

# Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter  
Registered Charity no 516789



## OUR FIRST EVER 'CIVIC DAY'

August 2011



*The Formby Civic Society Art Group Exhibition.*

Photo: Tony Bonney

As our main contribution to 'Civic Day', Saturday 25th June, the Formby Civic Society organised a competition open to local schools for art work representing individual children's perception of *'My Formby - a celebration of what makes the place where we live attractive, enjoyable and distinctive*, organised nationally under the auspices of Civic Voice, the successor organisation to the former Civic Trust. On the same day, members of the Formby Civic Society Art Group held their Annual Open Air Art Exhibition in Chapel Lane, which this year was devoted to 'painting local'; the result was many very good local landscape studies.

All children in primary schools in Formby were invited to take part in

presenting their art-work, which could be in any medium. We received 180 entries, the judging of which posed a considerable challenge to the judges. The entries were in three age range categories. These were up to seven years, from 7 to 9 years and 10 to 11 year olds.

Many entries focused on the beach and the pinewoods, in which the red squirrels often featured. One picture was of a natterjack toad that showed detailed and accurate characteristics of this rare creature. The shops in Chapel Lane featured and, perhaps not surprisingly, 'Sweet Memories' drew the attention of several entrants. It was not surprising also that the Swimming Pool was a focus for some young artists.

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## OUR FIRST EVER 'CIVIC DAY' continued

The best entries went on display at the Formby Pool on Saturday 25th June and book-token prizes were presented to the winners at the Pool on Tuesday 28th by the Civic Society Chairman, Ray Derricott. In presenting the prizes, he emphasised the major objective of the Formby Civic Society was to maintain Formby as a unified community. He also thanked the children, their head teachers and teachers who encouraged the children to take part.

We thank Sefton CVS for the loan of display panels and the Formby Pool

for making space for the event; it was an ideal venue. We thank Pritchard's Bookshop for giving book-token prizes for the best entries and Mark Ascroft, the pool Chief Executive, who donated a prize for the best picture of the pool itself. He gave special thanks to Dru Haydon who had made links with the schools, took part in the judging and mounted the exhibition

Digital copies of the children's winning entries and photos of the display and prize-giving are available at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/formbycivicsociety/>

[sets/72157627045353192/detail/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/formbycivicsociety/sets/72157627045353192/detail/)

or from Tony Bonney at [tonyb1206737@talktalk.net](mailto:tonyb1206737@talktalk.net)



*Members of the Art Group enjoy a rest.*  
Photo: Tony Bonney

## 'My Formby' - as seen by local children on Civic Day.



Some examples of local Children's concept of 'My Formby' (more on p. 16),



*Civic Day Prize-winners and organisers. The prizes were kindly donated by Pritchard's Book Shop.* Photo: Tony Bonney



# Formby Civic Society's new website by Noel Blundell



## Formby Civic Society



- Home
- Local History
- Program of Events
- Wildlife Notes
- Heritage Trails
- Newsletters
- Art Group
- Planning Matters
- Membership
- Contact Us
- Legal Information



The Formby Civic Society (FCS) warmly welcomes you to their web site. This has been designed to promote the Formby Civic Society objectives and activities and to make learning about Formby more accessible and appealing to a wider audience. In the following pages you will find information about the Society, Formby's history and keep up to date with the latest news and events within the area.

We hope that this information will be of interest to you.

The purpose of the society is ...

*"to foster and preserve the identity of Formby as a separate community, to safeguard its natural amenities and to assist with the development of its cultural activities, particularly its history"*

Please click on the links below to find out more about :

[Formby Society Past](#)

[Formby Society Present](#)

[Formby Society Future](#)

observer

Use the box above to search the site for topics of interest

### The home page of the our new website

The current website has been in existence since 2004 and the quantity of information, access to digital resources and the Internet has altered significantly since its inception. It was therefore decided by the Committee to seek assistance in revamping the existing website and expand the Local History section.

As reported in April's newsletter, I volunteered to redesign the site, taking into account the current and future needs of the Society.

The new site has been developed and is now out for testing. The site has been shown to the committee and they have approved the 'look and feel' of the site.

If members wish to view the new test site and provide feedback, this would

**"in the meantime please look at the 'test-site' and let us know what you think"**

be most helpful.

The address of the test site is <http://testfcs.webplus.net>.

The home page is shown above.

Please note that whilst overall the site is virtually fully designed, new additions or deletions based on feedback, updated articles and coding means that the site can change. One or two

navigation tabs still have to be finalised by the Committee.

We have taken a different approach to the new site in that it is a more traditional site with a webmaster. The major advantage is that this approach removes the constraints of the existing site. Articles can now have more than one image, new sections can be added and revised accordingly and a wealth of unique resources can be presented in different ways.

The aim is to showcase the aims of the Society and make readily accessible as many as possible of its resources relating to this area's unique fauna, flora, topography and history.

The Local History section is now an integral and significant part of the website with 3 subsections, Formby cottages (a photo gallery of the ceramic cottages collection), an online image collection (managed by Tony Bonney), new articles are being added by the History Group and past articles being revised to include additional photographs to make them feature rich.

Dr Phil Smith's wildlife notes have been retrospectively reviewed and additional high quality photographs added to show the diverse flora and fauna of this area.

Local History articles have in the past been rather 'lost' in the 'Learning Online' section. In actual fact they composed the major part of the contents of that section. Now that they will have their own well-illustrated section, this side of the work of the Society will become much more apparent. There is also a possibility that a collection of previous articles may be published. **In the meantime, please look at the test-site and let us know what you think.**

## Our local Coastguard Station to Close



The recent decision to close our local Coastguard Station at Hall Road, has come as a shock to many people. At one time, the NW Coastguard headquarters was at Hoylake, but in 1949 the base was moved to Formby where the lookout was better situated to observe vessels moving up the Mersey channel. Formby Coastguard station then became the headquarters for the North West Division, responsible for coordinating all action taken during an emergency on the whole of the North-west coast, a distance of about 300 miles. This coastline includes six major estuaries where many ships and boats find themselves in difficulties. Formby was on 'standby' for 15 lifeboat stations between Holyhead and the Solway Firth, including the Isle of Man.

In addition to Formby, there were originally two other stations manned by regular coastguards on 24-hour watches at Fleetwood, and Workington and a further six lookout points on day-watch. These were coupled with a further nine auxiliary stations run by volunteers.

Whenever any of these stations was alerted, it was Formby which controlled the operation, keeping in constant radio contact with all the other parties involved. Formby could also deploy air-borne assistance if required or call out assistance even for a ship

in distress off Workington!

Contrary to popular misconception, the coastguard on duty did not occupy his time by looking all day through a telescope. There was a great amount of work to be done beach patrols to be carried out, life-saving equipment to be

checked, office work and reports to be written.

There were historically three separate sections within the coastguard service, lookout sections, coast rescue sections and auxiliary sections, the latter run by men who had intimate

**"Whenever any of these stations was alerted it was Formby which controlled the operation,"**

knowledge of the coastline where they lived and who were prepared to give voluntary assistance.

Originally the Formby Coastguard lookout was on a high dune near the end of Albert Road. In 1975, a build-up of the sandhills meant that the coastguards at the lookout had only a restricted view of the sea and it was decided to move the post to a new building situated about 250 feet north of Lifeboat Road.

The coastguard H.Q. (and family accommodation) was in Queens Road and there was just as much work done at headquarters in Queens Road as at the beach lookout.

In September 1982, the station was transferred to Hall Road, Blundell-sands, where it was equipped with the most up-to-date technology. In 1989 the Crosby station was threatened with closure and a delegation from Merseyside travelled to London to lobby MPs backed by a 400 name petition from local people, including our then local MP, Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas.

The Formby Civic Society visited the Hall Road Station in September 2007 when Alan Burton reported *the staff on duty at the Coastguard Station were surprisingly relaxed and accommodating considering that their working space had been invaded by a 20-strong group of Society members.* Apparently the party very nearly didn't get to make the visit at all as, only a short time before, there had been the makings of a major incident developing off the coast, which would have closed the control room to the group. Fortunately, the crisis was resolved and the visit was possible. The guide to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) Liverpool Maritime Rescue Sub-centre,



as it was then officially known, was Ian Jackson, who gave an introduction to HM Coastguard. This was followed by a DVD/Video presentation which, for many members was an 'eye-opener'. The party learned, for example, that MCA has helicopters, hovercraft, a plane and a tug; it is responsible for 10000 miles of coastline and a million square miles of sea; the Coastguards are but one part of its remit. The local team co-ordinate with RNLI, RAF and Police search and rescue from North Wales into Cumbria as well as coordination for organisations in Eire and the Isle of Man. The familiar blue and yellow patrol vehicles, however, are staffed by volunteers, of whom there are 20 working at Crosby. This volunteer team is expert in dealing with rescues from mud banks, for example, using inshore rescue boats, .

The party rather overstayed their allotted half hour in the 'Ops' Room,

where the questions and keen responses seemed endless. It was a fascinating and educational introduction to this, our local, rescue service, now to be centred on Holyhead. When the current MRCC structure was established in the late 1970s, it resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of stations around the UK.

With individual stations therefore now required to cover larger geographic areas, there are two perceived risks:

- Coastguard officers may no longer have the necessary detailed knowledge of their area of responsibility.
- Coastguard officers may not be able to keep up-to-date with information about their area of responsibility.

With this in mind, work has been

carried out to ensure that Coastguard officers develop sufficient individual knowledge as to how to operate station-specific equipment, how to liaise with Search and Rescue units within their own and flanking areas, and with other local emergency organisations and authorities, to become familiar with the main geographical features and dangers to navigation, and to become acquainted with specific dangers and potential incidents, shipping routes and schedules, and the nature and local distribution of other waterborne activities.

Other local assets and resources of information include Major Incident Plans pertaining to the area, local counter-pollution procedures, radio coverage, charts and publications emergency towing or salvage facilities and arrangements, and controlled airspace. Quite a list....and a heavy responsibility!

## Visit to Gawthorpe Hall and Haworth Art Gallery by Dru Hayden

Thursday 16th June dawned dull and drizzly as we set off in our comfortable coach to Gawthorpe Hall. We arrived in the same weather we set off in.

As the hall didn't open till 1 pm, unfortunately, there was no one around to welcome us. We soon found the toilets, always welcome, and then set off to find the gardens which were smaller than we thought. We wandered around in the rain till the tea shop opened at 11.45. We all piled in to a very warm welcome from the delightful staff who immediately poured out hot tea and coffee. There was a good selection of fresh sandwiches, salad and crisps, followed by wonderful carrot cake and almond tart and a constant supply of drinks.

Gawthorpe Hall, an imposing Elizabethan house resembling the great Hardwick Hall and very probably by the same architect, was very interesting with much of the original furniture. Several rooms display part of an unparalleled collection of needlework, lace and textiles. We explored the four floors in two groups and learned about the original Shuttleworth family from the very good guides in all the rooms.

Then off to the Haworth Gallery to a warm welcome from Yvonne, who gave us a short talk on the story of the gallery and its famous collection of Tiffany glass, donated to Accrington by Joseph Briggs, a local man who emigrated to America as a 17 year old, joined the Tiffany firm, and

became the manager. She explained the layout of the gallery, then provided us with flasks of tea and coffee in the tea room to help ourselves whenever we wished

There were many things to see but for most of us it was the Tiffany rooms that were the most popular. It is an amazing collection! Haworth was originally called *Hollins Hill*, owned by William and Anne Brierly and generously bequeathed to the people of Accrington. It is a beautiful building and very well maintained by the local authority.

From a disappointing beginning, the day had a very happy ending with several of the group planning to return to the Haworth Art Gallery.

## Festival of British Archaeology Events by Reg Yorke



Crosby Beacon. Photo: N. Blundell.

It was intended during the summer months, that we would make progress with fieldwork on the proposed Ravenmeols Heritage Trails. This is in fact starting and we hope will make steady progress during the next few months. Much historical and archaeological information regarding Ravenmeols has been compiled and the story of Formby-by-the-Sea, although little known, turns out to be very interesting.

The challenge now is to delineate several different trail routes which highlight what we know about the history of the area and then to provide some easy to follow Trail guides. Several volunteers have commenced 'field testing' provisional trail guides and this process will continue during the next few months. I will be very pleased to receive further offers of help in this connection.

Unfortunately, my time on this project has been somewhat reduced by an invitation 'out of the blue' by Sefton Coast and Countryside to contribute information for a special publication by Sefton Council *A Timeline of Sefton's Changing Coast* (please see enclosure with this *Newsletter*). In this connection, the opportunity has also been taken to produce a display

on *Formby Point Through Time* on view at Duke Street library for one month from mid-June. (See photograph p. 15).

I am very pleased with the progress which is being made (with the assistance of Noel Blundell) to revamp the Society website and provide a long missing history section. Many of the enquiries we receive as a society relate to Formby's history. We continue to exchange interesting information with descendants of Dr. Richard Sumner in Australia, but also more recently with descendants in the USA of Dr. A.B. Sykes, formerly in practice in Formby, one of whom is visiting Formby for the first time in the next few months.

I, as Secretary of History Group, again organised two local events during the *Festival of British Archaeology*, organised centrally by the Council for British Archaeology. The first of these, on Sunday 17th July 6.00pm - 9.30pm, was a visit to Crosby Beacon, the large timber navigation marker at the mouth of the Alt, familiar to local people (and seafarers) as a distant object on the horizon. This was in fact the site of the very first Mersey navigation beacon. Despite a very strong wind and driving rain, the group were able to spend about 1 hr on site inspecting the structure as it is today, and discussing its history and significance for navigators since the first beacon was erected there early in the 18th Century. We also inspected various other adjacent features, thought to be the remains of

earlier beacons. We were fortunate to be accompanied by Mike Stammers, maritime historian. The visiting group were glad to have backup support from Sefton Coast and Countryside Service Land Rovers, especially in view of the severe weather conditions.

The second occasion, happily in much better weather on Saturday afternoon 23 July, was a visit to the remains of Formby Lifeboat Station, now known to be not only 'Britain's first', but according to maritime historians the 'world's first' established in 1776 by Liverpool Dock Trustees. Only the remains of wall foundations now remain (and are 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 onshore". Although the station was closed in 1918, our group was able to watch on the Society's Laptop a short 1916 news film of a practice launch, which showed a team of horses (provided by an artillery regiment station at Altcar Rifle Range) pulling the boat across the beach. I was able to explain the full sequence of events when the services of the lifeboat were needed (in the days long before any form of mechanical assistance). The group also saw photographs and plans of the lifeboat station.



Photo: Tony Bonney.

# Formby Civic Society Communications by Reg Yorke.

## Newsletter

Largely because of time constraints, the Society's Committee decided on 22nd January to reduce the number of issues of the Newsletter to three per year. and there was also some discussion as to whether the format might have to be simplified. There are five stages in the production of the newsletter in its present form. These are; inviting contributions, collating these in a single word document, editing this in MS Publisher, revising and correcting proofs, and finally getting it printed.

This process usually takes about four weeks and I am trying to speed up the process. It will however continue to also appear in digital format (on our website) in full colour, although for the printed version this is unfortunately rather too expensive. We would be interested to have reader's views on the present format and content

## Website

I am pleased that most of about 40 issues of the newsletter since I first took over as Secretary/Editor in 1999 have now been archived on our website. This was launched in February 2003 from scratch and as will be gathered from the article on p. 3 is now being re-designed in-house with

thanks to Noel Blundell, assisted by Tony Bonney. As a result we are now well on the way to launching the new site which will still carry an archive collection of articles built up month by month. Not only will the new website look better it will be able to carry many more images and will at last include a Local History section. We are proud of the quality of material regularly submitted, particularly on Planning issues (Des Brennan) and Wildlife, (Phil Smith).

We intend that most of the individual articles will be archived and remain accessible.

The Committee has received a short demonstration of the new website, which is still in course of preparation, and modesty prevented Noel Blundell from saying in his article on p. 3 of this issue just how delighted we are with his creation. I am pleased to report that Noel has now joined the Committee. It will not be long before the new website goes live. We would be very interested to know how many members have access to the Internet and also use e-mail for regular communications. If you are actively online, we would appreciate your sending Tony Bonney an e-mail so that we can compile a register. His e-mail address

[tonyb1206737@talktalk.net](mailto:tonyb1206737@talktalk.net)

## Feed-back

Good communications should be two-way. At present there is very little feed-back from readers of the Newsletter. Paradoxically we have more contact from (non-member) viewers of the website, usually e-mail enquiries or requests for information. These are often very interesting and indeed helpful, frequently from outside the UK and arise from the identification and selection of articles by users of 'Search engines'. For instance, we received separate contacts from two Australian descendants of Dr Richard Sumner, the hero of the Formby Lifeboat rescue of members of the crew of the Pilot Boat *Good Intent* in 1833, after reading an article about the event in a recent issue of the *Newsletter*. Neither of these descendants knew of the other but have now been put in touch with one another. One descendant, Greg Nicholls, is living in Australia; he has extensively researched and has now written an account of his Formby ancestors (please see p. 10 of this *Newsletter*). We also often get interesting snippets of information from previous residents, like J. M. O'Neill, a former Editor of the Formby Times (now also living in Australia), who attended the inaugural Committee Meeting when the Society was formed in 1953, and he was able to send us a photo of the founding committee.

## The Ravenmeols Heritage Trail Project

*The Formby Civic Society has been given a key role to play in a special project, in response to concerns that local heritage is at risk of being lost and even forgotten. To prevent this happening, the project will seek to explain our local heritage and, at the same time, will aim to improve access to the coastal dunes while protecting biodiversity in an ecologically sensitive area.*

*During the Development Phase, guided walks were undertaken which resulted in very positive feedback from the people attending. Participants were genuinely amazed at how much history there was within the area about which many local residents were quite unaware. All expressed support for the development of trails and interest in future events. Further associated events are now planned, including oral history events, guided walks and other opportunities to add to the existing archive of historical information.*

*Further field work is now planned to identify the best routes for the more important trails. If you are interested in becoming involved, please let me know by phone 01704 872187 or e-mail [yorke@briardale.co.uk](mailto:yorke@briardale.co.uk).*

## Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

*In February's Newsletter, I described how Sefton Council would be conducting a consultation after the May elections on the first and fundamental stage of its emerging Core Strategy, namely the Options Paper. Time has passed, so when you read this, the period for comments from the public will have ended. Doubtless many of you will have attended the Council's presentation of the Options Paper at Formby Pool and expressed your views to the planning officers in attendance; I hope the Society's views as expressed in its submission to the Council are not too different from your own. Here is what we wrote:*

### **Option 1** [Urban Containment, no development in the Green Belt]

We do not believe this option is a viable possibility in that it does not provide for sufficient development land throughout the period to 2028 to meet the housing and employment needs identified in the Council's databases, as required by government policy for a Local Plan to be deemed sound.

The consequences of the Local Plan's failing the process of Examination in Public would be very serious. It would greatly delay the production of the emerging Core Strategy, so requiring the updating of the evidence base on which the Local Plan must be based, with a consequential drain on Council resources. Even more seriously, there is a danger that it could mean the LPA's losing control of development, given the present government's policy that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which means that *a development should be allowed where the Local Plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date* (see letter of 31 May 2001 from The Chief Plan-

ning Officer to Local Planning Authorities in England, and the draft National Planning Policy Framework, par. 4, p. 4).

If it were not for these considerations, the Formby Civic Society would favour this Option, because it would preserve both the Green Belt, which is so important in contributing to the character of Formby, and the best and most versatile farmland, of which Sefton has such a high proportion and which is such a scarce and irreplaceable National asset. However, given the reality of the Council's current planning policies, we are unable to support this option, but, in abandoning it, we strongly urge that the Council pursues radically different policies in relation to existing hous-

**"The intention to minimise the extent of unoccupied property should be identified as a policy in the Core Strategy"**

ing stock, as explained below.

### **Option 2** [Meeting Identified Needs, some development in the Green Belt]

Fundamental to this option is the report of Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (NLP) in which it is estimated that 480 homes are required annually to 2028. We are not in a position to challenge the algorithm used in the NLP analysis, nor is it probable that anybody else is; however, we do question the likelihood of the scenario on which the prediction is based. We also question the reliability of the demographic data on which it is founded. Ideally, this kind of survey is best based on census data, which is comprehensive, being derived from a survey of all residents; however, the 2001 census is now substantially out of date and for this reason the NLP

study relies on the Annual Population Survey of 2008, which is based on a sample survey of residents and is therefore subject to sampling errors (see footnote 10, p. 19 of the NLP HEADROOM Report).

Notwithstanding these concerns, we acknowledge that this Option would provide the land perceived necessary for development both in respect of housing and of employment and therefore in this regard would meet the condition for soundness. On that account, we reluctantly and conditionally give this option our support as the preferred foundation for Sefton's emerging Core Strategy. The conditions we have in mind are concerned with flexibility throughout the life of the Core Strategy and the strenuous pursuit of alternative policies that would provide housing without the need to build on greenfield sites.

We are highly critical of the Council's dismal record of failure to bring long unoccupied houses back into beneficial occupation. Very recently, the Council has announced it intends to pursue a more active policy in this field, in keeping with the recent urgings of the government and the publishing by the government of a toolkit for use by LPAs in a drive to reduce the number of empty homes. We urge a sustained and dynamic attack on this issue. The restoration of empty homes is a very sustainable policy and it has the virtue also of minimum disruption to existing communities which are often well located in relation to communications and employment opportunities (see for example *Reviving Britain's Terraces: Life after Pathfinder - A Report* by Mark Hines Architects, Save Britain's Heritage 2010). We ask that the intention to minimise the extent of unoccupied property should be identified as a

policy in the Core Strategy. We emphasise that empty properties brought back into occupation as a result of such efforts serve to reduce the need for land for future development at any point in the life of the Core Strategy.

Much more could be done to facilitate residents who continue to occupy large family homes to downsize to smaller accommodation after their children have left home. A major obstacle inhibiting such movement is the poor standard of smaller houses and apartments. We ask that the Core Strategy should specify minimum standards of construction, accommodation and of external amenity space for new homes. At present planning permissions are being granted for apartments in which there is inadequate space to accommodate even basic items of domestic furniture and equipment and where the external amenity space is well below even the modest recommendation of Sefton's Supplementary Planning Guidance: *New Housing Development*. These considerations, together with low standards of internal sound installation, contribute significantly to the unpopularity of apartments. With higher standards, an ageing population would find that apartments/ smaller houses better met their needs without an unacceptable loss of residential amenity. The result would be a higher density of development and an indirect contribution to reducing the demand for land to accommodate younger residents and their families; both would lessen the need for re-designation of green belt land.

Although officers, in the various public consultative presentations of the Options Paper, have indicated that the re-designation of green belt land would be phased throughout the life of the Core Strategy, no detail has

been given as to how this would be done. We regard it as essential for the acceptability of Option 2 that the procedures to be followed should be written into the Core Strategy. We believe that the demographically based NLP study ought to be repeated using data derived from the recent census as soon as they become available, but it should always be remembered that predictions of this kind are inherently uncertain, given the difficulty of making accurate economic forecasts. We urge that the estimated need of land for housing and employment should be reviewed every five years, but the re-designation of green belt land should be carried out annually; this would mean the re-designation of green belt land to ensure the required rolling five-year supply of developable land would be based on the reality of current circumstances rather than on theoretical predictions.

**“The re-designation of green belt land should be carried out annually**

Notwithstanding the government's removal of any target for the preferential development of brownfield sites, we urge the Council to set its own demanding target, which should be written into the Core Strategy so as to minimise the need to re-designate greenbelt land. We regard such a policy as a necessary condition for acceptability of Option 2.

For the development of larger areas of greenbelt land, where significant new infrastructure would be required, we believe the rate set for the Community Infrastructure Levy should be commensurate with the planning gain associated with the sale of the land involved; this would help to ensure

redevelopment within the urban area was not disadvantaged by development on greenfield sites, and it would bring benefit to the community as some recompense for the loss of greenbelt land.

We ask that Option 2 should embody a policy aimed at achieving a balance of housing types to meet the various needs of people at different stages of life as identified in the NLP demographic study, so as to prevent re-designated greenbelt land being used preferentially for the high end of the residential market, as would be almost certain to happen were development to be left purely to market forces.

**Option 3 [Stabilizing Sefton's Population, considerable development in the Green Belt]**

We are strongly opposed to this option. It would entail an unacceptable loss of green belt land and of irreplaceable high-grade farmland in Sefton as a whole, and, more particularly, it would change the character of Formby and Little Altcar in a way that one of the charitable purposes of this Society, which is registered with the Charity Commission, requires the Society to resist. We take some comfort in the belief that the scenario on which this Option is based is so improbable that the extent of development that it predicts would not become a reality, even if the Option were to be adopted.

In due course, the Council will embark on a second consultation, this time on the final draft of the Core Strategy. If you would like to discuss any aspect of these issues with me, I would be very pleased to hear from you.

## A Tale of Two Formby Brothers by Greg Nichols, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia



On 16 May 1852, the departure of the 399 ton barque the “Grasmere” from Liverpool docks would herald the beginning of a new life for those emigrants seeking adventure and fortune in the form of a new life in the Australian colonies.

Amongst those emigrants on board the “Grasmere”, bound for Port Adelaide, were two brothers, the eldest and youngest sons of Dr. Richard Sumner from Formby; Thomas Richard Sumner, a clerk and station master, aged 32 and Henry Sumner (my direct ancestor), a farm labourer, aged 18; with them was Thomas’s young wife, Janet and their infant daughter Mary Jane.

It was the time of the “Gold Rush” era, and with stories of phenomenal finds of Gold in California and in the Bendigo and Ballarat goldfields being circulated in such newspapers as the “Illustrated London News” on a regular basis, the seed of fortune was firmly implanted in both brother’s minds. Certainly it had the desired effect, for the influx of new immigrants arriving in Australia in 1852 alone numbered over 370,000 persons. Most were headed directly for the Victorian Goldfields, and the passage was costly for many. Others were headed for the Goldfields via a less direct and more affordable route, through South Australia with the intent of making their way to Victoria by ship, horse, dray or on foot.

The latter option was certainly the intention of the Sumner brothers, and after their 13 week sea journey and

some difficulty travelling rough from Port Adelaide to Adelaide they encountered further difficulty finding lodging in the city. Accommodation was initially secured at the Victoria Hotel in Hindley Street and they subse-

quently stayed with Mr John Formby at North Adelaide for a short time, with the intent of finding their way to the Victorian diggings. Not long into that journey’s outset, however, it was brought to their attention that the cost of living in the Victorian goldfields was quite exorbitant. With this in mind, at the least, Thomas, of the two brothers, changed his mind and after living at Norwood for a short time, Thomas decided to stay in South Australia and headed for the “Echunga” diggings, south east of Adelaide, where he mined for gold from November 1852 until March 1853 with some minor success.

It is unclear at which point in time that Henry and Thomas and his family parted ways to do their own thing. Henry may well have gone on to Echunga with Thomas and family, who had moderate success in these goldfields. In Janet’s own words, “...enough [gold was found] to keep the pot boiling...”. It is reasonable to assume that at some point the younger, single brother Henry departed for the Victorian Goldfields and tried his luck there. However, there being such an alarming exodus of persons and workers from South Australia to Victoria at this time, farm labourers such as Henry would have been in great demand in South Australia had he chosen to stay. South Australia’s economy was on the brink of collapsing financially due to the exodus of most of its able-bodied citizens to the Victorian Goldfields. Many a wife in South Australia was deserted by her husband, never to be seen again and with the chief bread-winner gone,

The Currency Creek Hotel with the chief bread-winner gone, many became destitute.

### Thomas’s story

The tramway from Goolwa to Port Elliot was being laid in 1853 and Thomas, being a former stationmaster at Formby moved the family from the diggings at Echunga to Goolwa, South Australia in that year on the belief that there would be opportunity for employment there. Goolwa around this time did become an important and busy Shipping Port with the opening up of the Murray River region and ships being bought out from England would be put together at Goolwa. After the Gold Rush had settled, Goolwa had plenty of work on offer.

Thomas and Janet would settle in Goolwa (for over 30 years) and raised Mary Jane and at least four additional children, all born in Goolwa. Seeing the demand for, and lack of, quality supplies in the region (there was not a scrap of bread in some places at which they had arrived), Thomas later went into business as a baker and grocer. By 1877, the family purchased the two-storey “Currency Creek” Hotel which ultimately became their home, (now known as “Kingsbrook”). Thomas retired and he and Janet moved from Goolwa to Currency Creek in 1886. A couple of years after Thomas’ death in 1901, Janet moved closer to family in other parts of South Australia, with the family keeping possession of “The Currency Creek Hotel” until Janet’s death in 1916.

### Henry’s story

What level of success or purpose Henry may have had when he initially came to Australia in 1852 in search of his fortune is difficult to determine. Henry returned to Formby sometime between 1853 and 1856 (perhaps



Vessel under repairs, Goolwa c. 1900  
State Library of SA: B16671

Vessel under repair, Goolwa c1900  
State Library of SA: B 16671

when the Gold Rush petered out, or on hearing of his Mother Jane's death in May 1855), and on 30 Dec 1856, he married Elizabeth Rigby (born Liverpool), whose father James Rigby was the Butcher in Formby.

It may well have been that Elizabeth was already Henry's sweetheart before he left for Australia in 1852 and after doing some initial reconnaissance of the Victorian landscape, returned to Formby with a plan to move to the Gisborne region of Victoria.

Within a couple of months of their marriage, Elizabeth or "Betsy" was pregnant and it was in this newly conceived state that Henry and Betsy Sumner on 16 April 1857 embarked the "Sir John Franklin" bound for Melbourne, Australia and arrived at that Port on 20 July 1857. Their child Elizabeth was born on 26 Nov 1857 in the Black forest region of Gisborne (notorious for Bush Rangers), Victoria and Henry has listed his occupation as a Farmer at this time.

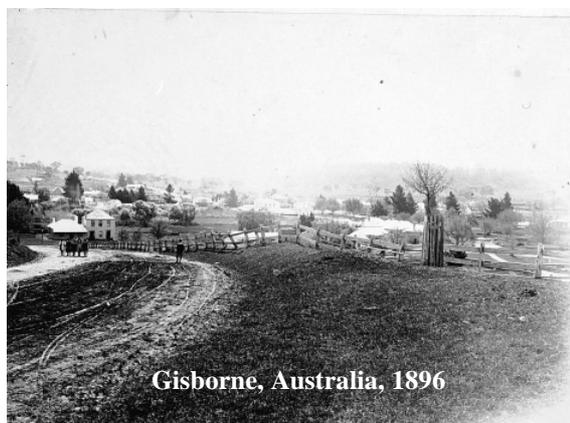
Perhaps due to the unsuitability of the region for traditional crop farming, by the time of the birth of their youngest daughter Sarah on 5 Feb 1869, Henry was now working as a labourer. At least five of the seven of Henry and Betsy's children would go on to marry and have children of their own, despite both Henry and Betsy dying young.

Unlike Thomas and Janet, who would reach the ripe ages of 81 and 78 respectively, neither Henry nor Elizabeth would reach their forties. Their daughter Elizabeth, the eldest of the

children was just short of her fifteenth birthday when her father, after a period of 8 weeks in 1872 died from "exhaustion" from the ill effects of an abscess in his abdomen and thigh. Only two years later in 1874 as she was about to turn seventeen, her mother, Elizabeth died after a ten day bout of gastric fever.

What happened to the family at this point is not yet known. One can only imagine the horror for the children of losing both parents so young, and the

responsibility their daughter Elizabeth must have felt to try and keep the family together must have been enormous. Perhaps some assistance was rendered by their neighbour, Emmanuel Roach who had acted as a witness on both parent's death certificates? Perhaps the Ryan family or a neighbouring family took them in until Elizabeth was of legal age? This point is unclear. At some point, though they all appear to have moved to the Benalla region of Victoria, with Elizabeth Sumner marrying William Ryan, (also born in Gisborne) at the Holy Trinity Church in Benalla in 1881.



Gisborne, Australia, 1896

## Formby Point Through Time



*FCS Local History Exhibition on 'Formby Point Through Time' at Formby Library being declared open by Chairman, Ray Derricott on Monday 20th June. The display was on for four weeks. Photo: Tony Bonney*

### April

Nationally, April 2011 seems to have been the warmest since records began in 1659, beating the previous record in 2007 by a considerable margin. In our area, rain fell in small quantity on only six days and, by the end of the month, the now customary spring drought was having major impacts on the countryside and wildlife. Pennine moorland was predictably going up in flames, while several large fires were reported in **Sand Lizard** habitat on the Sefton Coast.

For the second year in a row, the drought badly affected **Natterjack Toad** breeding, my counts of 89 spawn strings on Birkdale Green Beach being well down on recent years' totals. Many slacks and scrapes were drying up by the end of the month, bad news for the six new volunteers I had just trained to monitor the fortunes of our iconic amphibian.



*Saturnia pavonia*

On the plus side, lots of butterflies and other insects were on the wing early and seem to have survived the cold winter well. **Orange Tips** and **Speckled Woods** were particularly numerous from mid-month, joining plenty of **Peacocks**, **Commas** and even the occasional **Red Admiral** fresh out of hibernation. Dragonflies also emerged earlier than usual – I saw my first **Four-spotted Chasers** and **Blue-tailed Damselflies** at Birkdale on 24<sup>th</sup>, while Peter Gateley pho-

tographed a **Broad-bodied Chaser** at Martin Mere on 30<sup>th</sup>. The very rare **Northern Dune Tiger Beetle** also seems set for another bumper year. Following several unprecedented late March sightings, I counted 65 at Birkdale Green Beach on 24<sup>th</sup>. Alex and Shelagh Parsons invited me round to photograph male and female **Emperor Moths** they had bred from eggs laid last year. Our only member of the silk-moth family, this dramatic insect looks like it should inhabit the tropics but is actually fairly common locally.

I expect to see something new and different every time I go out on the sand-dunes but a first record for Sefton is always special. Kneeling down to photograph a dune slack plant at Birkdale on 24<sup>th</sup>, I disturbed a tiny insect which I took to be a **Common Ground-hopper** (*Tetrix undulata*), a relative of the grasshoppers that I have seen a few times before on the dunes. However, on viewing my photos later I realised it was actually the related but much rarer **Slender Ground-hopper** (*Tetrix subulata*). This is a mainly southern insect whose nearest mapped localities are about 60km away in North Wales. Over the next few days, I found it in several other dune slacks and scrapes from Hightown in the south to Queen's Jubilee Nature Trail in the north. Guy Knight of Liverpool Museum tells me that he and colleagues have also found **Slender Ground-hopper** in various places in South Lancashire over the last year, so it is clearly colonising the region, probably in response to climate change.

The settled weather seems to have led to most migrant birds passing though quickly with few notable sightings being reported. Surprisingly, flocks of winter **Waxwings** were still in Liverpool and Bootle in mid-April and I was pleased to find 70 **White Wagtails**, the continental form of our **Pied Wagtail**, on Ainsdale beach on 6<sup>th</sup>. Seaforth Nature Reserve is famous for its spring gatherings of **Little Gulls** but very few were seen this

April. However, my visit on 23<sup>rd</sup> produced a good variety of terns, including 48 **Sandwich**, 20 **Common**, 7 **Arctic** and a **Black Tern**. A tour of Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve with friends on 19<sup>th</sup>, ostensibly to record bushes of the rare hybrid willow *Salix x doniana*, led to close views of two male **Ring Ouzels**, the first time I have seen more than one of this spectacular upland relative of the **Blackbird**. The willows were nice too!

### May

The driest spring on record continued during May with only two genuinely wet days. However, several periods of light patchy rain early in the month resulted in some **Natterjack Toad** activity, with 47 spawn strings at the southern end of Birkdale Green Beach. Unfortunately, most of the resulting tadpoles were lost as the shallow water soon dried up. A few Natterjacks also used the new scrapes provided by the National Trust at Formby Point. This is encouraging as it may herald a resurgence of this endangered amphibian in an area previously lacking breeding sites.

As it has become increasingly rare nationally, it was good to hear a distant **Cuckoo** on a trip to Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve on 3<sup>rd</sup>. Having learned how to imitate its call as a small boy, I couldn't resist having a go and within seconds the male Cuckoo was flying overhead trying to locate and drive off its rival. Great views!

The real reason for our visit was to relocate one of our Red Data Book plants, the **Shepherd's-cress** (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*). This rather insignificant-looking white-flowered annual has been known for many years on a strip of acid grassland near the railway line. Sure enough, it was still there in good numbers, so Patricia Lockwood and I decided to map its distribution and record the habitat in some detail. Further inquiries revealed that this plant was quite wide-

spread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but has spectacularly declined to the point where the Ainsdale population is probably the last in the former Lancashire. Likely reasons for this are highlighted in research conducted in the 1960s. It was found that Shepherd's-cress has short-lived seeds that mostly germinate in the year of production close to the parent plant. Also, they need disturbed ground for seedlings to become established. There is no seed bank in the soil, so even a short period of unsuitable con-



ditions, such as overgrowth of coarse vegetation, will often result in local extinction. Fortunately the Ainsdale colony has survived due to the activities of Rabbits and occasional ground disturbance by reserve staff and volunteers.

Another of our botanical studies led to the discovery of two new plants for me: the very hairy, pink-flowered **Knotted Clover** (*Trifolium striatum*) and the tiny yellow **Slender Trefoil** (*Trifolium micranthum*). We spotted them on the grass verges of Kenilworth Road, Ainsdale, where my 1999 survey had produced a high total of 59 different higher plants. Repeating the study produced a gratifying increase to 83 species, including lots of the nationally rare **Smooth Rupture-wort** (*Herniaria glabra*), which has been known here since 1988. This plant has always been assumed to be a garden-escape at Ainsdale, its British headquarters being in the Breckland of East Anglia. However, I recently found it listed with other wildflowers for the Southport area in a book published as long ago as 1831, so perhaps its sta-

tus should be reviewed.

Cool, windy conditions for most of the month inhibited insect activity but warmer weather in the last few days resulted in a spectacular emergence of **White Satin moths** (*Leucoma salicis*) at Ainsdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve. In addition to hundreds of these large startlingly white moths, it was easy to find all the other life-stages: eggs, the brilliantly-coloured hairy caterpillars and pupae in protective silk nets on Creeping Willow. This is an irruptive species, prone to sudden increases. I haven't seen so many since the early 1970s.

The last day of the month found me at Alt Bridge on Downholland Brook to look for one of our most beautiful damselflies, the **Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*). Several were easily found in the marginal vegetation, the iridescent blue males being outshone for once by the stunning metallic-bronze females.

## June

An oft quoted statistic is that, since the 1940s, England has lost about 97% of its flower-rich hay meadows. Although agricultural intensification is the main agent of change, the meadows where I gained some of my earliest natural history experiences now lie beneath a motorway junction. An opportunity on 14<sup>th</sup> June to visit a rare survivor of this wonderful habitat saw Patricia Lockwood and me heading for Banks, West Lancashire, where a series of fields reclaimed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and extending to about 5ha (12.5 acres) now forms part of the Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve. I remember first visiting this area in 1973 and being impressed by a colony of about 850 **marsh-orchids**. Since 1989, Natural England staff have managed the meadows with an annual late-summer hay cut followed by sheep-grazing until January. The results have been spectacular – we estimated around 250,000 orchid flower-spikes, many up to 60cm (2 feet) tall. Most were **Southern Marsh-orchids** but we

also found **Common Spotted-orchids** and **Northern Marsh-orchids**, together with lots of the big hybrid between the first two. Altogether, we recorded an impressive total of 73 different plants in the meadow. In my report, I emphasised that this is an outstanding example of the habitat and deserves to be much better known both locally and nationally.

Orchids are also a feature of the dune coast in June and, despite continuing drought conditions, there were plenty of shocking-pink **Pyramidal Orchids**, especially at Ravenmeols and Ainsdale, while **Bee Orchids**, although less numerous, were not hard to find. A group of 21 at Seaforth Nature Reserve had unusual deep rose-pink sepals. **Marsh-orchids** were especially abundant in the ex-



tensive slack habitat of Birkdale Green Beach, where several perplexing hybrids caused me much head-scratching. Unfortunately, technology has not yet come up with a portable DNA sampling kit.

Other notable plant records during the month included the rediscovery of the rare grass, **Dense Silky-bent** (*Apera interrupta*) on Crosby dunes, which I hadn't seen since 2005, and **Spring Sedge** (*Carex caryophylla*) found by Mary Dean at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve. The latter may be the first reliable Sefton Coast record since 1957. Mary also kindly helped with our survey of the nationally declining **Dyer's Greenweed** (*Genista tinctoria*) at its only Merseyside haunt near the coast road

on Birkdale Sandhills. Listed by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust as “endangered”, the two patches of this yellow-flowered shrub seem to be doing well, having grown substantially since they were last measured in 2007.

Our rarest coastal butterfly is the dramatic **Dark Green Fritillary**, so on 20th I was thrilled to count as many as 40 at Ravenmeols between Albert Road and Devil’s Hole, a distance of only 400m. Being such fast flyers, they were almost impossible to photograph. A few days later, however, a dozen or so nectaring on brambles at Ainsdale NNR were much easier to approach. Also features of the Sefton duneland in high summer are the red-and-black **burnet moths**, identified by the number of red spots in the forewing. I saw the first **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets** on 15<sup>th</sup>, followed ten days later by lots of the commoner **Six-spot Burnet**.

The dry and windy spring and early summer seems to have adversely affected our dragonflies. However, Mike Bird got in touch to report his discovery of **Large Red Damselflies** in roadside ditches on Downholland Moss. This species is scarce near the coast, so Trevor Davenport joined me on 24<sup>th</sup> to check it out. Sure enough, we saw a male and a mating pair, together with three other species of damselfly. As this is the last summer of the regional Dragonfly Atlas Survey, we need to fill as many gaps as possible in the distribution of these fascinating insects

## July

The first few days of July were enlivened by sightings of the **Forester moth** on the Sefton Coast. Closely related to the red-and-black burnets, this distinctive “Lincoln Green” insect is nationally declining and listed in the Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plan. Local moth enthusiasts have therefore been looking out for it, leading to Richard Walker reporting a colony on the National Trust’s Larkhill Heath. Coincidentally, my

visit with friends on 2<sup>nd</sup> found Richard on site with three Forester’s temporarily potted up for study, the first I have ever seen. Later that day, Trevor Davenport and I bumped into another near the entrance of Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve. Then, on 3<sup>rd</sup>, I was helping with a vegetation survey on Freshfield Dune Heath when a visitor called me over: “What’s this green moth that’s just landed on my arm?” Needless to say it was another Forester; extraordinary! Finally, a few days later, Graham Jones counted 16 Foresters at three different places on Ainsdale NNR. Other notable moths recorded on the Sefton dunes this month included **Goat Moth** at Birkdale, Freshfield and Formby and **Red-tipped Clearwing** at Ainsdale.

Another of our important insects, the **Grayling butterfly**, had a good July with much larger numbers flying on



the dunes than last year. Other groups, especially dragonflies, did less well, seeming to have been affected by the continuing dry conditions. Thus, I saw only one **Emperor** all month.

A tour of the scrapes in the southern part of Birkdale Sandhills on 25<sup>th</sup> confirmed the very low water-table, some sites being almost dry. Nevertheless, I was pleased to find eight Ruddy Darters, our only nationally notable dragonfly, while a deeper scrape in the Birkdale frontals produced another five **Ruddy Darters** and a good hatch of 33 **Emerald Damselflies**. I was amazed to see a **Brown Hawker** intercept a fast-flying **Oak Eggar** moth in mid-air,

the two crashing headlong into the ground. I found them struggling in the vegetation but the dragonfly soon decided that this large powerful moth was more than it could cope with and departed. Apparently uninjured but disinclined to fly, the Oak Eggar was perched on a bush to recover. A downside of my visit was the discovery of two small patches of the **New Zealand Pigmy-weed** (*Crassula helmsii*) on the edge of one of the scrapes. This highly invasive escape from garden ponds and aquaria has so far been largely kept out of our coastal wetlands so it would be worthwhile trying to control it here.

On 27th, I found myself on the shore at Ravenmeols walking past the chestnut paling fencing that John Dempsey and colleagues erected a year ago. Spectacular amounts of sand have been trapped by the fences, creating a superb habitat for embryo dune and strandline plants, in particular **Prickly Saltwort** which I have not found in such abundance anywhere else on the Sefton Coast. This species is Red Data Book listed as “Vulnerable”. Also there was the regionally notable **Frosted Orache**, which I don’t see often. Finally, without trying too hard, I counted 32 of one of our most charismatic insects, the **Northern Dune Tiger Beetle**. They were dashing about on the hot sand and I managed to photograph one which was standing on tip-toes to keep cool!

As a member of the Altcar Conservation Advisory Group, I was invited to attend the ceremony for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rifle Ranges on 30<sup>th</sup>. As well as an impressive interpretative display, the Group had published a beautifully-illustrated guide book to the Altcar training estate just in time for the event. This covers the history, archaeology and wildlife interest of the 500 acre property and is a recommendable read.

## Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

*The Annual Open Air Exhibition, held on 25 June, was also Civic Day, and tied in with the Schools Painting Competition, Members had been asked to provide as many paintings of local interest as possible and there were about thirty of these, plus mugs, irons and cards, depicting local views. Over 100 paintings were on view and as usual attracted a lot of interest from passers-by some of whom purchased items. Members of the group were on duty all day and for this I thank you. I think everyone enjoyed themselves It is the highlight of our year.*

*Was this our last Exhibition, after more than 50 years? As you know, I stood down as Art Secretary at the recent AGM but agreed to stay on until the Exhibition, which was a special one this year and no one had come forward at that time to take my place. I have filled this role for 19 years and we need new blood. To date no-one else has come forward so there is no programme of events for the Art Group at this time. We need someone to arrange a monthly meeting, run the Exhibition and report back to the Committee. Unfortunately as with the Society in general, we need some new young members. We are only a small group - it has always been so. Even when I was first in the Society in my twenties and we met at Miss Thomson's house we never had more than twenty members, if that. Since that time the successful Association of Formby Artists was formed - all our members belong to that Society too and they have been very helpful to us over the years. They have a membership of 100 and are therefore able to achieve things that we cannot attempt. There are also several art classes attached to the U3A, including an Art Appreciation Group. However, we have had very successful artists in the Group and achieved a lot over the years. Unfortunately current members all have other interests and commitments - some looking after grandchildren - and it is difficult to arrange dates to meet that suit all.*

*Does the Group continue ? Are you mainly interested in the Exhibition? Would you like to put items on our now well established web site or illustrate our Magazine? Should we have more contact with art students at our local schools? Could you arrange a coach trip to a Gallery or Exhibition - open to all ? Would you like a Modern Art Exhibition. This was tried about 18 years ago - unfortunately entries were thin on the ground - but times change. Would you like a sketching weekend - we had several of these in the Lake District-enjoyed by all . Before the Group is disbanded , it would probably be helpful to have a general meeting , to see what the members want and what they feel they could undertake .*

*I am no longer Art Representative but I would help any one or group of people who would like to see the Group continue.*

## Formby Civic Society Meetings Programme, Autumn 2011.

*Open to all Members (free) and also Guests (on payment of a small admission charge)*

**GENERAL MEETINGS are held on the fourth Thursday of each month.**

22nd September: *New FCS initiatives and Website.*

27th October: *Town and country make common cause*, C. Ryan and N. Thompson, CPRE

24th November: *Sefton Church*, Keith Thomas.

**HISTORY GROUP MEETINGS are held on the second Thursday of each month.**

13th October: *John Foster and Sons, 'Kings' of Georgian Liverpool*, H. Hollinghurst

10th November: *Liverpool's Irish Connection*, Mike Kelly.

8th December: *Britain's last lighthouse keeper*, G. Meldicott

## Formby Civic Society

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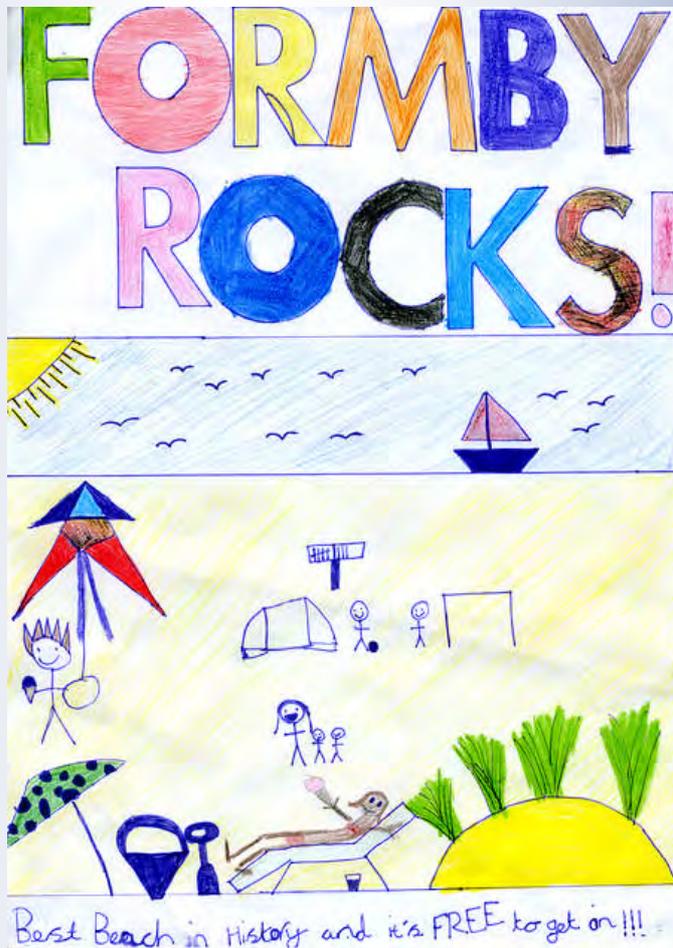
Barbara Yorke

### Art Group Representative

Vacant

### Membership Secretary

Tony Bonney



## 'My Formby' as seen by local children.

