

# Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

Registered charity No 516789



October 2016

## BARONESS WILLIAMS OFFICIALLY OPENS THE RAVENMEOLS TRAIL - WITH A SMILE



The Formby Community and all visitors who come here now have a superb resource for both walking through a lovely environment but also to become aware of the importance of the

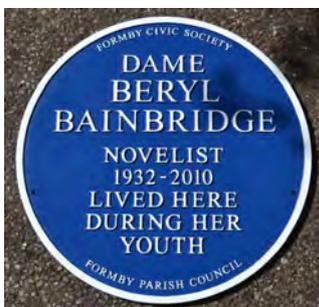
natural environment in Ravenmeols.



We should all be proud of what Formby Civic Society has achieved and congratulate Reg on all the hard work and vision he has put into this.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/formbycivicsociety/sets/72157672650802421>

## BLUE PLAQUE FOR BERYL BAINBRIDGE UNVEILED



Formby's second Blue Plaque at the childhood home of author Beryl Bainbridge was unveiled at 47 Ravenmeols Lane on Thursday 20th October. There will be a full report on this in the Christmas edition of our Newsletter.

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### REGULAR FCS ARTICLE IN THE 'FORMBY BUBBLE'

FCS supplies a regular article for the fortnightly free newspaper 'The Formby Bubble', giving us a platform to reach the whole community on a regular basis as well as advertise forthcoming activities and events. We hope you enjoy this.

*We welcome any comments you wish to make regarding the content of 'Formby Civic News' as well as any suggestions you make for what may be included in future editions*

## THE OPENING OF THE RAVENMEOLS TRAILS IN SEPTEMBER 2016

We have been preparing for this opening for a number of years, now. The credit for the research and inspiration goes to Reg Yorke and it was a pleasure to hear the warm words from Shirley Williams at the official opening - all of it was accurate and most thoroughly deserved. It is a mark of Reg to not only undertake the most meticulous research into whatever subject he deems worth pursuing, but he also has in his mind a permanent reminder for everyone else.



The other key player in this project has been the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership who managed to gain funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and have subsequently produced excellent signage across the Ravenmeols Sandhills to guide visitors along the two trails: the 'Lost Resort' and the 'Devil's Hole'. If you wish to know more you just have to choose a Trail and then follow the signs. The SCLP has been led in this project by Rachel Northover, pictured above with Dr. Yorke.

We must also recognise the work of Phil Smith of FCS in identifying the key aspects of the Devil's Hole Trail and for helping Reg lead groups through the area in the developmental years.



We owe a special debt of gratitude to Shirley Williams for making a special journey to Formby over that weekend to thank Reg and to officially open the Trails. If you have not met her, she is just the person you would expect to find: warm, honest, sharply intelligent and with a keen and lively sense of humour.

She spent the Sunday afternoon walking the Devil's Hole Trail with Rachel and a couple of FCS members and thoroughly enjoyed it.



## Dr. Yorke's Address at the Opening Ceremony

**Baroness Williams, ladies and gentlemen,** Thank you for attending this official opening of the Ravenmeols Heritage Trails.

My earliest personal memory of 'Formby-by-the-Sea' was when stationed at Harington Barracks in spring 1947, learning to use a .303 Lee Enfield Rifle on the (still existing) Firing Range here. The next was a happier occasion, my first dune-picnic when Barbara and I came back to Formby to live in the mid-50s. So this part of Ravenmeols has been happily very familiar for some 69 years. Familiar but still not *completely* understood.

At that time and for some time after, the original Formby Land Company properties built at the turn of the century (in an attempt to imitate Birkdale) were still standing and lived in despite the knocking about they had received from the military during WW2. Further development had however ceased and was never resumed. The Formby Land Company had already had a good return from the other part of 'Formby-by-the-Sea' development near Formby station and so the houses nearest the sea in Alexandra and Albert Roads were left in rather poor condition.

When I took up the exploration of the remains of Ravenmeols, (much of which had certainly been "lost to the sea"), I soon discovered how much had been forgotten or overlooked; but also how much of historical interest remained. It has been a great pleasure under the auspices of Sefton Coast and Countryside Service to be able to re-discover the Ravenmeols story and now present it by means of the two now well-marked trails and accompanying leaflets and hopefully a forthcoming book. A third trail may follow.

One of the most interesting findings was the

extensive use of most of the properties prior to WW2 by several well-known philanthropic organisations to provide much needed holidays for needy children and families from Liverpool and Salford. I had the good fortune to make contact with several of these former holiday residents (some now living in Canada) who to this day retain very fond memories of their sea-side holidays here. They even sent me copies of their 'snaps' taken in the 1930's!

I also enjoyed reading the vivid account of life here written by one-time resident Gladys Bevan whose butcher husband was also a coastguard here.

I would like to thank the staff of Sefton Coast and Countryside who have facilitated this project, particularly Rachel Northover who has been in charge of the project from the beginning. Also Phil Smith who has done (and still doing) a great deal of voluntary but highly professional work on the wild-life of the area, including identifying the uniquely high density colony of Black Poplar, (more here than the whole of Cheshire!), and recording the extraordinary natural history of the giant post WW2 'blowout' - the 'Devil's Hole'.

I would also like to thank two very long-standing local residents, Mollie and Charles Rathbone who have lived here many years and given me a great deal of information and hospitality, (their home is Ravenmeols' only listed building) during the course of the four years of my field-work here.

Finally I would very much like to thank Baroness Shirley Williams (our one time Member of Parliament) for coming back to Formby to perform the official opening of the Trails today. I had the pleasure of walking her round a short bit of one of the trails one misty evening a year or so ago and was delighted by her great interest in the Ravenmeols story. It is that sort of response that has made it all so worth-while.

# THE FORMBY-BY-THE-SEA LOOP LINE

*Dr. Reg Yorke*

An indignant Formby resident wrote to me a few years ago to say that it was with “amazement and deep disappointment that she read in the Formby Times that Formby Civic Society intends to work with the Sefton Landscape Partnership to make the public more aware of the south end of the dunes”, i.e. Ravenmeols. She went on to say, “to open it up to the public would mean the death knell to that unspoilt area”.

Not everyone has felt as strongly as this! And, indeed, as long as 1878 Mr. Thomas Hawksley, an eminent engineer, envisaged that Ravenmeols could become a potential rival to Southport! The major problem, of course, was the distance from public transport. To help solve this, in 1918 the Board of Trade “authorised the Lancs. and Yorks. Railway Co. to construct a Light Railway comprising a loop-line to connect with the Liverpool-Southport Line between Manor Road and Woodvale, running just inland of the coast. The route was actually pegged out for at least a portion of its length. To serve the intended new resort of ‘Formby-by-the-Sea’ there was to be a station at or near to Alexandra Road.

An attempt to resurrect the idea was made in 1924 by the LMS Railway Company – to complete the railway authorised by powers granted in 1918. The detailed plans for the railway (recently kindly donated to Formby Civic Society for our history archives) included a 36 foot wide bridge over Lifeboat Road and the construction of six Level Crossings at Kirklake Road, Alexandra Road, Albert Road, between Albert Road and Cocklepath Road (the continuation of Range Lane) and on Marsh Farm. At Alexandra Road there was to be a station with a platform, shelter and ‘sanitary conveniences’. The Railway Company were to be given facilities for sewers,

water and gas pipes. The most striking feature of this failed but ambitious experiment is the still-existing thousand feet long double-tiered Promenade that was commenced in 1876. It is now completely covered over by sand apart from a single flight of steps which has been exposed at one point.

It is interesting to wonder what made the Formby Land Company launch out as they did. It seems that the success of many other new seaside resorts made them hopeful that this could, in fact, be carried out successfully here at Ravenmeols. The Formby family themselves foresaw the possible development of a town and pictured the villas and parades of a ‘bathing place’ at Formby Point. Catherine Jacson, a member of the Formby family, says that they had an “eye for profit”. By 1930 the route of this proposed railway was suggested again for a new Coastal Road. A plan for this was given in an official report on the future development of South West Lancashire published at that time by the South West Lancashire Joint Town Planning Advisory Committee. This, however, was never developed either, probably because of World War II.

The development of Formby-by-the-Sea consisted of half-a-dozen scattered houses, most of which have now been demolished, thus preserving this spot as one of the quietest areas of the Sefton Coast. However, profits from the area continued to be made right up until the 1960s through the uncontrolled extraction of huge quantities of sand. Indeed, the extraction of sand was so great that until an artificial barrier was built at Hoggs Hill Path, there was a real danger of ingress by the sea.

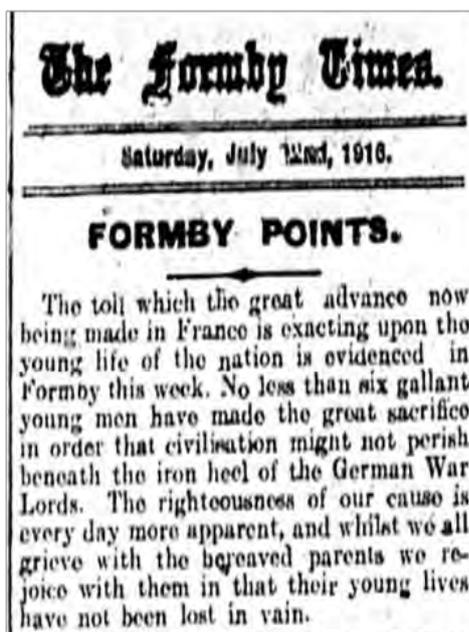
# THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME AND FORMBY

## John Phillips

Between July and November this year we are commemorating the Battle of the Somme during World War I and remembering the sacrifices made by many people a century ago. The Somme began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July and ending mid-November 1916. British casualties on the first day were the worst in the history of the British army: over 19,000 troops were killed and over 57,000 were injured.

Formby was still a village comprising fields, farms and dirt tracks for roads. There was some street lighting by gas and the main roads had been cobbled. The village had been transformed by the arrival of the railway in 1848.

The excitement of the first weeks and months of enlistment was less evident in 1916 and there was a growing issue of finding people to cover the work of those who had left to join the Forces. This was particularly true of agriculture – who would work on the land? Gradually, some of the jobs were being taken by women. However, there was no room for defeatism, as can be seen in the clip from the Formby Times in July 1916.



It has been difficult to track down detail of the

people lost to war in Formby at this time but, by using past copies of the Formby Times and looking for relevant sites on the internet, we can develop a picture. We have traced through the sources to come up with a list that is as accurate as we can make it. It gives their date of death and their age at the time. They include people who lived in Formby at the time or were sons of Formby.

### July

- 1 Archie Smith-Maxwell 18
- 15 James Lee 32
- 16 Thomas Fazackerley 28
- 21 Albert Waddington 33
- 22 Thomas Lovelady Wood 25
- 27 George Christopher Christophers

### August

- 6 Henry Rimmer
- 9 Tom Bailey 18
- 9 George McConnan 32
- 17 John Joseph Wright 33
- 18 Richard Dean 18

### September

- 3 Kenneth Hutchings 33
- 3 George Eric Thompson 20
- 9 T G Wright 27
- 19 H R Charters 21
- 26 William Holden

### October

- 4 Harold James Meadows 22
- 12 Randolph Singleton Howarth 30
- 30 W Wharton 25

### November

- 19 Peter Mercer 20
- 30 Douglas Grant 21 (*wounded in August*)

## Let us look at just a few of those fallen heroes

**Archie Smith-Maxwell** was the first Formby casualty on the Somme, killed on the first morning of battle when he fell in the attack on the Leipzig Salient early in the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> July. He had been leading his men on an attack on German defences as soon as the British artillery barrage ceased at 07.30. He was 18 years old. He had been born in Formby and lived at Old Town Lodge, Old Town Lane. He was schooled at Holmwood School in Formby and went to university at Fettes College, Edinburgh. When war was declared, he joined up straight away and became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry.

### PTE. ALBERT WADDINGTON (DIED OF WOUNDS).

Early in the week, news reached Formby, on a field postcard, that Private Albert Waddington, whose father is the manager of Mr. Birtwistle's shop, Church-road, had been wounded, and was awaiting removal to the base hospital. No further news came until Wednesday evening, when Mr. Waddington was officially informed that his gallant son had died from the effects of his wounds on Friday, in the Clearing Hospital in France. Private Waddington was perhaps one of the best known youths in Formby, and the deepest sympathy will be felt for his sorrowing relatives. He enlisted in the early months of the war in the King's Royal Rifles and after training in different centres, went to the Front about seven or eight months ago. He was in the company that was formed of ex-members of Church Lads Brigades, and he proved in his training the advantages of this most useful institution. He was connected with St. Peter's Church, and with the Church Lads Brigade there. He also served the church as bell-ringer. Prior to enlisting he was engaged by Mr. Rimmer, shoemaker. A younger brother of the deceased has just joined his ship as a seaman.

**Albert Waddington** worked for Rimmer's Shoe makers and his father was the manager of Birtwistle's Stores in Church Road. He had enlisted in the King's Royal Rifles in 1914.

**Henry Rimmer** was the son of Arthur and Mary Rimmer of Chapel Lane, Formby. He had been employed at Birtwistle's Stores for ten years and for one year at McSymon's Grocers at 28 Chapel Lane. He was well-known and highly thought-of in the Village. He joined the Royal Fusiliers in March 1915 and was killed on the Somme, aged 27.

### PTE. HENRY RIMMER (KILLED).

News has been received in Formby to the effect that Private Henry Rimmer, of the Royal Fusiliers, has been killed in action. Private Rimmer, the fourth son of the late Mr. Arthur Rimmer and Mrs. Mary Rimmer, of Chapel-lane, was 27 years of age, and joined the Royal Fusiliers in March last. After training at Oxford, he went to the Front with his battalion in June, and had only seen three weeks' service there when he was killed on the 6th August. He had been employed for about ten years by Mr. Birtwistle, and for one year by Messrs. Mac-Symons. He was well known and highly respected in the district, and much sympathy will be felt locally with the bereaved relatives.



**Captain George McConnan** who joined up with the Liverpool Scottish in November 1914 before accepting a commission with the 19<sup>th</sup> KLR. He had been born in

1884 and lived at Mayfield, a large house on Victoria Road. He was killed in action on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1916, aged 32

**Peter Mercer** was the last Formby man to die in fighting on the Somme. He was born in Formby and lived in Cross Green, Church Road. His mother, Jane, had a shop there, today Trimmer's Barbers. He was a Lieutenant Corporal in the East Kent Regiment, the 'Buffs'. He died on 19<sup>th</sup> November, aged 20. However, **Douglas Grant** had been wounded in action in August but finally lost his fight for life on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1916, after the Battle of the Somme had finished.

## THE WOODEN CROSS AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH



Few people passing down Green Lane and who see the lovely wooden Memorial Cross with a metal plaque remembering eight officers who fell in France in 1916 know the full story behind it. The Church authorities there, particularly Archivist Michael Brien, have been very helpful in giving FCS members the full background.

It is known to many as the 'The King's Regiment Cross' and its preservation over the years has been supported by the Regiment. The Cross remembers the officers of "the 12th King's who gave their lives near this spot", listing the eight officers who fell in France and Flanders between 3rd September and 8th October 1916. They were probably buried at Ginchy Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery and the Cross - made by a fellow soldier - placed close by. Subsequently, the cemetery was damaged by shell-fire and some of the graves were lost in the shelling. Five of the men are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, and three in separate cemeteries (Guards Cemetery, Lesboeuifs; Grove Town Cemetery, Meaulte; and Serre Road Cemetery No2).

Only two of the men had lived in Formby and none had been born here. The Cross was brought back to Formby after the war by the

family of one officer, whose parents came to live in 'Parkfield in Formby early in the war. He was **George Eric Thompson**.



A brother officer wrote, "It is certain that no one went into that attack with more coolness and pluck ... we knew at that time that we were going over the top... but he died a soldier's death and played 'cricket' to the end."

The other Formby resident was the popular test match cricketer, **Kenneth Hutchings** of South View, Old Town Lane.



The six other officers commemorated by the Cross are:

2nd Lt **Arthur Thompson** (London)

2nd Lt. **T.P. Corish** (Liverpool)

Lt. **R. Davison MC** (Belfast)

Lt. **H.H. Dunn** (Bromley)

2nd Lt. **H. Edwards** (Aldershot)

2nd Lt. **John Smethurst** (Oxton)

## THE SUMMER PROGRAMME 2016

Our first activity was a **Wildflower Walk** at the Altcar Rifle Range, led by Phil Smith. As an absolute amateur in these matters I was able to marvel at the enthusiasm shown by the various members of our group in searching for and mainly finding different example of plants at the site.

**Phil Smith** writes,

“Eight members and friends led by Dr Phil Smith and Patricia Lockwood met at Hightown station in pouring rain which, fortunately, soon cleared up enabling the group to enjoy the superb meadows of Altcar Rifle Range. Here, selected areas have been left unmowed until mid-July each year since the mid-1980s, creating a flower-rich habitat that is increasingly rare nationally. On arrival, a visual treat was provided by golden vistas of buttercups interspersed with patches of pink Ragged Robin.



Soon we found a colony of Bee Orchids on a low ridge, while damper areas were dominated by the magenta spikes of thousands of marsh-orchids. These were mainly a mix of Northern and Southern Marsh-orchids with

patches of brick-red Early Marsh-orchids of the coastal form *coccinea*.



Large numbers of hybrids were also noted, including several with spotted leaves, indicating the involvement of Common Spotted-orchid, although this species was not seen.

Another stopping point on our walk provided huge numbers of Twayblade orchids, by far the largest colony in the region, while the first Pyramidal Orchids and Marsh Helleborines



were just coming into flower. Nearby, rare hybrid willows and a fine specimen of the native Black Poplar provided more esoteric interest.

The Society is grateful to the Altcar Training Camp Commandant, Col. Gordon Black, for permission to visit this normally restricted military facility. It is evident that the success of the mowing regime at Altcar is down to the willing co-operation of a succession of Commandants and their staff over a period of 30 years”.

## Summer Programme continued ...

In July there was a talk at Formby Library on **Formby and the Battle of the Somme**, recollected in this issue on the previous pages.

In August another walking group headed for a tour of the Ainsdale Sand Dunes Natural Nature Reserve. It was a fascinating exploration of one of the treasures of Sefton and we were taken along not only the public paths but some others reserved for groups like ours. Sadly, this was to be the last time that we were joined by former Committee member, Andrew Pearce, who passed away suddenly shortly before he was due to join us at the Cross House in September.

Also in August a group of members and friends spent a lovely and sunny afternoon walking along Chapel lane to try to identify what it may have looked like in 1901. We used copies of the 1901 Census, old photographs and maps to work it all out. Of course, the best part was sharing memories of the Chapel Lane that everyone had known in the past.



Finally, about 30 members joined up at the Cross House for a meal, a drink and a very happy and enjoyable 'get together'. If you were not there, why not join in next year? We really did enjoy ourselves!

### Margaret's Memories

One of the FCS members who joined this walk was Margaret Madden, nee Kershaw.

"I was born in Formby Village in 1942 and we lived there for 21 years at 32 Chapel Lane. My grandfather John Kershaw bought the property about 1909. He was a cabinet maker/funeral director and sold second-hand furniture. His son Charlie Kershaw, carried on the business. We lived above the shops and behind. I remember the shop on the right was our furniture shop, filled with furniture and house clearance items and the shop on the left was leased to Ewings, a bakers and confectioners.

At the side of the house was a very wide passage with a glass roof; this was also full of furniture. At the back of the property was a large garden, a greenhouse, a lawn, apple trees and beautiful arch-covered roses. There were also three workshops and, at the bottom of the garden, was the Conservative Club Bowling Green, now sadly gone with the advent of the Lifeboat pub. My father, Charlie, often displayed the furniture on the pavement outside the shop. He delivered the furniture on a handcart, with me sitting on the top.

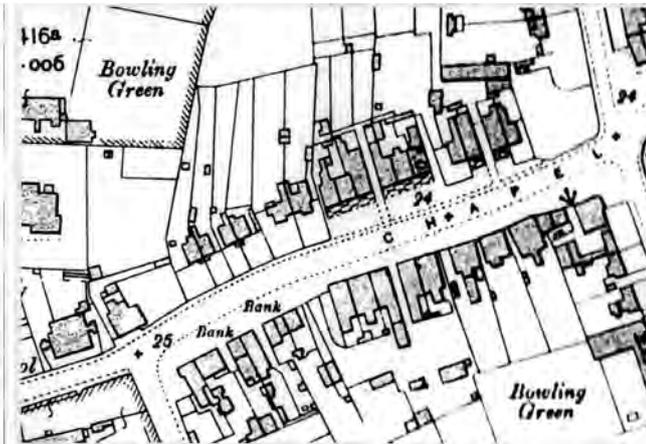
When I was older, about 9 or 10, I helped him push the cart. Sometime in the 1950s he leased out the furniture shop and it became a Fresh Fish shop, while still selling furniture from the back of the property. I remember often going to McSymons, next door, to get a penny bag of broken biscuits (no packets of biscuits then!). I also remember the Tudor Toy Shop having a most beautiful window-display of toys at Christmas, with all kinds of dolls sitting on swings etc. And that year, I was so lucky as I was given one for Christmas! I also remember that in the 1950s, two policemen used to patrol the village every night between 10 and 11 pm, checking that all the shop doors were locked and secured."

# OUR WALK DOWN CHAPEL LANE - IN 1901!

*John Phillips*

We started off with the 1901 Census for Formby, which told us something of the people who lived in Chapel Lane and which buildings were shops and which were dwellings. We also had a Street Directory for Formby for 1914 and the 1911 Census to give us an idea of how Chapel Lane had developed over the decade. Other invaluable sources of evidence were some photographs

per portions of the shops as well as the various



Chapel Lane, - the site now occupied by the Gas Showrooms. The house, dated 1888, was used as a food office during the 1939-45 war. The grocer's shop became Dalley Bros. who have now left Formby.

pavements and side entrances. We found some dates on shops that told us when they had been built originally and who had paid for the work.

from about the time. The sense we had of the Village then was clearly one of somewhere rural and with a much smaller population than now: in 1901 it would have been around

The date 1888 can be seen on two adjacent buildings, one being where Boots is today; the letters WB refer to the Weld Blundell family. On the same building can be found the sign 'The Village' which would have appeared at the same time and reminds people of the name by which this area had been known for some time although it had been officially re-named 'Chapel Lane'. This images are part of the FCS Flickr Archive, maintained by Tony Bonney and available online at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/formbycivicsociety/>



*Chapel Lane in 1908*

the 6,000 mark. More trees, fewer people and no cars! However, most of us were also keen to have a good look at the buildings; not just the shop fronts of today but also the up-

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# WILDLIFE NOTES

## with Dr. Phil Smith

August 2016

A good news story involved the **Natterjack Toad**. Summer 2016 was the best breeding season for several years, this being confirmed by the uplifting sight of well-grown baby **Natterjacks** running about in many places, including Hightown, Devil's Hole, Lifeboat Road and Birkdale Green Beach. **Smooth Newts** also seem to have done well, with lots of juveniles under pieces of wood and other debris. I even found a young **Great Crested Newt** at Ainsdale Local Nature Reserve. However, on the down-side, one of our best newt sites, a scrape in the Ravenmeols Local Nature Reserve, was systematically trashed by seven dogs which were being encouraged repeatedly to dash through the water, smashing down the vegetation. On pointing out to the dog owners that the pond had been created for wildlife in a nature reserve, I was told they were intent on "entertaining their dogs". Unfortunately, this was by no means an isolated event; it has become necessary to erect expensive and visually-intrusive fences around signed Natterjack scrapes and other dune ponds to protect them from dogs.

Two (fenced) scrapes at Hightown attracted a few dragonflies during the month, including **Common**



**Darters** and an egg-laying female **Emperor** on 4<sup>th</sup>. Nearby, I rescued a huge **Emperor Moth** caterpillar that was heaving its way

across the cycleway, while a male **Oak Eggar Moth** dashed past at high speed. The brick-rubble beach

produced eight large plants of **Yellow Horned-poppy** with their spectacular arching seed-pods, representing a good recovery after being almost wiped out by the storm-surges a couple of years ago. Unexpectedly, Pete Kinsella spotted a male **Common Hawker** at one of the Hightown scrapes on 29<sup>th</sup>, while the same observer found a **Black Darter** the previous day at Ainsdale. Earlier that week, Trevor Davenport and I went to Highfield Moss near Golborne, specifically to see these two species at their more usual peat-land haunt. Also at this Lancashire Wildlife Trust reserve were **Brown Hawker**, **Emperor**, **Common Darter** and **Emerald Damselfly**, while abundant **Meadow Grasshoppers** reminded me that I have still not recorded this species anywhere else in the region.

As usual, the glorious sweep of flowering **Heather** on Freshfield Dune Heath was unmissable. But even better was my second ever **Red-legged Shieldbug** there on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, together with a **Painted Lady** butterfly and the first **Migrant Hawk** of the year. More of the latter and a **Ruddy Darter** were at Mere Sands Wood on the last day of the month.

Much of my time during the month was spent studying a rather obscure and uncommon plant, the **Small-**



**fruited Yellow-sedge**, which is confined to the Sefton dunes in the vice-county.

It is a good indicator of young slack vegetation and so is often found around recently excavated Natterjack Toad scrapes or in places where there has been some disturbance. The best site is the Devil's Hole blow-out at Ravenmeols, where I estimated about 4500 plants. I also found several small colonies associated with wheel ruts caused by illegal off-road vehicle driving a couple of years ago in the Birkdale frontal slacks. Like many other dune specialists, this plant is vulnerable to overgrowth of competitive vegetation. However, research elsewhere has shown that its seeds can survive in the soil for many decades before germinating when conditions allow.

Although I had a **Kingfisher** at Ainsdale on 3<sup>rd</sup>, my most notable bird sighting of the month was five **Arctic Skuas** harassing a tern roost at Cabin Hill shore on 6<sup>th</sup>. The Skuas had been attracted inshore by flocks of especially **Sandwich Terns** that gather in Liverpool Bay before their autumn migration to Africa. This month, the largest count by *The Biodiverse Society* volunteers was 1260 at Ainsdale on 16<sup>th</sup>, exceeding the previous record of 800 in July.

Finally, I have to report that the **Essex Skipper** found at Ainsdale last month has proved, upon further examination, to be just a **Small Skipper** after all. Disappointing; but surely only delaying its inevitable colonisation by a few years.

## SEPTEMBER 2016

September can be a wet and windy month but not this one; it was much drier and warmer than usual. This meant a busy time for me, fin-

ishing off several field surveys, including a coast-wide investigation into the ecology of **Small-fruited Yellow-Sedge**. I ended up with 44 colonies of this rather uncommon dune-slack specialist. Another much longer-term project is on the flora of the Devil's Hole blow-out, Ravenmeols, with local botanist Patricia Lockwood. Adding several more species to the list we started in 2004, we reached a total of 160 higher plants for the "Hole", about 20% of which are national or regional rarities. Although not as abundant as last year, **Grass-of-Parnassus** flowered here throughout the month, an attractive distraction from my rather esoteric study of rare hybrid willows. A particularly exciting find (for me) was a sizeable bush of

**Don's Willow** which I hadn't noticed before.

This cross between **Creeping and Purple Willow** is one of Brit-



tain's rarest plants, fewer than 40 individuals having been recorded nationally, most of them on the Sefton Coast. Later in the month, I was amazed to bump into another bush of the same hybrid on Falklands Way, Ainsdale in dense woodland that has colonised a former slack. How did I not find it before? Another interesting group of plants are the **Evening-primroses**, whose gaudy yellow spikes are such a familiar feature of the dunes from late June to the first frosts. In July I reported the discovery of a rare Coastal Park. hybrid, **Oenothera xbritannica**, at Crosby Coastal Park.

Visiting Hightown dunes on 6<sup>th</sup> September revealed a spectacular swarm of what appeared to be **Small-flowered Evening-primroses** growing on the strandline, a species I had previously only seen at Crosby.

It didn't look quite right, so I sent some specimens to the national expert, Rosemary Murphy in Cornwall.



She eventually determined it as **Triple Evening-primrose (Large-flowered x Common x Small-flowered Evening-primrose)**, a rare

cross never before recorded on the Sefton Coast. Later in the month, the same hybrid turned up at Crosby Coastal Park, again confirmed by Miss Murphy.

About a dozen members of the Bradford Botany Group came over on 13<sup>th</sup>. They visited Marshside in the morning and I took them round Crosby Coastal Park after lunch. Despite a thunderstorm, the group was delighted to see **Isle of Man Cabbage** at its premier British locality, flowering **Dune Wormwood** in what is now its only site in the country and four different **Evening-primroses**. As usual, a variety of non-native garden escapes attracted attention, including **Wild Pear**, a new plant for the coast.

As in August, large insects were few and far between but a **Painted Lady** was a welcome visitor to dunes north of Ainsdale-on-Sea where it nectared on **Sea Rocket** with a **Small Copper**. A trip to Mere Sands Wood Nature Reserve on 8<sup>th</sup> was rewarded with several each of **Brown Hawker**, **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter** dragonflies, together with a single **Ruddy Darter** very close to where I had spotted what was probably the same individual last month. Also there were **Small Copper** and **Comma**, together with a **Gorse Shieldbug** which I hadn't recorded at Mere



Sands before. A **Migrant Hawker** was also flying at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup>, where **Birch** and **Gorse** **Shieldbugs** were expected finds, together with a few **Small Coppers**, including the fairly common blue-spotted form



**caeruleopunctata**. Swathes of flowering Heather still coloured the heath, scattered trees attracting a typical autumn mixed flock of **tits**, **Goldcrests**, **Chaffinches** and a **Chiffchaff**. Two noisy **Jays** reflected the seasonal migration of this species, while a **Raven** flew west with its unmistakable cronking call.

Hearing that the *Biodiverse Society* survey of **Sandwich Terns** was finding particularly large numbers, I dashed down to the Birkdale shore on 4<sup>th</sup>. The beach was white with an enormous high-tide roost which I eventually estimated contained not less than 2800 **Sandwich Terns**. There were also birds feeding offshore, so there may have been even more. It was an incredible sight and sound, especially bearing in mind that recent autumn maxima have been around 500. Of course,



these numbers are internationally important, representing

a significant proportion of the British and north European breeding populations. My only disappointment was that two separate dog-walkers disturbed the roost during the hour I was there. Unfortunately, such incidents are all too common, being a sad reflection on the reaction of some people to the wonders of nature on their doorstep.

# GORDON ROBERTS - AN APPRECIATION

## Ray Derricott

Gordon passed away on 23 August this year.. As his daughters Liz and Helena said, "His intellect, kindness and wealth of knowledge will be missed by many. His love as a father will be missed by us."

Gordon was a family man and a steadfast friend to the core. I met him many years ago when he came to Formby to live, and I grew to know him, his wife Pat and the girls so very well.



He was very lively and amusing in conversation and my family enjoyed happy times with him and his family. He was a good man, generous, able, imaginative and very hard-working.

He is justly well-known for his work on the Formby footprints. Despite a career as a teacher and a natural linguist, his passion was for the natural world. Many people had seen and remarked upon what we now call the Formby Footprints, but it was Gordon who interpreted and explained them to the wider world, devising in the process a unique way of locating the footprints on the shore, using GPS to focus on the area and work out where they were. He worked out how to measure them and also how to make moulds of them to enable the research and recording. He was always happy to show anyone else how to undertake that task and would say, "It is knowledge that needs sharing." His work on the footprints on the shore is being developed further through the research being undertaken at Lunt Moss.

He was such a generous man and spent a lot of his own money on carrying out his exhaustive research.

It is worth remembering some of Gordon's own words about finding the Footprints. "Coastal erosion at Formby Point permits us to have one last, wondrous glimpse of that Lost World – even to step forward into the Past and walk unseen among its animals and birds and people before all traces vanish forever".

Gordon in 2016 pictured with his wife Pat at a Presentation made to him by the Sefton Coast Partnership.



Gordon's funeral at the church was typical of him. His daughters did a superb job in putting together a service that Gordon himself had prepared ahead of time. Liz, his younger daughter, gave a sensitive, intelligent and exactly appropriate eulogy for the situation. She even had me joining in with the service in Gordon's linguistic section ('speaking in tongues'). I did the French, son-in-law John spoke German, a medic spoke in Latin, another lady spoke Italian and the Dean spoke Russian. At the burial the Dean asked me to give thanks for Gordon's life. I had to do this in Russian. Liz said the Lord's Prayer in Old English.

What a remarkable man my friend Gordon was.

## History Group notes

**Reg Yorke**

Our main achievement this year has been in the completion of our commitment to The Sefton Landscape Partnership to research and produce an easy to understand guide to the landscape history of Ravenmeols Sand Dunes Reserve. This project, undertaken during the last four years, has now resulted in an illustrated guide and the mapping, description and marking of Two 'Heritage Trails' kindly officially opened by Baroness Shirley Williams on 11<sup>th</sup> October. She had already explored one of the trails with me some time ago and had expressed great interest in the area and its history. I was very grateful to her for being willing to come back to Formby to officially declare the trails open. The final outcome will be the publication of a 37 page booklet before the end of the year.

Although the aims of this project sound easy, it has proved a challenge as the history of the area is so diffuse and largely unrecorded. It has, however, been one which I have very much enjoyed and for which I have been very grateful for information from numerous sources. Now, however, condensing it into 37 pages will be a challenge!

For personal reasons I have now withdrawn from speaking to outside groups and acting as History Group Secretary. We still hold a large collection of Local History Books and historical documents. For the present I am willing to continue to look after these and in addition try to provide answers to the regular questions we get on local history topics.

### **CONGRATULATIONS, DR. YORKE**

On Friday 14th October at the Parish Council 'Pride of Formby Awards', Reg Yorke was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Mayor of Sefton. This was richly deserved and FCS is very proud of what he has done for Formby over many years.

## From the Chairman

We have already enjoyed the first event in our Winter Programme of talks, with Tony Pawson now preparing to deliver an update on the Formby WWI Home Front Project in November. Be aware that the December event will take place on a Friday afternoon - and will involve an informal Christmas celebration.

On Wednesday 9th November I will be giving a talk at 2pm in Formby Library on the 'Formby Tapestry'. My aim in doing so is to raise awareness within the community that this work by Lillian Rushton resides in Formby Library and is available for viewing at most times. *To attend the talk please contact Formby Library to reserve a place.*  
**01704 874177**



I will also mention to you again our need for more members to help out in any little way possible in the work of the Society. We really are a small 'fighting force' now and we will run into problems next spring when our Treasurer Dave Skelton leaves Formby and relinquishes his post as Treasurer. It need not be very much or time-consuming and any help you might give us would be really appreciated.

If you have any ideas please get in touch with anyone on the Committee. We need your help.



**John**

# FCS Programme: Autumn 2016 - Spring 2017

## PRESENTATIONS AND MEETINGS

Meetings are held at **Ravenmeols Community Centre** in Park Road  
They are open to guests on payment of the small admission charge of £2.

### 2016

<b>Wednesday 9th November</b> <b>At Formby Library</b> <b>01704 874177</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>The Formby Tapestry</b> <b>(places must be reserved beforehand)</b>	<b>John Phillips</b>
<b>Thursday 10th November</b>	<b>8pm</b>	<b>Formby Home Front</b>	<b>Tony Pawson</b>
<b>Friday 2nd December</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Christmas in Formby Past</b> <b>(with mince pies)</b>	<b>A group of FCS members</b>

### 2017

<b>Thursday 9th February</b>	<b>8pm</b>	<b>'Anthropoid'</b> <b>The assassination of Heydrich</b> <b>1942</b>	<b>John Martin</b>
<b>Friday 10th March</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Father Nugent and his Legacy</b>	<b>Nugent Care Team</b>
<b>Thursday 13th April</b>	<b>8pm</b>	<b>The History of Inn Signs</b>	<b>David Russell</b>
<b>Thursday 11th May</b>	<b>8pm</b>	<b>Annual General Meeting</b>	

## OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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### Committee

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