

# Formby Civic News



## The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

Registered Charity no 516789



May 2010



Paula Ridley, Chair.

## Launch of Civic Voice

Nearly 200 civic society volunteers packed into the Building Centre in central London on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April for the historic launch. As well as hearing Griff Rhys Jones call for a powerful new voice speaking out on the issues that matter and helping the civic movement become ever stronger delegates met the new trustees and had their first look at Civic Voice's new "identity" and website. Sir Terry Farrell led a discussion of the changing social, political and economic environment within which the civic movement operates, drawing on his own projects, and Tony Burton kicked off a discussion about Civic Voice's priorities. The liveliest session was lunch - with everyone catching up on news and sharing experiences with others from across the country. The day ended for many with a fascinating walk around the local area to see the work - and the impact - of Camden Civic Society. We're now looking forward to the next national meeting at our first AGM, expected in the Autumn.

## A new national charity has been launched with the aim of re-energising the country's civic societies

Civic Voice hopes to give new life to the civic movement, which represents more than 1,000 local groups dedicated to improving communities in England.

It follows a consultation that revealed some members felt the movement had become remote and old fashioned.

The Civic Trust, which represented more than 700 civic societies, closed because of a lack of funds a year ago.

Civic Voice said it aimed "to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive".

It said Civic Voice's priority was to champion and support the civic movement, provide a "stronger national voice"

and get people more actively involved in their local community.

There should be pride in being a "busybody" when it comes to looking after where we live, it said.

Civic Voice's first national campaign - Street Pride - aims to "remove unnecessary street clutter" and a Love Local campaign is also being launched "to champion what makes people feel proud about where they live", the charity said.

It is also campaigning on issues ranging from the reform of the planning system and proposals for a second high-speed rail link, to the future of coastal towns.

### Inside this issue:

Planning Matters 2

Wildlife Notes 3

Art Group 5

Black Poplar at Formby Point 6

### SUPPLEMENTS inserted

Freshfield Flying Centenary

AGM Reports

Subscriptions are now due!

Please find renewal form inside this issue and send to treasurer as soon as possible.

# Planning Matters by Dersmond Brennan

The Altmouth pumping station continues to occupy a significant place in the work of the Society's Amenities and Planning Subgroup. We have now received a first response from the Environment Agency (EA) to our recent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) enquiry. Not all the information we requested has been disclosed, but the EA promised to provide by 21 April all the missing information as further detailed by me. However, the information now available to us is extensive, including as it does the second Form G Report (the Project Team's application to the EA's National Review Group for additional funding for the refurbishment), and we have learned important new information.

The FOIA enquiry has provided us with data concerning the energy requirements of the four storm pumps, data which we tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to obtain during our numerous engagements with EA representatives. Each storm pump under normal running conditions will consume 592 KW, viz. a total of 2368 KW for all four pumps. The four dry weather storm pumps, together with the ancillary equipment, require approximately 600 KW, making the total steady power necessary for the station to deliver the promised standard of flood protection to be close to 3.0 MW. This figure has to be considered in the context of both the power that will be available from the Scottish Power network and from the on-site backup diesel generator.

The maximum steady power available from the network is just 3.0 MW. Because of its importance, but not having information about the storm pumps, I had earlier estimated the power consumption of the station indirectly by applying basic physics to data available in the Halcrow modelling report and found it to be approximately 3 MW. Thus, even before becoming acquainted with this latest information, we recognized that the power requirement will be right on the limit of what will be available from the network supply. We repeatedly warned the EA that there was

negligible reserve of network power and, eventually, they gave us an assurance that they would convey our concern to their engineering consultant. We remain critical that the power requirement of the station under storm conditions should be on the limit of what is available from the network supply, especially having in mind that the network is likely to be under pressure in such circumstances. However, we take comfort in the knowledge that any shortfall can be made good by the on-site diesel generator; we have been assured that each storm pump can be independently connected to either the network or the backup generator.

The on-site diesel generator is 2.5 Megawatts which is just sufficient to supply under steady operating conditions the power requirements of three storm pumps, the four dry weather flow pumps and the ancillary equipment, although again there will be negligible reserve capacity. We had pressed repeatedly that the on-site generator should be capable of driving three storm pumps, but we could only obtain an assurance that it would be sufficient to operate just two storm

*We remain critical that the power requirement of the station under storm conditions should be on the limit of what is available from the network supply*

pumps, so we are very pleased to have this latest information that the stand-by generator will have the capability of driving a third storm pump under steady operating conditions. In this account of power requirements, the reference to *steady operating conditions* has been deliberate, because there is a major issue arising from the very large spike in power demand when a storm pump is started.

The transitional starting power demand of a storm pump is approximately four times its steady state load, but fortunately this surge lasts for only a matter of seconds. Scottish Power has given an assurance to the EA that this potential source of insta-

bility will have minimal impact on their network. However, it is interesting to note that, as at 7 October 2009, the EA estimates that there is a 30% risk of constraint being imposed by Scottish Power on account of the pumps' start transient loads causing network problems. Similarly, the supplier of the diesel generator has stated that their equipment will be able to withstand the transient surge at startup, even for the third storm pump. However, it is a little worrying that they found it necessary to add that *in the unlikely event that the generator is overloaded, it will fail safe and will be operator resettable.*

There is no reference in the second Form G Report to the possibility of there being a reserve canister storm pump stored on-site ready to be substituted within twelve hours for an out of service installed storm pump. We had earlier vigorously pressed the case for having the necessary pumping capacity delivered by three installed storm pumps, with a fourth installed storm pump as backup. Given that configuration is now a lost cause, we shall continue to press that there should be a canister storm pump in reserve to reduce the risk that the promised standard of flood protection cannot be delivered when it is needed.

After months of no communication from the EA, I was surprised and pleased to receive last month an invitation for a conducted tour of the pumping station and, in the event, Jack Gore and I had a very interesting and enjoyable visit. We were able to see and discuss the full range of the refurbishment work in progress. We came away with the impression that the process was being well managed and was being conducted with urgency. However, we were concerned to learn that there will be a period when our flood protection will be down to only one of the two remaining diesel pumps, so we must hope that, when that happens, we will be enjoying an extended period of dry weather.

**Continued p 4.....**

## Wildlife Notes by Dr Phil Smith



Pinkfooted Geese on Plex Moss

### February.

Despite the continuing cold weather, spring movements of waders and gulls became evident along the coast during February. Big tides in the first week concentrated gulls into huge roosts totalling 25-30,000 between Ainsdale and Birkdale, of which about three-quarters were **Herring Gulls**. However, the Ainsdale beach roost held about 2500 **Common Gulls** on 4th, one of the largest flocks of this species I have ever seen. Rarer species were harder to find but, as usual, a few **Mediterranean Gulls** accompanied the flocks. At Ainsdale, I found one on 3rd and two on 18th, but there were reports of up to four at Birkdale. Seaforth Nature Reserve also had visits from "Meds" throughout the month, a colour-ringed adult on 21st having originated in Hamburg.

Internationally important numbers of waders are also a feature of our shores. On 3rd, the Ainsdale high-tide roost held at least 12,000 **Knot** and 5000 **Oystercatchers** with smaller numbers of **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Grey Plover**, **Dunlin** and **Sanderling**. As the tide pushes them up the beach, these birds often indulge in remarkable aerial manoeuvres, looking from a distance like great plumes of twisting smoke. These are among our most dramatic wildlife spectacles, comparable with the seabird cliffs of north Scotland or even the herds of Wildebeest on the African savannas.

Not surprisingly, **Avocets** returned later than in the milder spring of

2009, the first two being reported at Marshside on 21st, while Martin Mere had its earliest pair on 24th, increasing to four on 26th. The latter site

also supported around 1000

**Whooper Swans** throughout the month, 78 being trapped for ringing on 10th. Of these, 56 were new birds, the other 22 having been ringed in previous years. Martin Mere was also graced by an **American Green-winged Teal** and a remarkable variety of birds-of-prey, including **Hen Harrier**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Peregrine**, **Merlin**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Barn Owl** and up to 10 **Buzzards**. A spectacular **Red Kite** also passed through on 8th.

Most notable at Marshside was a **Bit-tern**, which spent over a week at the beginning of the month stalking the Crossens salt-marsh with the usual **Grey Herons**. This is a bird that normally hides away in dense reed-beds but here it was mostly in full view of its many admirers. I was lucky enough to see it on two occasions.

From the middle of the month a large flock of about 6000 **Pinkfooted Geese** at Plex Moss was accompanied by two Bean Geese of the race *rossicus*, which breeds in the west Siberian tundra. This goose always attracts a good deal of interest, first because it is relatively rare in Britain but also because it is a challenge to find among the **Pinkfeet**, the main differences being that the Bean has an orange band on the bill and orange legs, instead of pink.

The sea-watchers reported lots of **divers**, **grebes** and **scoters** off Formby Point early in the month, including up to five of the uncommon

**Velvet Scoter**. Unfortunately, on the two occasions I had a look from the high dunes only **Common Scoters** were to be seen as little more than black dots on the horizon, even with a powerful telescope.

Interesting plant life is thin on the ground in February but non-native **Snowdrops** can usually be guaranteed to brighten up a winter's day. However, they were much later than usual, the populations at Hesketh Road, Marshside being mostly still in bud on 7th. Here, you can find several varieties of the common Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) and also the much rarer **Green Snowdrop** (*Galanthus woronowii*), which has broader, shiny green leaves.

### March.

This unusually cold winter continued its grip well into March, with the result that many spring flowers appeared about a month later than usual. Thus, **Snowdrops** (*Galanthus nivalis*) were not at their best until the first week, a particularly fine display being at Cabin Hill wood. Presumably these were introduced by the hermit who used to live there in a little brick cottage, now long demolished. Nearby Range Lane, Formby, had some gloriously vivid clumps of the **Early Crocus** (*Crocus tommasinianus*), while the much rarer **Hybrid Crocus** (*Crocus vernus x tommasinianus*) appeared at Kenilworth Road dunes, Ainsdale and Hesketh Road, Marshside. One plant of **Golden Crocus** (*C. chrysanthus*) at Kenilworth Road seems to be new record for the dunes. These, and the many other spring bulbs are all garden-escapes, of course, but no less welcome in providing a splash of colour at this time of year. Another interesting plant is **Moschatel**, sometimes known as **Townhall Clock** (*Adoxa moschatellina*), which I was surprised to find in some abundance in a woodland fragment off Ashdale Close, Formby. The name refers to the strange arrangement of the yellowish-green flower-head with four flowers on. **Continued p 5.....**

## Planning Matters, (Continued from p 2).

Finally, on the topic of the pumping station, I received an invitation to attend the meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration and Environmental Services) Committee on 13 April to hear a presentation by a senior representative of the EA on land management and flood protection in the Alt Crossens catchment. This involves many complex and difficult issues (the management plan runs to 498 pages!), but its specific relevance to the Altmouth pumping station was the reference to the Lunt Meadows flood storage scheme and the computer modelling study that is in progress for it and the wider area. I was able to make the point in this influential forum that, although the specification of the refurbished station had been arrived at as though the storage scheme existed, the scheme itself is still at the planning stage and as yet the Project Team for the refurbishment has no understanding how it would affect flows at the pumping station. Indeed, there is no certainty that the scheme will be approved any time soon, notwithstanding that the Project Team anticipated the scheme would be in existence at the same time as the pumping station refurbishment programme was completed. We shall continue to do our best to make sure there is a proper understanding of this point when further consideration is given to the measures necessary to secure an appropriate degree of resilience for the station.

Regular readers of these reports will recall that we have had an ongoing engagement with the EA concerning the condition of the Downholland Brook embankment, which is essential to the flood protection of Formby. As part of Atkins work for the Lunt Meadows flood storage area prior to 2006, physical tests were carried out on the Downholland Brook embankment as a result of which Atkins reported the embankment to be in poor condition. The strengthening of the embankment was a substantial component of the planning application for the Lunt Meadows scheme which was approved by the Council in Au-

gust 2006. When that scheme failed to obtain EA approval, the strengthening was said to be scheduled, but later the EA claimed there was no need for any remedial work on the embankment; the latest FOIA enquiry has confirmed our suspicion that there is no documentary evidence to support that decision. We have continued to press the EA to take proper account of the Atkins investigation into the condition of the embankment and not to discount their concern for the embankment's stability. We are pleased, therefore, that at last the EA have now commissioned a consultant to investigate the condition of the embankment. The west bank (adjacent to Formby Business Park), for approximately 350 metre upstream of Lord Sefton Way road bridge, is being investigated in terms of its structural stability. The embankment profile has a steep riverside slope over this reach owing in part to the close proximity of buildings on the landward side constraining its position. Although there have been no signs of slippage along this section during any of the regular inspections, the initial condition assessment has

*We are pleased, therefore, that at last the EA have now commissioned a consultant to investigate the condition of the embankment.*

suggested that it would warrant a detailed investigation, potentially leading to stabilizing works. The report of the investigation is awaited.

In conclusion, I shall refer to a few recent significant planning applications. The redevelopment of the Powerhouse building and site is still being investigated by Council officers and I understand that it will not be possible for them to make a recommendation to Planning Committee in time for its next meeting on 28 April. There has been an application for a four story block of twelve apartments of modern design on a very narrow site at the head of Marsh Brows close. The site is bounded on the west by Formby railway station and car park,

and is a close neighbour of two large electricity substations. We opposed the proposal on several grounds, chief amongst them the belief that the building would be much too large for the site and would be completely out of character with the street scene, which it would dominate by reason of its very considerable height and mass.

We also complained that the initial amenity area of 160 m<sup>2</sup> was unacceptably small compared to the minimum of 360 m<sup>2</sup> required by the Council's own modest guidelines; as a result, a second amenity area of 110 m<sup>2</sup> was added, but we continued to complain that 270 m<sup>2</sup> was still too small and that, anyway, both areas were of very low quality (the planners concede the areas will need acoustic protection, but they argue the presence of balconies in some of the flats should be counted as compensation for inadequate amenity space!). Regrettably, the proposal has been approved, but subject to a large number of conditions, some of them rather onerous.

Finally, there is an application for a building to replace the former children's home at 86 Victoria Road (the third application for the redevelopment of this site since May 2008). We have criticized its dominant zinc roof with raised seams and its tall narrow stainless steel chimney pots, together with a number of other ill-conceived features. There has been a good deal of opposition from neighbours, some of whom we have assisted with advice on procedural matters. The case was expected to be considered at the next meeting of Planning Committee but this application has now been withdrawn.

Information concerning the several planning applications on which we have commented is available on the Society's website.

## Wildlife Notes (Continued)

Attending a two-day conference on sand-dune hydrology in Southport reminded me just how much we rely on winter rainfall to recharge the dune aquifer and top up water-levels in our dune slacks, these being one of our most important wildlife habitats. Following on from a dry winter and a three-week total drought in February/March, the rains late in the month were therefore particularly welcome. I visited the wetlands of Cabin Hill on 27th, counting at least 200 fresh batches of **Common Frog-spawn**. **Common Toads** were also active, with several balls of struggling males around long-suffering females trying to get on with laying their long spawn strings. Surprisingly, I counted 75 Common Toad corpses in a relatively small area, most having lost their back legs. Such predation is unusual, as this species is normally well protected by skin poisons.

On a recent trip to Tesco, I heard an unfamiliar bird-call. It was a **House Sparrow**, once abundant everywhere, now sadly declining in most places, seemingly due to the lack of spilt grain from agriculture and fewer insects to feed its young. The RSPB has targeted it for conservation and 20

specially designed nest-boxes have been set up at Marshside, where an exceptional flock of 109 House Sparrows was recently reported.

While a few winter birds, including one or two **Snow Buntings** on Ainsdale beach and two Bean Geese at Plex Moss, remained during March, the usual summer visitors began to



*Crocus tommasinianus*

arrive. One of the earliest is the **Wheatear**, the first I heard about being at Marshside on 17th, not much later than normal. **Sand Martins** appeared the following day and the first **Swallows** on about 23rd. I was pleased to find three **Sandwich Terns** on Birkdale beach on 22nd. More unusual were a Green Woodpecker seen by Rachael Parks at

Greenloons Drive, Formby, on 18th, two **Black Redstarts** at Seaforth Nature Reserve on 23rd and 25th, a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Banks on 7th-8th and an **American Wigeon** at Martin Mere from 9th. The last named site had a record number of 112 **Avocets** on 25th, an extraordinary total for a bird which was a rarity in the district less than a decade ago.

### April

Whatever happened to traditional April showers? Just like the previous year, April 2010 was characterised by long dry periods with cold nights, adding up to another disappointing breeding season for our **Natterjack Toads**. A brief respite from the drought around 9<sup>th</sup> April stimulated some breeding activity and I counted 111 spawn strings on the southern section of Birkdale Green Beach the following day. This was lucky, as I had arranged a training event for our Natterjack monitoring volunteers on 11<sup>th</sup>. There was a good turn-out and we were able to compare fresh Natterjack spawn with older **Common Toad** and recently hatched **Frog** spawn, (**Continued next page.....**)

## Art Group by Barbara Mossop

Since the last newsletter, the Group have visited the display of etchings and prints by Lancashire Artists - quite a wide variety of their work - in Ormskirk, and also two Exhibitions held at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

The date fixed to sketch at The Ship, Burscough, proved unsuitable for several members so we will make another visit there shortly. This was a pleasant, quiet spot and the weather was sunny and even quite warm.

We are visiting the Lancashire Craft Guild's Exhibition at Salmesbury Hall in May, followed by paint-

ing in the grounds and our annual Exhibition due to take place in the Village on 26 June. Help is always required for this event. If you would like to assist us for an hour or so, even if you do not paint - you would be made most welcome.

As so many people seem to be on holiday in July, we are just having an evening meeting, sketching the sunset at Hall Road. We do not usually meet in August, but if anyone one would like to go on a painting safari in Southport, stopping at several places to sketch for an hour at each venue, let me know and I will try to arrange it.

St. Luke's church will be open every Tuesday afternoon in the Summer for visitors and I have been told that we would be most welcome to paint in the grounds at this time, followed by tea and cakes in the Meeting Room.

If this Newsletter reaches you in time, there is an exhibition in Southport on 8th May of the works of the late James Blackwell, a local Artist and lecturer, who is known to some members. His paintings are on sale - proceeds going to several local charities.

## Wildlife Notes Continued.

Adding to the enjoyment were a **Jack Snipe** and **Northern Dune Tiger Beetles**. The latter species is doing really well on the Green Beach dunes, this being reflected later in a count of 94 beetles over a distance of about 400m; not bad for one of our



*Northern Dune Tiger Beetle*

rarest insects.

Also enjoying the prolonged April sunshine was another sand-dune speciality, the **Vernal Mining Bee**. Hightown dunes have recently come under the control of Sefton Council which proposes to designate a Local Nature Reserve here. Therefore, I thought I would count Hightown's bees, so that their locations can be taken into account when planning the reserve's management. In three visits I managed to record the coordinates of 72 "colonies", containing about 3750 nesting burrows of this nation-

ally rare solitary bee. During one of my searches, a commotion over the nearby Alt Estuary drew my attention to the spectacular sight of an **Osprey** being mobbed by a flock of **Oystercatchers**. It hovered over the water a few times, as though looking for a fish, before heading northwards. In fact, there were lots of local sightings of Ospreys during the month, Seaforth Nature Reserve alone reporting four or five, a consequence of the rapidly increasing Scottish breeding population.

Much rarer birds seen during April included a **White Stork** over Marshside on 24<sup>th</sup>, a **Common Crane** at Hundred End on the Ribble Estuary on 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> and two **Bearded Tits** at Seaforth on 15-16<sup>th</sup>, a first record for the reserve. More usual migrants, included lots of **White Wagtails**, the continental version of our **Pied Wagtail**, and the occasional **Yellow Wagtail**. I made a special trip to Curlew Lane, near Martin Mere, on 19<sup>th</sup> to see some Yellow Wagtails that had been found on a ploughed field a few days earlier. There were four males in their dazzling summer plumage, a rare sight nowadays. In former times, this was a common bird in Lancashire and North Merseyside; now there are probably less than 50 pairs in the two

counties. Another rapidly declining species is the **Cuckoo**; I didn't see a single one last year. However, a chance visit to Seaforth on 18<sup>th</sup> was rewarded with an excellent view of a Cuckoo, particularly unusual here, and the first **Swift** of the year.

Our Formby Civic Society "Black Poplar walk" on 25<sup>th</sup> enabled participants to see some of the 650 **Black Poplar** trees recorded at Formby Point and to discuss their former uses to create shelter for agriculture and the growing of pines. Cuttings were taken to try and propagate a new generation. During the walk, I was pleased to find two interesting non-native plants on the dunes at the end of Albert Road. These are **Garden Peony** (*Paeonia officinalis*) and **Mediterranean Spurge** (*Euphorbia characias*) known from only one and two other Sefton Coast localities respectively. Another botanical excursion took me to Larkhill Heath where I spotted a completely new plant for the coast, a beautiful flowering shrub, **Japanese Crab** (*Malus floribunda*), also a garden escape but none the less attractive for that.

## Black Poplar at Formby Point by Phil Smith & Pat Lockwood

In October 2008, Patricia Lockwood and I visited the Wirral. While there, by chance, we were shown a large Black Poplar tree in a Hoylake garden. This reminded Pat that her friend, the late Vera Gordon, had recorded a similar specimen at Formby Point many years ago, so we went to see if it was still there. Sure enough, we found the tree near Victoria Road carpark. Unexpectedly, however, it was accompanied by another 83 similar trees in woodland, which Pat christened "Vera's Grove". Nearby, stood more of what looked like the same kind of tree around the old asparagus fields.

This was a surprise because the Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* subspecies *betulifolia*) is a rare species in Britain, native only in the south and east on river floodplains. National surveys have found only about 7000 individuals and their numbers are declining. This tree has a long history of human use in Britain, its timber having fire resistant and shock absorbent properties. It is the third most common surviving medieval timber after oak and elm, being used especially for crucks and floor-boards. However, these cultural uses are largely defunct and the species has greatly declined in the British land-

scape. Although not native in northern England, the Black Poplar was widely planted in past.

I have been studying the plants of the sand-dunes for many years but had always assumed the Formby Point poplars were hybrids rather than the genuine native Black Poplar. Actually, the differences between the two types of tree are quite subtle, hence the confusion.

Among the main characters of the true Black Poplar are:

- A leaning trunk often (but not always) with knobbly bosses.
- Lower branches sweeping down with twigs sweeping upwards at the tips.
- A dense canopy of vivid green leaves
- A yellow exudate around the terminal bud in spring and early summer

Spiral galls on the leaf stalks produced by an aphid which is hardly ever found on other poplars.

We decided to find out how many Black Poplars there are at Formby Point and map their positions using a hand-held GPS device. The final total was about 650 trees between Cabin Hill in the south and Victoria Road in the north. We also found a few elsewhere along the dune coast, in Formby itself and on roadsides towards Hightown. About 175 hybrid Black Poplars were also recorded within the same area.

This represents a nationally significant number of this rare tree and a population that was previously unknown. It is important to stress that all of them have been planted and they are all male trees, distinguished by their red catkins in spring. Females were rarely planted because they produce copious white fluffy seed which blows around and can be a nuisance.

The question arises, when were they planted and why? Most were found in the following locations:

- Along tracks and paths extending into the dunes.
  - On the edges of agricultural fields – mainly old asparagus fields.
- On the borders of, or within, conifer plantations.

Presumably most were planted to provide shelter from strong winds and the blowing sand that was so

prevalent in the past, before the dunes became much more stable about 50 years ago. Also, in the 2008 book *Sand & sea: Sefton's Coastal Heritage*, Reg & Barbara Yorke refer to the use of poplars, known locally as "Frenchmen", as nurse trees for pine plantations.

Several Black Poplars were found during our survey along the edges of Corsican Pine plantations in the National Trust estate and also at Ravenmeols, while a much smaller number was noted within the plantations. Most of the original nurse trees must have disappeared long ago, as they were shaded out by the fast-growing conifers.

The question arises, when were they planted and how old are they now? Some of the trees appear really ancient having massive collapsed limbs. Often these have rooted into the



*Examining a particularly weathered specimen.*

ground, sending up new stems that have matured into substantial trees in their own right. Annual ring counts would ideally be used to determine age but this requires specialised equipment and techniques, so we had to use indirect methods as follows:

**Estate history.** - We know that pine planting began in about 1884 and largely ceased in the 1930s, so the trees that were used as a nurse crop would now be around 75-120 years old.

**Ordnance Survey maps.** - Early maps, such as the 1893 edition at 25 inches to the mile (surveyed in 1892), show the first plantations as a mixture of conifers and broad-leaved trees.

The latter could have included Black Poplars. The maps also indicate rows of broad-leaved trees on field boundaries and track sides. One such, north of Lifeboat Road, appears on the 1893 map and is still there as two lines of heavily weathered Black Poplars with hollow trunks. Their appearance has not changed much in the last 40 years and the trees are probably now over 120 years old.

**Historic and aerial photographs.** One photo of Formby Promenade, Ravenmeols, in the Society's archive, taken in 1919 or 1920, shows no trees in front of the promenade. However, a second, taken by R.K. Gresswell in 1933, has a row of trees just west of the promenade. These are still present and are Black Poplars. Assuming they are the same trees, they must now be over 80 years old.

The youngest Black Poplars at Formby Point appear to be those around the National Trust asparagus fields, presumably planted for shelter by the growers. They first appear as small trees on aerial photos taken in 1974. That would make them 40-50 years old.

In summary then, we think the Black Poplars at Formby Point range in age from about 50 to over 120 years.

Despite being a rare tree, these Black Poplars are not of major nature conservation value because they are all planted. However, they are of considerable interest as part of the land-use history of the area and have some landscape value. In ideal conditions, this species lives about 200 years but, growing in impoverished sand in an exposed coastal climate, many of the specimens are in poor condition and some have died within the last few years. It is hoped to propagate them by cuttings, the first being taken during our Formby Civic Society "Black Poplar Walk" on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

## The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

### SOCIETY OFFICERS

Chair, Dr. Ray Derricott,  
17 Harington Road, Formby.  
01704 876661  
Hon Secretary and Newsletter  
Editor  
Dr. R. A. Yorke,  
3 Wicks Lane, Formby,  
L37 3JE  
01704 872187  
Winter Programme Secretary  
Dru Hayden, 35 Stanley Road,  
Freshfield, 01704 872740  
Amenities Secretary  
Dr. Desmond Brennan,  
9 Brows Lane, Formby.  
01704 879115  
History Group Secretary  
Barbara Yorke



Opening Friday 23rd April  
St. Luke's Meeting Room  
Next to the church in the pinewoods  
Access from  
Lifeboat Road & St. Luke's Church Road, Formby  
FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS 10 am - 4pm  
APRIL to SEPTEMBER  
serving  
Tea, Coffee & Soft Drinks,  
Fresh Sandwiches, Cakes & Biscuits  
*Tables indoors and outside*  
*Dog Walkers welcome - bowls of water provided!*

## Summer Programme

1. **Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May 3 30 pm** *Vintage Flypast in Celebration of Centenary of Flying at Freshfield, Formby Point.* # NB. There is also be a related photo exhibition in Formby Library during May
2. **\*Sunday 20th June. 10 30 am.** Guided Walk to explore '*The Devil's Hole*', Ravenmeols (with Dr.Phil Smith and Reg Yorke). Meet at far end of Albert Road. A look at this giant 'blow-out',
3. **\*Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July. 10 30 am.** Visit to the *Formby Lighthouse* site, Altcar Training Camp.(By kind permission of the Commandant Altcar Training Camp). To be led by Reg Yorke. Meet at the Camp Entrance 10.30 am. (*Included in the programme of the British Festival of Archaeology*).
4. **\*Wednesday 18th August. Visit to Pendle Heritage Centre** and guided coach tour around the heart of Lancashire's Hill Country. Leaving Formby 10 am, return 6pm. ***For details see enclosed leaflet.***

**\*Booking necessary for these events :** Please contact Dr Yorke on 01704 872187 or

e-mail [yorke @briardale.co.uk](mailto:yorke@briardale.co.uk) prior to event.

### Formby Civic Society Art Group Programme.

**Sunday 23rd May, Visit to Salmesbury Hall.** Meet at Hall, 11 am. please note - this is a provisional date - phone me on 01704) 873920 before hand, as this may have to be altered.

**Saturday 26 June. FCS Annual Art Exhibition,** Formby Village.\*

**Thursday 8th July, Painting** at Hall Road. 7 pm

**\* Will all members submitting work please request Entry Form direct from Barbara Mossop?**