situation overlooking the mouth of the Mersey highlights the original concept and need for "a boat for saving lives from vessels forced on-shore". As members will know the access to the site is via a 200 m walk over the frontal dunes. The site is very exposed if wet or windy. Appropriate clothing and footwear essential

### **New Local History Web-site.**

With the help of new member Noel Blundell, the site will have: a *home page, contact us* (which may be separate or link back to the main site), news, articles, details of forthcoming meetings, a navigation bar, together with a list of major resources including a Gallery of images of particular local historic interest. The plan is for the Local History web pages to be accessed from the home page of a redesigned Society website .

**The Society's Library Display**—Following the public interest shown in our display on 'Early Aviation at Freshfield' last year in the Duke St. Library we propose mounting a further display on 'Sefton's Changing Coast' at the library this summer.

Watch out for details in the local press.

**Our Summer Programme** will also include the 'Testing' of the proposed Ravenmeols Trails, (referred to in the last issue) and possibly a day visit to the prehistoric copper mine on the Great Orme. Discovered in 1987 during a scheme to landscape an area of the the Great Orme, the extensive mines found below the ground represent one of the most astounding archaeological discoveries of recent time. Dating back 4,000 years to the Bronze Age, they changed our views about the ancient people of Britain and their civilized and structured society 2,000 years before the Roman invasion.

**Recent archive acquisitions** include the original 1915 Railway Engineer's Plans for a proposed Formby Loop-line agreed in 1918 but never constructed. Also an interesting set of early 20th Century Picture Postcards, of Bishops Court School.

**Ravenmeols Project.** This is ongoing and is covered by the article on page 12.

**Helpers are still needed** for Local History subcommittee and work on archives. Please contact me by phone or e-mail for details.



*The crumbling remains of the foundations of the Lifeboat Station*

## Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

The Group had to cancel the Get Together which should have taken place in January, because of the inclement weather. It will take place at a later date. Our meeting in February was at Burscough Wharf This is a collection of buildings which were empty for a number of years, set around a courtyard running alongside the canal by Burscough Bridge. The buildings have been renovated and are now very attractive. One of our members belongs to The Art and Craft Guild of Lancashire which now has a new permanent home in a lovely Gallery on the Wharf which has only been open for a few weeks. The site was originally the home of the Veterinary Practice which looked after the canal horses which used to tow the boats. In June, they are holding a River Festival, when they are hoping to have canal boats, complete with horses for trips along the canal. They are also inviting schools to visit that week and they will have the opportunity to learn about various 'old' crafts and customs - such as clog dancing. On the second Sunday each month, they at present hold a Farmers Market; it is good to see a local initiative which will bring people and money into the area. Our visit in March is to The Mill Gallery in Burscough to see the most recent work of James Bartholomew, whose Studio it is. He is a talented young artist, who has had Exhibitions in various good venues throughout the country. In April, we are meeting at Cafe D' Art to discuss our Exhibition, which this year takes place on 25 June, which is also Civic Society Day throughout the country and, to celebrate this, the Group have been asked to enter as many paintings as possible, of local views. To contribute to this, our meeting in May will be sketching locally.

As there will not be another Newsletter before the Exhibition, Entry Forms will be sent out to members who exhibited last year. Anyone else wishing to enter is asked to phone me on 01704 87390, when I will send them a form. Please put a star next to the entry, if it is a local subject. Entries will need to be returned by 1 May this year to enable us to set up the Exhibition. As usual, we ask for help on the day of the Exhibition. We also need to paint the stands that we use and if anyone would be prepared to help, with this it would be wonderful .



**In this issue we feature three watercolours by Joyce Mawdsley:-**

1. Kentonwood Stables
2. Hesketh Park
3. Formby Beach in Winter

## Ravenmeols Heritage Trails by Reg Yorke

We are now at the beginning of year two of a three-year programme. Last year much background information was gathered, and collated, a Power-Point presentation prepared and presented to a trial audience and two visitor leaflets prepared and used for group visits (organised by the Formby Civic Society in association with Sefton Coast and Countryside), when useful experience was obtained in gauging visitor interest. These were intended to provide information on:

1. The sand extraction 'legacy'.
2. The remains of *Formby by the Sea* – "the resort that never was".
3. (With Dr. P.H. Smith), The Black Poplar population, looking at the recently (genetically identified) large number of black poplar to be found in this area and consider its history.

In preparation for the proposed trails, work has commenced on delineating several circular routes to take in a good number of features of geomorphological, historic and/or wildlife interest

The history of this small coastal area is in fact unexpectedly interesting and multi-faceted and includes the ambi-

tion for a narrow gauge passenger loop line in 1915 (between Hightown and Woodvale with a station at Alexandra Road) and subsequently a planned coastal road in the 1930s.

In this connection, the surviving traces of 19th Century 'Formby-by-the-Sea' might be considered the modern equivalent of a 'deserted village'; the main difference from a mediaeval site such as Warram Percy being the existence of easily accessible records of various types and also the memories of a number of people still alive who actually lived there in its heyday. There is in this respect a close parallel with another failed resort, with a similar name, Ravenscar in Yorkshire.

*the surviving traces of 19th Century 'Formby-by-the-Sea' might be considered the modern equivalent of a 'deserted village'*

As in the 'sand-winning' project, a small working party will research old newspaper accounts and council records. Ravenmeols was last a contentious issue in the local press in the

1970s when the Mountrule Land Company applied for and nearly obtained planning permission to convert most of the area now protected as local nature reserve to an extensive golf course. The records of this dispute should now make interesting reading.

### Draft Trails.

Based on the identification of a number of existing paths, surviving features and structures of note, an attempt has been made to indicate some possible trails, a 'Main Trail', 3.5 km long and a shorter Woodland Trail. These are indicated on the accompanying map.

Either trail can be started or finished at a number of different points. Short linking paths are also indicated, as is the Sefton Coastal Footpath and a possible permissive bridleway. This network of features, paths and byways is listed on the attached table but is still flexible subject to further user opinion.

## Formby-by-the-Sea

Sometimes things don't work out as you expect but nevertheless fortuitously result in some unexpected and unplanned benefit. This is the story of a 'magnificent failure' a plan that didn't succeed in the financial way expected but nevertheless had much success in totally unexpected ways.

In 1875 a company was incorporated under the title of the Formby Land

and Building Co. to purchase 105 acres of the coastal area of Raven Meols, for £12,100 – a roughly rectangular area south of Formby, west of the Liverpool – Southport Railway and as far as the shore, overlooking the mouth of the Mersey.

This Company's ambition was to create a new residential resort, which it was hoped would rival Southport.

Practical work was to include:-

"The laying out, forming, and sewer- ing of streets, roads, parks, gardens, squares, crescents, terraces, boulevards, Promenades and other open spaces; the making of piers, jetties, and landing places in, upon and connected with lands purchased; the laying of tramways, railways, and running carriages thereon, by steam or



Formby Promenade 1933

R.K. Greswell.

other motive power, for hire or profit; the forming of waterworks and reservoirs, for supplying water; the erection of gasworks, and the manufacture of gas and the selling of the same; the erection of markets, docks, hotels, laundries, baths, water gardens, aquariums; the manufacture of bricks and tiles, and selling the same.”

Their first step was to run a narrow-gauge track from the siding at Formby station for the conveyance of building materials, etc. to the coast, and here they constructed the first item on their programme, a double-tiered promenade of brick, joining up the westerly ends of two new roads. Albert Road and Alexandra Road. The “first sod” was cut in 1876. Behind the promenade, and parallel with it, two other roads were partly made; one was named Lord Street. The promenade, 1000ft long still exists but now entirely covered by the dunes. Hopes for this new residential resort were high and in 1878 Mr. Thomas Hawksley, an eminent engineer who was advising the company, thought that ‘Formby-by-the-Sea’ would indeed become a potential rival to Southport!

For easier communication, in 1915 a proposed loop-line to connect with the Liverpool-Southport Line was surveyed and pegged out to leave the main line at Hightown and re-join it at Woodvale, closely following the coastline and with a station at Alex-

andra Rd. Application for the necessary authority was made in May 1915, but not until 1918 was this forthcoming when The Board of Trade authorised its development by the Lancs. and Yorks. Rly. Co. Possibly due to WW1, it never happened, but in the 1930’s this route was again officially

considered for the construction of a coastal road and shown in official planning maps of that period. Probably due to the Depression and then WW2 that did not happen either.

Now most of the properties actually constructed have disappeared and the 1000ft promenade has disappeared under the sand.

The lack of commercial success however lead to a valuable and interesting use for many of the of the houses built. During the depression, several were seized on by a number of philanthropic organisations to provide rest and recuperation for children from poor backgrounds in central Liverpool, Manchester, and Bootle, one house also being used to provide refuge for Basque children during the Spanish Civil War.

The properties included:-

1. *Sandon*: 1930, Bootle Corporation “Kiddies Kamp”, Hon. Sec. Capt. H. E. Wilson; 1933–37, Summer Camp for Bootle Children. Also used for Basque refugee children during Spanish Civil War.

2. *Mount Pleasant*: 1927–39, Convent of Notre Dame, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool.

3. *The Briars*: Chapel of our Lady of Peace, also used by Notre Dame Convent.

4. *Seabank House*: 1933–39, Father Berry’s Homes, Rev. Fr. Bennett, Manager.

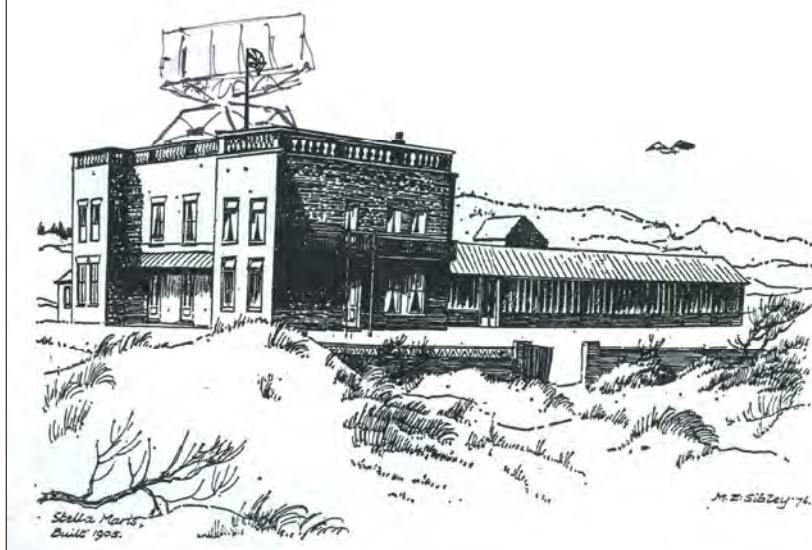
5. *Stella Maris*: 1927–1939, Stella Maris Association for Poor Children Holiday Home

6. *Everton Valley House*

The most interesting of these is Seabank house, as we here have a clear link with the well known mid-Victorian social reformer Father Nugent (who actually died in Formby) and his successor Father Berry.

In addition to these Holiday Homes, there was during the summer months

*This sketch, of Stella Maris by Muriel Sibley has had the wartime Radar aerial added. This was connected to a control room on Broad Lane.*



a great deal of camping in the area, some organised in camp-sites, but a great deal very informal.

This happy philanthropic use for Formby-by-the-Sea property ended suddenly at the beginning of WW2, when virtually all this property and land was requisitioned for military and defence reasons. Overlooking the mouth of the Mersey, Formby Point had great strategic importance, (even during the Napoleonic War there had been a naval signalling Station at Formby Point). There was an Observation Post on a prominent dune near the end of Albert Road possibly established (like Fort Crosby) even before WW1. During the Cold War a further Nuclear observation Post was also constructed and manned for a period before being transferred to RAF Woodvale. (Its remains exist to this day).

There was also a searchlight unit, a Radar Unit on the flat roof of Stella Maris and a military Rifle Range, used by troops training at Harington Barracks (where I learned to use a Lee Enfield 303 myself during my military training in 1947). Unlike for most of the properties, the high brick wall of this range still stands rather like a memorial to the 'resort that never was'. In summary, apart from a separate (still existing) area of housing close to Formby Station, only a scattering of houses of the sea-side boarding-house type were erected in Formby-by-the-Sea itself and today most of them have gone.

Visiting Ravenmeols today (via a very pot-holed, unsurfaced road originally named *The Avenue*, to this day lined by a rather magnificent double row of mature deciduous trees), you pass the remains of a onetime gentleman's residence (*Firwood*) set within the pioneer Sefton coastal plantation planted in the 18th Century by the

then Lord of the Manor, Rev. Richard Formby. Albert Road and Alexandra Road are simply marked by some residual granite kerb-stones as far as the remaining frontal dunes. Most of the inner dune belt has been literally carted away (*sand-winning*) for building purposes, foundry mould-making and some for glass manufacture. Garston Bottle Works used a lot (it produced a pleasantly green glass); much went to Midlands for industrial purposes and much more for filling sand-bags for the defence of Liverpool during WW2.

You have to look closely to find the sites of the majority of the houses which once stood here. Apart from a rather special Grade 2 Listed house designed by McMurdo, the noted architect, slightly seaward of Firwood, only a few properties survive, Seabank House, overlooking the promenade and a new bungalow built on the site of a former wartime 'shack' near the remains of the Rifle Range. Several others remain further inland.

The area is slowly 'scrubbing over', but along the edges of the roads are

some very picturesque, ancient Black Poplars; search of the area reveals many other younger Black Poplars. These have only recently positively identified genetically as the "real thing". They were planted by the Land Company as amenity trees and have survived longer than most of the bricks and mortar development. The whole county of Cheshire is proud to possess about 350 Black Poplars; here in Formby and Freshfield we have about 650, mainly in the dunes. These probably will be the final legacy of Formby-by-the-Sea.

*The Map below is copied from "The Future Development of South-West Lancashire, 1930", the Report of the South-West Lancashire Joint Town Planning Advisory Committee. This shows the then intention to construct "a new coastal road between Hall Road and Southport", 50 to 60 ft wide, running along the frontal dunes! The areas marked in green were to be the only areas saved from development!*

*Road 19 represents the western extremity of an extended B5195, a largely new road from Ormskirk through Formby to the Coast (via Lifeboat Road!).*



## A Note from the Chairman, Ray Derricott.

The appeal in the last Newsletter for help in running the Society produced a small, but positive response. Dr. Yorke has had offers to help in organising the Society's historical archives and will set up a History sub-group to assist with this task. A vital offer came from new member, Noel Blundell, to help Reg and Barbara to link their work and other material

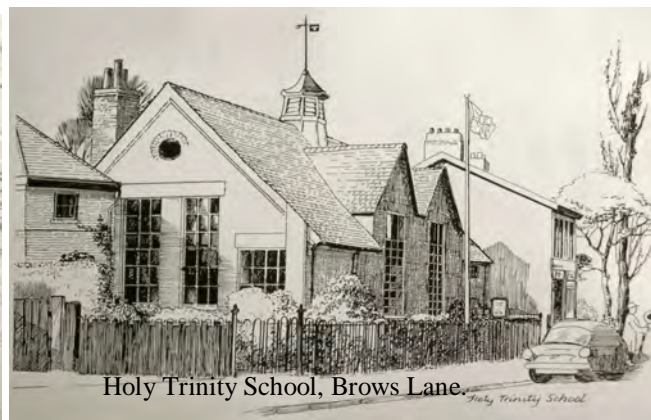
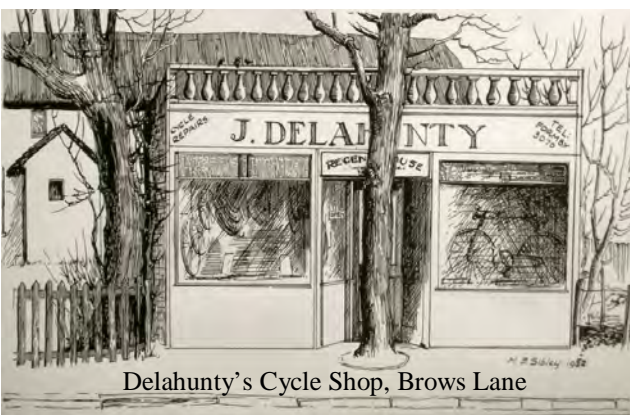
directly to a reconstructed Society website. Noel brings his professional skills and impressive technical knowledge to this task. We welcome Noel and his wife to the Society and it was good to see them at the last meeting of the History Group. Tony Bonney continues with the digitalising of more of the Society's materials. Tony and Noel will help to produce an attractive, accessible and user

-friendly feature to the website.

Dr. Brennan has welcomed a new member to the Planning and Amenities Sub-group. We are pleased to have the enthusiastic and helpful comments on planning applications from James Byrne.

Further offers of help are still much needed.

## New Formby Civic Society Notelets are now available.....



## Formby Civic Society

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### History Group Chair

Barbara Yorke

### Art Group Representative

Barbara Mossop

### Newsletter

### Distribution Secretary

Elsie Winthorpe

## Society Meetings Programme

To be held at Ravenmeols Community Centre

**Thursday, 14th April (History Group) - David Russell, The residents of Lydiate Hall - an everyday story of Country folk**

**Friday, 6th May, 7.30 pm - Annual General Meeting.  
(Members only)**

### Art Group

**Wednesday, 13th April, 10.30 am - Meet at Cafe D'Art to**

**discuss Exhibition**

**Thursday, 5th May, 10.30 am - Sketching locally, meet at  
Freshfield Station**

**Saturday, 25th June - Open Air Art Exhibition, Chapel Lane**

For further information see our website [www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

## Outdoor Summer Events

**Friday, 13th May at 1.50 pm - Visit to Altcar Rifle Range to see Green-winged Orchids with Dr. Phil Smith.** Meet at Hightown Hotel; walking fairly easy, but sturdy footwear recommended; maximum of about 2 miles. Pre-booking required; please phone or e-mail Reg Yorke (contact details top left).

**Saturday, June 11th at 2.30 pm - Visit to Ince Blundell Hall and Grounds**

**Thursday, 16th June - All-day visit to Gawthorpe Hall and Haworth Art Gallery** (to be confirmed)

**Saturday, 25th June - Open Air Art Exhibition, Chapel Lane, (Civic Day).** Entry Forms will be sent out nearer the date to those who entered last year's Exhibition. Anyone else wishing to enter paintings please phone and a form will be sent to you. Details from Barbara Mossop, tel. 01704 873920

**\*Sunday, 17th July, 6.00 - 9.30 pm - Investigating Crosby Beacon.** Meet at the sea-ward end of Range Lane, Formby; must be pre-booked with Reg Yorke (contact details top left).

**\*Saturday 23rd July, 3 - 5pm - Visit to Formby Lifeboat Station remains.** Meeting Lifeboat Rd. Car Park but must be pre-booked with Reg Yorke (contact details top left).

*\*For details of these events please see History Group Report, p. 10.*

