

Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

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A Madonna Lily, seen on the Hightown dunes by Phil Smith

PLANNING FOR ANOTHER BLUE PLAQUE IN FORMBY

For some time we have been looking for another person who lived in Formby to be remembered through a Blue Plaque. One option is someone who is little known but who made a dramatic contribution to social welfare in Liverpool and through his approaches, to towns and cities across the whole country.

The quiet and retiring **Frederic D'Aeth** is described inside on page 5.



LOOK OUT FOR OUR NEW 'HERITAGE TRAILS' PROJECT

In order to attempt to increase 'footfall' in the Village, the Formby Business Partnership has been working in a joint venture with Formby Civic Society to create and print a series of three walks from the Pool up through the shopping area to School Lane. The first of these 'Heritage Trails', researched and written by FCS members with old images from our archives, is expected to be available for locals and visitors alike before Christmas.

FCS AWARDED £500 BY REDROW COMMUNITY FUND TO DELIVER OUR 'FORMBY FOLK COMMUNITY HERITAGE PROJECT'

The funding will be used to enable us to bring people of all ages together to better understand their local heritage and to record and make easily available to others the contributions made by so many Formby people - 'Formby Folk' - over the past century and more.



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The Old Watts Cottage



see inside pages 8, 9 and 10

The Ravenmeols Lost Settlement Project

It was in early 2012 that members of Formby Civic Society enjoyed a talk by Dr. Mark Adams, senior archaeologist at Liverpool Museums, about a project in which he had been involved at Newton-le-Willows.

In his talk he mentioned a new project for which he had just received Heritage Lottery funding and which was to investigate the so-called 'lost' settlement at Ravenmeols at the southern end of Formby. There was evidence to suggest that there used to be a fishing and farming community on the coast at Ravenmeols and that this had been overwhelmed by the sand in the 18th century.

Mark asked for volunteers to help him with this research in order to try to establish the whereabouts of this settlement and a small group of FCS members was set up. The group met regularly between 2012 and 2017 under Mark's guidance to consider and analyse the original sources of information that are available.

There were a number of FCS members who were involved from time to time, but the key members of the group from the start to the finish were Glennis Poole, David Poole, Anthea Royden, Barry Hewitson and Mark Adams.

As a starting point the RLS team used the Formby Tithe Map, various written commentaries and a report produced in 1981 by Kim Morton:

"An Agricultural Study of Formby with Ainsdale", Kim Morton (1981)

edited by J. Lewis, M. Adams & C. Ahmad - May 2015

National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit

Using these different sources of evidence as their starting point, they went to look at original land lease documents, mainly in the Lancashire Records Office at Preston. The group was able to request documents from storage and then photographed them so they could be

studied at greater length at home with the digital images. Many of the original documents dated back to the 17th and 18th centuries and were extremely difficult to read: indeed, some were in Latin. Dr. Adams then tried to match the information obtained by the group to the tithe map. They began with Land Registry documents; however, the results provided little further knowledge and it was decided to move on to local Wills.

Lancashire Record Office keeps most of the original wills for the Formby area in the identified research period. Using an index of wills, the RLS team attempted to identify people such as landowners, yeomen and those with common Formby surnames; they then requested original copies of many of these Wills, photographed them and set about transcribing them. Again, the Wills provided a lot of interesting information about the way of life in the Formby area though our knowledge of Ravenmeols remains rather obscure.

The FCS team felt that the project had taught them an awful lot about how people lived in the 16th century, particularly in respect to aspects such as:

- houses and their contents, including furniture (or sometimes lack of furniture)
- occupations,
- laws and issues of punishments,
- social issues and standards
- attitudes to money, debt, money lending one man even had one debtor in Anglesey and another in Cumbria
- Travel
- different types of trading, with one example being someone who clearly traded in spices and would most likely have been involved in their importation
- the ownership of boats and small craft.

The group noted that the people whose documents were analysed were wealthy enough to produce a will but they do appear to have led frugal lives. It was common to sign documents with a 'mark' rather than a signature – this seemed to be the norm.

There was a huge range in the value of the wills and properties, ranging from a humble £8 to £1000. Wills valued below £40 were marked as 'infra'.

However, there were still many items to be considered before the group was able to build up gradually a more detailed picture of life at that time.

One regular member of the group, Anthea Royden, provided the following perspective on what had been learned and accomplished over the course of the Lost Settlements Project.

"The format of the wills almost invariably followed a standard pattern, using the same phrases and flowery language as if the local (or perhaps visiting) Clerks/Scribes had benefitted from similar training or at least had access to 'examples' for guidance. The script was often elaborate, with decorative capital letters used in a random manner. There was little punctuation, and the spelling was variable with plenty of abbreviations.

Addresses were not used. Apparently, if the person in question lived in Formby, then everyone knew them. People living outside Formby had their village name shown, most often Altcar but sometimes Ainsdale or Ormskirk. Hardly any occupations were given, just general descriptions such as 'husbandman' or 'yeoman', though there was the occasional 'sailor' and there was one 'house-wright'. It seems that most Formby residents lived self-sufficient lives, which are borne out by the contents of the inventories.

Like the wills, the Inventories also followed a standard pattern. They always began with the livestock (the cattle first then horses, sheep etc.), then working through all the other goods to finish with the deceased's wearing apparel; In one case the widow's apparel was included

also. Values were given in Roman numerals in the earlier documents before Arabic figures gradually came into use.

Generally, the goods listed indicate a mixed economy - livestock, cereal crops and hay, textiles (most households had a spinning wheel) and fishing; often a boat was shared. Sometimes the livestock was shared also; one example was a half-share of three heifers. Furniture was sparse, but there was usually plenty of bedding - feather or chaff beds, bolsters, blankets, sheets, coverlets etc. Sometimes there were one or two 'luxury items' such as a few silver spoons or a looking glass.

There was a fair amount of borrowing and lending, mostly small-scale such as just a few shillings between neighbours; however, sometimes it involved sums of several pounds between people further afield.

These inventories really provide an insight into the lives of Formby people in the 17th century, and the task was always full of interest. Deciphering the elaborate and well-worn script was always a major challenge!"

Now let us look at one specific example of the work carried out by the intrepid FCS group-the Will of John Sutton from 1728. Here is the actual document as kept in the LRO at Preston.

On the next page you can see a transcription of the Will in full.



Lancs. Record Office Wrapper

Transcription of the Will of John Sutton 1728

SUTTON, John of FORMBY, yeoman, 1728

In the Name of God Amen the Thirteenth Day of October in the year of our Lord one Thousand Seven hundred & twenty seven I John Sutton of Formby In the County of Lancaster yeoman being weak of body but of sound & perfect memory thanks be given to God & Calling unto minde the mortality of my body I do make & ordain this my last will & Testament In manner & forme following First & principally I commend my soule into the Hands of God that gave it me hoping through the merrits of Jesus Christ to receive full pardon of all my sins & my body I comitt to the Earth to be decently buried at the discretion of my Executors hereafter named

And as touching such worldly Estate as the Lord in mercy hath sent me I give I give & dispose the same in manner & forme Following First my will & minde is that my Funerall expences & the probat of this my last will be paid & discharged out of my money or goods

Item I give to my wife all my land in Scasbrick & the house wherein I now live & the chamber & buttery & the Chamber abovestairs endureing her life provided she remain my widow, but if it happen that she marrie Then it is my express will that immediately after her marriage or her Decease I give all my land and my house to my only son & Heir Richard

Nevertheless it is my will that if my wife happen to marrie that my son shall pay her the yearely sume of five shillings a year enduring the terme of her life. Item to my wife the bed whereon I now lie & all the furniture thereunto belonging to the same & likewise a little iron pot a backspittle and fleshfork. Item I give all the whole proffitts of my Tenement immediately after my Decease to be equally divided amongst my four children Richard Ellen Jane and Alice so long as they all remaine unmarried.

But if it happ that my son Richard marrie immediately after his marriage I give him the kitchin and the Towerparte of the house & all my tenement & the whole proffitts thereof or if it happen that any or all of my Daughters should marrie before my son then immediately after such marriage or marriages I give her or their parte or parts of the proffitts of my tenement wholly to my son. Item I give to my son the choice of my mares & my best saddle & bridle & a large brass pot & a mortar & pestill and all my apparel.

Item I give to my three Daughters Ellen Jane and Allice to each & every one of them the full sume of Thirty five pounds to be raised out of my moneys & goods and the same to be paid within the space of twelve months after my Decease & the remaining parte of my money or goods I give to be equally divided amongst my four Daughters Margery Ellen Jane and Allice.

Item I give to Thomas Browne the sume of ten shillings & lastly I make & ordain my wife Dorothy my son Richard & Thomas Brown Executors of this my last will & Testament hoping they will see the same truly performed & I do hereby utterly disallow revoke frustrate & make void all other wills by me formerly made & declare this only to be my last will and Testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand & seal the day & year first above written

Sealed signed published pronounced & declared by the said John Sutton as his last will & Testament

John Sutton (seal)
In the presence of
Thomas Rimer
George Williamson

Frederic D'Aeth

A 20th Century Social Reformer who lived in Formby

Frederic D'Aeth is a name little known today, not even in Formby where he lived from about 1914 until his death in 1940. However, he was known nationally in the first half of the 20th century for his enormous contribution in the field of social welfare and the provision of better life chances for young people. He played a key role in winning for Liverpool its status as a flagship of social advance in the years during and after WWI through the new system of social administration he devised to meet the public need of the time.

Having achieved so much in Liverpool by the end of the War he could see clearly that the country would need to contemplate change in approaches to poverty and social wellbeing on a scale never before experienced. Increasingly he was recognised as the person to contact by the Home Office and he became the hub of a national network of connections across the field of the welfare services.

The programme he developed in Liverpool in 1919 was effectively the first-ever attempt to produce a social plan for a welfare society and listed in concrete terms the rights of British people to food, shelter and work – backed with reciprocal obligations and the responsibilities of citizenship. He was Vice-Chairman of the UK Joint Committee on Social Service, recognised as having been the inspiration for the whole project, promoting an active partnership between Business and Philanthropy before the days of the Welfare State and the joined-up thinking of today. He also developed his longstanding interest in setting up Boys' Clubs with the establishment in 1924.



D'Aeth, however, never courted fame or publicity. He was shy and retiring in nature, but imbued with a strength and determination to find ways that would provide practical solutions and ways forward to challenge poverty and social deprivation in his own time. Having become a clergyman upon leaving Oxford University, he realised that poverty was not going to be challenged by traditional approaches. He left the church and accepted a post at the new Liverpool University, most likely through the advice of Bishop Chavasse. Within a short time his unique ability to gather vast amounts of data and with them devise detailed plans and approaches for joint action with large numbers of independent charitable bodies was recognised. He was asked to manage the newly created Liverpool Council for Voluntary Aid. In his time, the quiet D'Aeth was almost a human computer with his ability to gather information, suggest ideas for ways forward – and then provide the administrative framework to make it all happen. In 1919 he was offered an OBE for all his contributions during war-time, but felt compelled to refuse it as he had only been doing his job.

He married Margaret Sewell of Liverpool in 1909 and later moved to Formby at a house called 'Lindenfield' in College Avenue. They had two sons and were members of the congregation at St. Peter's Church.

Sadly, his life was cut short when he contracted Lethargic Encephalitis – 'sleeping sickness' – in one of the worldwide epidemics following the War. The death of his elder son, Christopher, in an accident in the Arctic was the blow that finally saw him retire formally from work and was cared for selflessly by Margaret, lingering on until 1940 when he died peacefully.

Watts Cottage in Brewery Lane

The Tale of a Freshfield Dwelling

Thursday, August 10, 1967

Occupants escape as 700-year-old house collapses

One of the oldest thatched cottages in North-West England, in Brewery Lane. Freshfield, faces the prospect of demolition after the collapse of part of the roof, writes Nick Mawer.

Mrs. M. Watts, who lives in the cottage with her husband and, son, told the Times how it happened :

"My husband and I entered the sitting room and I put my handbag down on the side. My husband then noticed that the main roof beam was moving and he went into the kitchen to get something to prop it up. "I went out of the room by the front door and the roof fell in," she said.

In December 1988, Mr. A.R. Jones gave a talk to the Formby Society History Group on Watts Cottage in Freshfield, and the written account of this now resides in our Society Archive. There is so much of interest to members in his research and account that we are printing excerpts from it over the next two editions. So, if you missed that talk in 1988

I knew that there were thatched cottages in Formby. I had seen some about fifty years ago from the top-deck of a bus as it rumbled along Church Road, and was entranced by their quaint appearance and delightful setting. How lucky Formby folk were to dwell in such a rural paradise! Little did I dream at that time that one day I would be amongst them, but little did I realise how much the Formby scene would change by then, and even more so in subsequent years. By 1965, the year I got a job in Formby, those picturesque cottages in Church Road were no longer there. Their sites had been developed! But, for all such changes, Formby was still a very desirable residential area, and my wife and I began house-hunting in real earnest, but it was not until the day we drove

along Paradise Lane that we found our ideal, a site from which we could view one of Formby's oldest cottages, known as Watts Cottage, in Brewery Lane.

We saw a fairy-tale cottage, believed to have stood there for over seven hundred years. We had the good fortune to get one of those new houses, and eventually to become friendly with Mrs. Watts, the last occupant of the cottage. Her reminiscences vividly depict day-to-day life in the cottage and its environment when she was a child. I must acknowledge my considerable debt also to Mrs. Muriel Sibley for facts given in her chapter on "Old Formby Cottages" in "Viking Village," the book edited by the late Mrs. Edith Kelly.

1965

A yard beyond the eastern gable were the stables and then a dovecote. These, with a hen-coop and bee-hives, were all on a long narrow strip. alongside Brewery Lane.

The front door of the cottage was set more or less centrally in the north wall, and close to it was the pantry. Once over the threshold, one could turn left for the kitchen, right for the parlour, or round a short screening wall - the 'speer' - behind which was the living room, where the ceiling reached up to the roof and which was supported by arches or 'crucks' of massive split tree-trunks set on sandstone blocks to prevent them rotting. Much of the other timber was supposedly from shipwrecks of ions ago. The floor was flagged.

Behind the Speer, one could be warm and cosy, sitting near the brick oven incorporated in the wall between the living room and the kitchen. In the rear wall was a small latticed window with a sliding frame, which (to quote from "Viking Village") "...looked across heathery fields to Bishop's Court School, or looking left, over miles of flat open fields, with the low

Clieves Hills in the distance." The ceiling was low to allow for a bedroom under the thatch. A staircase in the parlour led up to it. The kitchen fireplace was in the brickwork of the eastern gable. The kitchen ceiling was low, and access to another bedroom under the eaves was, according to Mrs. Watts, by a ship's ladder! A door at the back of the kitchen led into a 'lean-to', and thence to the back garden, where fires and the oven were sited, the walls were brick-built.

The uneven, hand-made bricks were bound to one another by a mixture of what Mrs. Watts called 'smithy sleek' (a preserving mixture of lime and candles). The other walls, however, were frameworks plastered up with a mixture of twigs, mud and horse-hair, and the white-wash coating was applied not so much to please the eye as to preserve them. Though gas and electricity had brought a touch of modernity into the cottage, living conditions remained somewhat primitive. Mains water had arrived, but had stopped at a single tap in the kitchen, there being no bathroom or indoor toilet to be supplied.

I gather there wasn't even a kitchen sink; Mrs. Watts would fill a bowl for washing and place it on the table. For baths the family made do with heated water in a dolly-tub!

In other ways, the cottage clung to its past: "Over the doorway was a yoke, resting on big nails, ready for use on the wall hung a man-trap. Lustre jugs, horse-brasses and many other items spoke of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." (Viking Village) Yet, in the parlour, Mr. & Mrs. Watts could be sitting to watch "Coronation Street" on their television! I think that in 1965, in spite of the changes taking place around them, the Watts were quite content to live on in their cottage. It was so handy to their riding school in the field at the end of Paradise Lane. It was warm and snug in winter, and pleasantly cool in summer, and the rent to the Weld Blundell Estate was so low. There was a sentimental attachment too; Mrs. Watts had lived there all her life, and a great-grandmother had been born there. The tenancy had been in her family for generations, she told me. I guess that she was born about 1910, and most of her reminiscences would seem to date to a period around 1920.



Watts Cottage

Life there in the early 20th century

In Mrs. Watts' childhood, the cottage somehow gave roof to herself, her mother, brother and sister, her great-uncle Bob and, between long voyages, her father, who was a chief steward on a liner. Occasionally, someone had to sleep in the granary above the stables next door. Before the gas came, the family went to bed by candlelight. They also had paraffin lamps to light up the rooms or to find their way on dark nights over the rough surface of Brewery Lane. It was a lonely spot in those days, the folk in the big house, Kenton Wood, and at the old Brewery being the only other families in the lane. The semi-detached houses along the north side were not there until after the First World War. Before this and other building developments, there were so many stretches of open land in Formby that Mrs Watts reckoned she could walk almost in a straight line to most places. She sometimes walked across to the Lifeboat Station to visit her great-grandfather Aindow, the coxswain.

Formby was then still an area of farms and smallholdings, from which the tenants could provide a basic supply of food for their families, and a well was usually close at hand to supply all the water they needed. So it was for the family at the cottage in Brewery Lane. In the garden at the back there were vegetables to pick, and in the hencoop, eggs to collect. Plump fan-tailed pigeons cooed in the dovecote and honey-bees hummed around the hive. Mrs. Watts recalled a queen-bee and a swarm being brought down by banging a tin. Before mains water came, the family went behind the cottage to draw water from their well with a piggin, a square wooden box with a long handle. There was good, clear water at a depth of twelve feet. Their smallholding was just across the lane, extending north as far as the brook by Bowler's stables.

Before houses were built on it in the 1960's, there was a cattle shed, a pig-sty and a privy there and we began to understand why we had that mighty crop of potatoes in the first year! Many of the cottagers kept a cow or two. If one strayed on to the lanes, it was taken to the Pinfold, a circular stone-built structure, at the south end of Watchyard Lane. Milk was then only half-penny a pint. At one of two cottages in Green Lane, Mrs. Watts used to watch the milking when she was a child. The old lady there gave her many a jug full of buttermilk.

SHRIMPING ... AND HEDGEHOGS

The family seldom had beef for dinner, but they never lacked protein. Great-uncle Bob would fetch a brace of rabbits from his warren over by the Moss, or go down the Fisherman's Path to catch mackerel or fluke.

A fluke, filleted, stuffed with sage and onion, and roasted, made a very tasty dish. Like many of the Formby 'sandgrounders', Great-uncle Bob had one foot on land and the other in the sea, so to speak. He was homeward bound from the shore one day, probably feeling cold and hungry, when he became aware of a most appetising aroma from the direction of the gipsy camp at the lane end. It came from their steaming stewpot. He said how good it smelled, whereupon the gipsies offered him a dishful, which he devoured with relish until they told him what it was - stewed hedgehog!

Bob timed his trips down to the shore according to the tides, both by day and night, to lay out his 'baulk' (a kind of seine net) in a semi-circle, so as to catch the fish as the sea ebbed. Mrs. Watts, as a girl, often went with him. If it was to be late at night, her mother saw that she had a few hours in bed until it was time to go. Getting back from far out by the low-water mark in the darkness and thick mist could be an exciting and hazardous business.

It was then Bob's amazing understanding of the quirks of sea and shore came into play. He could tell by the shape of the 'cribbles' - ripple marks left in the sand - just whereabouts he

was on the foreshore, and whether he was heading towards the land or towards the sea. Before setting off back, he would warn the girl on no account to speak or the sea would draw them back, and they would lose their way. Once, they did lose their direction and found themselves in Ainsdale, a couple of miles away.

If the catch was exceptionally heavy, Bob would send the girl back to a farmhouse close to where Argarmeols Road is now to ask Mr. Bond, the farmer, to bring his horse and cart down to the beach to fetch it. A big catch meant a fourteen mile journey by pony and trap into Liverpool to sell it. Mrs. Watts would also walk round Formby village, knocking on doors, offering the fish - mostly mackerel and fluke - for sale.

Sometimes, there was a 'shiner' in the net. Mrs. Watts would be told to take it, covered with cabbage leaves, to a gentleman's house in Wrigley's Lane. Not until she was older did she learn that 'shiner' was Bob's name for a salmon. Fishing ranged from that down to shrimping. This was done with a 'Dower', a fine-meshed net on a T-shaped frame, which was drawn through the shallows. It was very hard work. From the sales of fish, I guess, the family got much of the cash to buy the items they could not produce themselves, such as flour for breadmaking, candles and paraffin for lighting, material for making clothes, footwear, and so on.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Mrs. Watts' mother used to get flour by the sack from Formby Mill. She would make a fire in that brick oven, and, when it was hot enough, would rake out the ashes and put in the pieces of dough from her pan mug. Sometimes, room was found for a huge egg custard. The hens obliged with the eggs, and the milk supply was just across the lane! Candles, paraffin and miscellaneous household items could be bought at Miss Birtle's little general store in



Mrs. Watts also remembered the big bag of sweets she could buy there for a half-penny! A similar shop was Swift's in Cummins Avenue. For footwear, the family went to Miss Buckley's shop in Church Road. Worn shoes were taken for repair to Mr. Rimmer's workshop in White Cottage, near the Freshfield Hotel, in Massams Lane. Getting new clothes or cloth to make them meant the occasional Thursday trip to Ormskirk Market. Formby folk boarded a horse-drawn waggonette at the Grapes Hotel. At the hill before Aughton, they had to go on foot, because the driver would not have his horses worked too hard! It must have been a rough ride anyway, for most of the roads in and around Formby in those days - even Church Road - were very poor.

I doubt if ever the family had financial worries. Having their own garden and dairy produce so close to hand, and a sure supply of fresh fish and rabbits, they never went hungry. They had to have money, of course, for items such as those already mentioned when shopping, and it was important to have enough to pay the rent, about 8s per month. Whoever took it to a stable near Freshfield Station got 6d back to buy a jug of beer! (this may have been bought at the Freshfield Inn, but there was plenty of beer (or 'jackey water') in Dickinsons' Brewery along Brewery Lane, only a few yards west of the cottage. The brewery was demolished in the early sixties, and the site cleared to extend St. George's School (now Clarence House) playing field in the seventies. The sole relic of the brewery is a large sandstone

A Message from The Chairman

After a summer of very mixed weather you will receive this newsletter just a little after we have held our annual 'Get Together' at the Cross House Inn. We just about managed to squeeze in before the brewery starts a renovation on the building in early October. It is always a pleasant affair held in the early hours of the evening – between 6 and 8 p.m. and before the Thursday Quiz begins – and a friendly way to complete our Summer Programme.

One of our good friends has been missed very much over the past year or so, previous Society Chair Dru Haydon. You will be pleased to know that Dru sends her best wishes to all her FCS friends in Formby from her new home in Lower Almondsbury, a lovely village close to her children. She lives near to a 14th century church and loves hearing the sounds when the local bell-ringers are at work. She said that her "...French windows open onto a lovely garden and squirrels come to visit me."

We are always open to new ideas, and you will have seen on the front page how we have been successful in applying for a grant of £500 to open up a local history project for members and non-members alike to use sources of evidence from the past to understand more of our community. We will send you details of dates and activities in the autumn and winter.

Also, we are hoping that our planned set of three local Heritage Walks through the Chapel Lane area will see publication before the end of the year. We begin with Chapel Lane about a century ago, text and descriptions provided by Tony Bonney, Joan Rimmer and me. This is a project we are sharing with the Formby Business Partnership.

trough in which used malt was dumped for later collection by a farmer, Mr. Sutton, for pig-food.) If money had to be put by for sundry expenses, Mrs. Watts' mother probably used the hidey holes in the beams of the kitchen. She said her mother as a child had to take a penny to school each Monday so that, like the other pupils, when her name was called, she could say "Present, Miss, paid a penny."

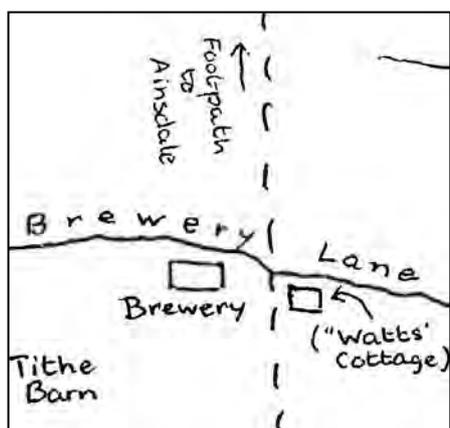
She also recalled money being put in each corner of the cottage to ward off evil spirits!" Apparently, at that time, there was no bank locally, so Mrs. Watts' mother and other cottage womenfolk used to carry any savings in their long white aprons to the parson for safe-keeping.

In those days there were only three dwellings in Brewery Lane – one at the brewery itself, the cottage and Kenton Wood. Such, then, was the silence normally around the cottage that any sound outside could easily be detected and often recognised - the footsteps of local people for instance.

The neighbours at Kenton Wood, the Edwards, three spinster sisters and a brother, were almost recluses. Their door was closed to tradesmen, who were required to put goods ordered into a box outside. Mrs. Watts remembered being in the garden on two occasions, once to be shown the graves of twenty cats, and once when lifted over the wall by her mother in an emergency. A spark from the cottage chimney had set the thatch over the stables alight. The men from the brewery tried in vain to douse the flames with sand and water. The folk at Kenton Wood had a pony and trap. Mrs. Watts remembered, as a child, jumping on the back for a free ride; she also remem-

bered the flick of the driver's whip when caught her the act!

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Our Summer Programme

The day following our 'WWI Walk through Formby' in early August, the heavens opened and gave the village a good soaking. However, we had made it through by one whole day, dry as a bone but for a short shower at the start. We began at 11.00 and by 12.15 reached the Bier House where we enjoyed a relaxing session with tea, coffee and biscuits and talk of Formby past. Some joined us there, others called it a day there – and a good number of us managed the walk back to Chapel Lane via Gore's Lane and Freshfield Road. We were all very grateful for the welcome and help given to us by our friends at St. Peter's Church.

The walk itself was designed to point out places of interest relating to the years of the Great War, such as the Gild Hall which served as an HQ for the King's Liverpool Regiment, a hub for billeting in the area and a centre for local men to enlist in the armed forces with a Recruiting Officer (local solicitor William Bindloss) having his office on site. Further up Church Road we passed the former Council Offices of Moorfields Building: here was where the Council met, from where the Roll of



Honour was sold, where the Military Tribunals sat each Friday evening in early and mid-1916, and also where classes in cookery were held for local people at a time of rationing and hardship.

At St. Peter's Church we remembered some of the parishioners who played parts either in the armed forces or in helping at various working parties, sales of work and concerts held throughout the community. We also looked at the wooden Battlefield Cross from 1916 and the eight men who died on the Somme. Two of them had lived in Formby and we were able to identify the houses in which they had once lived as we walked past.

In July we had enjoyed a trip around Ormskirk Parish Church on a bright Thursday Market Day. It is a large and impressive building and with strong links to the days of King Henry VII the earls of Derby. We continued in a similar vein with a very enjoyable guided tour of Formby's own St. Luke's Church and its grounds, led by churchwarden and FCS member, Pete Griffin. There was a large turnout for this and Pete certainly gave us a fascinating account of the church as well as raising a number of questions about the area in the past to make us think about. Thanks also to Hilary Griffin who made sure we were well catered for after the tour.

Pete Griffin also took charge of the final activity of the summer programme with a walk from Moorfields Station in Liverpool down to the Port of Liverpool Building to raise some fascinating issues raised on the buildings we saw en route. How many of the carvings on these impressive buildings from the late 19th to the early 20th century relate to slavery? That is the question we had to ask ourselves before we ended with some afternoon refreshments.

Phil Smith's Wildlife Notes

JULY 2019

Since these notes began over 12 years ago, extreme weather and its effects on wildlife has been a constant refrain. Now the Met. Office tells us that we had the warmest July since 1884, the UK's record highest temperature being broken on 25th, while subsequent heavy rain led to flash flooding in the Pennines. Here, July began with drought conditions, virtually no rain falling until 19th. Thereafter, it rained on eight days, though we missed the torrential downpours elsewhere. A pulse of warm air from the continent produced a short-lived heatwave late in the month.

The warmth helped many duneland insects. The **Ringlet** colony at Ravenmeols spread to the nearby Range Lane pasture, while the Hightown scrapes still had up to four **Red-veined Darters** on 3rd and 7th, presumably survivors from the June influx. They were accompanied by the usual **Black-tailed Skimmers**, **Broad-bodied Chasers**, **Emperors** and **Common Darters**. A totally unexpected find nearby was a patch of spectacular white **Madonna Lilies** in full flower. There was no sign of them being planted, though that origin seems likely. A visit to Ainsdale National Nature Reserve with Trevor Davenport was rewarded with good views of a **Purple Hairstreak** (found by others). Trevor also spotted a rare **Forester**

on moth Ragwort.



The heatwave on 25th brought another influx of **Red-veined Darters** to the Hightown scrapes, four males suddenly arriving out of the blue. They behaved differently from earlier individuals, being wary and perching on emergent plants rather than on the ground. The following day, I found eight species of dragonflies, including four **Ruddy Darters**, at slack 47in the Birkdale frontals. More **Ruddy Darters** were reported in Ainsdale NNR, while Trevor and I bumped into a male at a friend's garden pond at Hillside. This is encouraging news for a species that was thought to be on its way out in the region. My regular dragonfly walk at Mere Sands Wood Nature Reserve did not find any **Ruddy Darters** but eight other dragonflies and damselflies were seen, being much appreciated by the 22 participants. Another consequence of the southerly airstream was a spectacular invasion of **Painted Lady** butterflies, especially on 30th, when Pete Kinsella reported about 650 on **Sea Holly** at Crosby Coastal Park.



Painted Lady, Crosby Coastal Park

I went the following day but in windy conditions counted only 40. Some were fresh, having recently emerged, while worn and faded specimens may have come from further afield.

which is a known migrant. A single specimen of the attractive **Greater Knapweed** was a plant I see rarely on the coast. Even rarer was a flowering individual of **Sand Leek** that Patricia Lockwood found on Wicks Path at Formby Point. It had not been recorded on the coast since the 1980s. Another plant unaffected by the drought was the non-native **Hungarian Mullein** at Ravenmeols woods, its only northern England locality. Eight candleabra flower-spikes up to 2.5m tall made a big impression.

One of my regular visits to Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve produced two major highlights. First, I was delighted to find two male **Southern Hawks** hung up on a **Gorse** bush. Passing dog-walkers disturbed them and I thought my chance had gone but they returned and allowed me to photograph them at leisure. Using a sweep-net to search for the rare **Heather Shieldbug**, I had three juveniles in the net within minutes and, a little later, caught an adult. Apart from one I found here last year, these were the first **Heather Shieldbugs** seen in the vice-county since 1997.



Hungarian Mullein,

A well-camouflaged **Grayling** on a path was also unexpected, as this butterfly is usually associated with younger dunes near the sea.

Returning the following day, I photographed a supposedly common parasitic fly, **Dexiosoma caninum**, which was new to me.



I joined Ainsdale NNR staff on 10th to search scrapes in the centre of the reserve for **Variou-leaved Pondweed**, the food-plant of a nationally rare weevil, **Bagous lutosus**, found by Gary Hedges of Liverpool Museum. I confirmed the pondweed in two of the scrapes and also found a population of the Red-listed **Lesser Water-plantain**. However, the scrapes are now horribly overgrown by **Grey Willow** and **birch** scrub that has developed since they were dug in 1976. My photographs show that 35 years ago the banks were scrub-free. These scrapes had the first **Ruddy Darter** for the region in 1989 but are now unsuitable for this and other dragonflies. Management is needed to prevent the deterioration over time of habitats like this.

Finally, a rare trip away from the Sefton Coast on 23rd saw Trevor and me heading for Birk Bank Bog near Quernmore on the edge of Bowland. This is the only Lancashire breeding site for the **Keeled Skimmer**, which we found within seconds of our arrival. Also there were two stunning **Golden-ringed Dragonflies**, a species that it hard to see in the Northwest. Being impressed by the quality of the bog, we thought it should be a nature reserve.

August 2019

It was an interesting month for weather, with cool occasionally rainy days interspersed with hot spells. As many as 15 days with measurable rainfall was reminiscent of the “normal” summers I remember as a lad. In recent years, we have got used to prolonged droughts. Climate change continued to rear its head, however, with a new all-time record high temperature for August Bank Holiday of 33.2° at Heathrow on 26th. It was cool and cloudy here!

Bird migration begins in earnest in August with a few late **Swifts** and streams of **Swallows** heading south. A big tide at Hightown produced an impressive roost of waders, including at least 600 **Oystercatchers**. More surprising was a flock of 450 **Sandwich Terns**. They usually roost on the beach between Ainsdale and Birkdale but John Dempsey’s volunteers found fewer than expected during their annual survey, perhaps because many chose Hightown.

Although, it felt quite autumnal by the end of the month, August on the Sefton Coast was brilliant for wildlife. The first day found me on Ainsdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve, where butterflies abounded. Lots of **Painted Ladies** reflected the earlier invasion, while **Graylings** jostled for the best position on **Sea Holly** flowers, showing off their rarely seen upperwings. As expected, the big **Natterjack** scrape had several dragonflies, including a single **Red-veined Darter** left over from the July influx. A huge male **Emperor** caught a **Grayling** in mid-air, eating most of the body before dropping the head and wings.



A mating pair of **Dune Robber-flies** and several **Northern Dune Tiger Beetles** also vied for my attention. I returned the following day with two friends. Somehow the **Emperor** had fallen into the water. Slowly rowing himself towards an emergent plant stem, he eventually hauled himself out and dried off, majestically taking to the air again 20 minutes later. Walking back to the beach, we bumped into Pete Kinsella who pointed out a rare bee-fly, the **Dune Villa**, nectaring on **Sea Spurge**. I had only seen one before,



20 years ago.

A Dune Villa ‘Villa Modesta’

Dragonflies also featured on Ainsdale National Nature Reserve, where a small glade amongst the pine trees produced two superb male **Southern Hawkets** and up to seven **Migrant Hawkets**, an insect that was unknown in the region until the late 1990s. At least four **Common Lizards** basking on some timber was a nice surprise.

Another recent arrival is the spectacular **Hornet Hoverfly**, the largest of its family. There has been a remarkable upsurge in records this summer, Pete Kinsella reporting around 30 sightings in August. I found both the **Hornet Hoverfly** and the smaller **Lesser Hornet Hoverfly** on a large patch of **Apple Mint** at Ravenmeols dunes. It also attracted many butterflies with up to 55 **Red Admirals**, 15 **Painted Ladies**, 12 **Peacocks**, 2 **Small Tortoisells** and a **Comma**.



Common Lizard

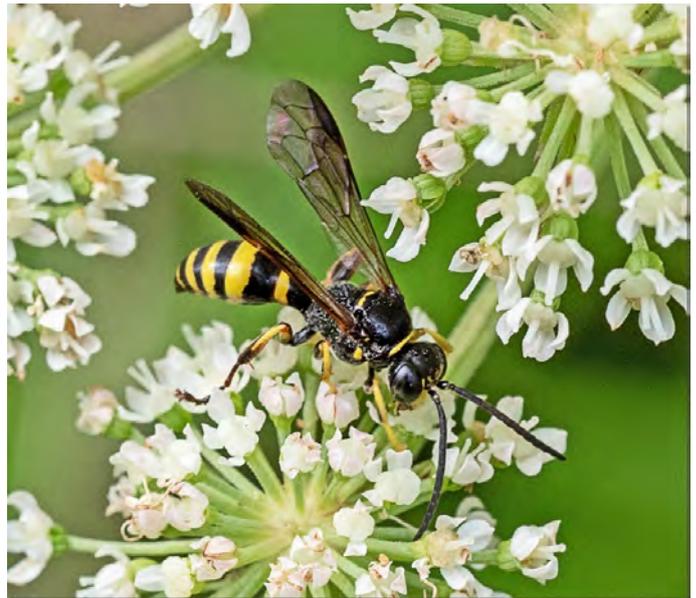
Nearby, insects nectaring on **Ragwort** sheltered from the blustery wind included several small black-and-yellow parasitic flies, known as “bee-grabbers” from their habit of laying eggs on their host bees and wasps while in flight. One I photographed proved to be the uncommon **Dark-cheeked Bee-grabber** *Conops strigatus*.

After last year’s discoveries, I checked for **Speckled Bush-crickets** at Falklands Way, Ainsdale. They were still there, in exactly the same place as before. Trevor Davenport also reported a small colony surviving in his Freshfield garden. Surely there must be more around.

A repeat of the workshop on grasshoppers and shieldbugs that I ran last year for Liverpool Museum’s *Tanyptera Project* took place on 10th with 15 participants. Strong winds and heavy rain were forecast but, in the event, the rain held off and we found seven species of **shieldbug** on Freshfield Dune Heath, together with the usual **Field** and **Mottled Grasshoppers**.

On another windy day, I decided to venture inland to Haskayne Cutting Nature Reserve in the hope of finding some shelter. At least 30 **Painted Ladies** were nectaring on a fantastic display of **Common Knapweed**, while flowers of **Wild Angelica** attracted small solitary

Gorytes Laticinctus at Haskayne Cutting Nature Reserve



Photos sent to local expert Ben Hargreaves showed as many as four species were present, including a rarity, **Gorytes laticinctus**, which has only just arrived in our region from the south.

Following reports of **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** at the former Festival Gardens in south Liverpool, Trevor and I took the train down on 23rd. We soon located several of these insects with distinctive cherry-red eyes, together with seven other dragonfly species. **Small Red-eyes** were first reported in Essex in 1999, thereafter rapidly spreading north and west. Like so many other insects now appearing on the Sefton Coast, they are responding to warming temperatures.



Red-eyed Damselfly

FCS Programme: 2019-2020

Meetings are held at **Ravenmeols Community Centre** in Park Road.

They mainly begin at 7.30 pm and usually last between an hour and ninety minutes, However, please check times for each event as we do like to put on an occasional talk in an afternoon. You are more than welcome to bring family and friends along to any meeting with you. we would be very grateful if visitors were to pay an optional £2 towards charitable purposes

2019		
Thursday 10th October 7:30pm	The Man who Shod Horses	Martin Jones
Thursday 14th November 7:30pm	The True Story behind Viking Voices The Cuerdale Hoard	Paul Atherton
Friday 13th December at 2 p.m	Formby in the 50s and 60s' With mince pies!	John Phillips
2020		
Thursday 13th February 7:30pm	Beyond the Garden Gate A talk about the National Gardens Scheme and local involvements	Margaret and Geoff Fletcher
Thursday 12th March 7:30pm	Forgotten Fort Crosby	Alison Burns
Thursday 9th April 7:30pm	Formby in Maps over 300 years	Roger Hull
Thursday 14th May 7:30pm	A.G.M followed by a short presentation by John Phillips on Frederic D'Aeth, the social re- former in Liverpool and lived in Formby	John Phillips

GET IN TOUCH

Chairman	John Phillips	chairman@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
<u>Secretary</u>	Nathalie Phillips	secretary@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
<u>Treasurer</u>	Bob Prescott	treasurer@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
<u>Amenities Secretaries</u>	David and Yvonne Irving	amenities@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
<u>Committee</u>	Colin Cooke, Ray Derricott, Lynn Gibson, Shelagh Crosbie, Alastair Gillies David Skelton	
Membership and Distribution Secretary	Tony Bonney	membership@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
Digital Archives	Tony Bonney	membership@formbycivicsociety.org.uk
Webmaster and IT Advisor	Noel Blundell	