

Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

Registered charity No 516789



April 2020

JUST THINKING OF OTHER THINGS

Locked in? In these circumstances it would not be right to print and distribute a full-scale Newsletter for loyal members. However, with the wonders (?) of modern technology we can produce a reduced size effort that we can send to members with internet access. We are very sorry if you do not have such access, but this is the best we can do for the moment. Many thanks (as ever) to Tony Bonney and Noel Blundell for proof-reading and tweaking the copy and to Phil Smith for his article and photographs. Keep safe!



About 1952 Turban Motors
Formby Flyers Cycle Speedway Team
(behind Formby Station)

'We used the above photo from the pages of the 'Formby Times' in the 1950s for a recent Christmas Talk at Ravenmeols Community Centre. As ever, this kind of reminiscence began much conversation!



Danish Scurvy Grass at Ainsdale
Courtesy Phil Smith



AS OUR ARTIST SAW THEM AT FORMBY.—(1) Mr. W. Foulkes, B.Sc., Chairman Formby Higher Education Committee, and Billeting Officer. Knows all, tells little, and likes a joke. (2) Mrs. Alderson, Women's Voluntary Services organiser. Hasn't heard that "men must work and women must weep." Works hard and keeps cheerful. (3) Mrs. Leggatt, also of the W.V.S., shares the same idea. (4) Farmer "Jimmie" Lowe. Lives down on Dove Farm. Looks and talks so like a farmer one thinks he must be a commercial traveller. (5) Councillor J. R. Rimmer, J.P., Chairman of Formby Urban District Council. Avoids pomposity. Still called "a nice young man." (6) J. Meadow, Deputy Captain, Formby Fire Brigade. Remembers Formby in the days before it had street lamps. (7) J. Meadow, his brother, Captain of the Fire Brigade. Has a smile that lights the township now it still has no street lamps.

We have used examples of cartoons and illustrations 'from the time' in Talks about World War II, and above we can see in some fair detail one of them from the war-time 'Formby Times'.



At the Christmas Talk at Ravenmeols the two newspaper cuttings from the 'Formby Times' stimulated much discussion and opinion - Gosh! It was a good meeting !!!

Lane and Marks and Spencer - the one with the awful parking arrangements and the dis-used toilet block which is now for sale. Any offers?

The photograph above shows the date it was taken and is pretty self-explanatory. It does, however, stimulate observations and discussion regarding how much Formby has changed - developed!! - in that time.

There was a lot of thought given to the site of the photograph from the 1960s showing foundations being laid. It was eventually agreed it is the site of the car park to the rear of Chapel



PANDEMICS IN THE PAST?

We may not have experienced anything remotely like this Coronavirus Pandemic in our lifetimes, but there have been outbreaks that may have served as warnings and precedents in some way.

Possibly the most famous event happened at the end of World War One with what became known as the 'Spanish Flu'. It began to appear in January 1918 and lasted until December 1920, killing over a quarter of the world's population at the time and famously more than the number of deaths in the Great War. Within my own family, we had a relative - the nephew of my Grandmother - who had moved away from Bootle to Australia but who then joined up in the armed forces there and contracted the Flu on his journey back to the UK in 1918 to fight in France. His boat landed at Liverpool where Grandma was desperately searching for him at the dockside, but he was taken to the Infectious Diseases Hospital near to what later became Walton Hospital. He died there.

It was the worst pandemic to hit Europe since the 14th century Black Death and the later plagues that ravaged Europe in the 17th century and caused the 1665 outbreak in London. In 1918 most European countries applied censorship to keep the bad news away from already-suffering populations, but they felt free to report the effects in neutral Spain where the King - Alfonso XIII almost died - and thereby grew the term of 'Spanish Flu'. In fact, we do not know where it actually started.

The flu has been linked to the outbreak of *encephalitis lethargica* in the 1920s, otherwise known as 'Sleeping Sickness' and which ended the career of the hugely successful Liverpool City social reformer Frederic D'Aeth, who lived in Formby near to Freshfield Station. The normally active and immensely hard-working D'Aeth contracted the disease in 1926 but lived as an invalid with it until 1940.

People were always in danger from illness in past times and this was certainly the case in this area of Lancashire. In "Viking Village" we can read about the effects of what was probably Malaria in the rather marshy area around Formby. They quote the Parish registers of St. Peter's Church that describes one particular outbreak as follows:

So great a mortality was there in Formby in the year 1728 that in the same year were interred in the churchyard of Formby aforesaid 94 corpses." There had been a similar epidemic in Crosby only the year before and Squire Nicholas Blundell wrote in his Diary (and using his own spelling), "Never so quickly a time known in Lancashire as from May until the end of this year, abundance died, but generally those over 50 years old, the Distemper was an uncommon sort of fever, which either took them off or ended in a violent Ague which often lasted severall Months and was scarce possible to be cured and most who had these fits had them after different Mannors so that they scarce knew when to expect them, being sometimes Quartan, tertian etc. (and som had an easy fit and as soon as that was gon off had a most violent Fitt)"

It is possible that Formby's very small population and relative isolation from the rest of the county helped to reduce the mortality rates. It is thought that when Blundell says 'Distemper', he is describing what today we would call 'Malaria'.

Until the mid-20th century, the only effective remedy for malaria - at least in western medicine - was an extract of cinchona powder, obtained from the bark of several tree species native to South America. The principal active ingredient in this bark is quinine.

John Phillips

Dr. Phil Smith's WILDLIFE NOTES March 2020

The first half of the month continued the trend set earlier in the winter of repeated low-pressure systems driven on a particularly vigorous North Atlantic Jet Stream. Measurable rain fell in Formby on 13 days but the last 12 days of March were completely dry as the strongest high-pressure system ever recorded dominated the Atlantic and the usual spring drought set in. The month was also windy, with particularly fierce blasts on four days. One of these on the 12th coincided with 10.2 m tides, amongst the highest we get, adding to the damage caused to coastal dunes during a similar coincidence of storms and spring tides in February. I managed to get a photographic record of the losses to the dune frontage, this being not quite as bad as the massive storm surges of the 2013/14 winter. The worst damage was at Hightown and also at Formby Point, where spectacular sand cliffs were up to 25 feet high. Yet again, the National Trust was faced with the problem of hundreds of tonnes of rubble washed onto the beach from the foundations of the old car park created using Harrington Barracks demolition material dumped here in the mid-1960s. Hightown suffered a loss of perhaps 9 m of dune frontage, parts of the northern section being especially badly affected with hardly any dune width remaining.

I estimated losses of 5-7 m at Crosby, while there was only slight cliffing at the Green Beach north of Ainsdale. On another accreting shore at Cabin Hill, the embryo dunes had been overwashed but there was minimal loss of sand.



***Summer Snowflake,
Wicks Lake, Formby***

Following the wet winter, there was impressive flooding in slacks throughout the dune system. At my Devil's Hole measuring point, the water was 14 cm deeper than at any time since I began recording in October 2015. It remains to be seen whether this will lead to a good breeding season for **Natterjack Toads** when they emerge from hibernation in April.

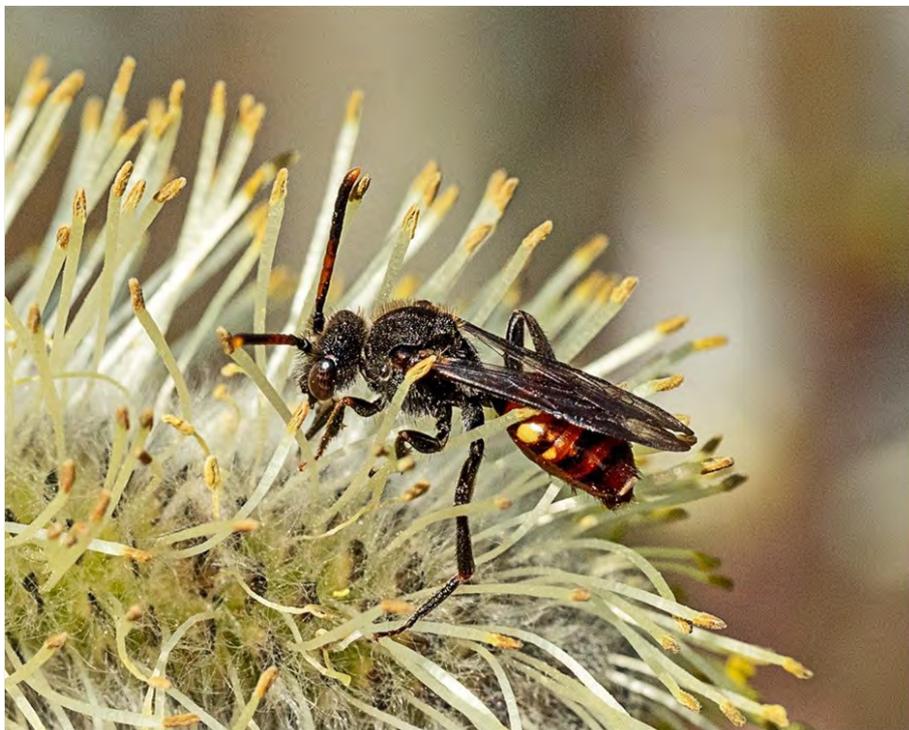
As ever, March is a time when signs of spring appear, while many of our winter wildlife visitors are still around. Thus, the **Pink-footed Goose** flock at Crossens reached a staggering 10,000 early in the month. Fellow travellers included the small **Todd's Canada Goose** from the High Arctic which has been with the **Pinkfeet** since last winter. I managed to see it once at long range, together with several **Barnacle Geese**. However, a **Tundra Bean**, **Whitefronts** and a rare **Grey-bellied Brent**, spotted by others, escaped me, as did an American **Green-winged Teal** at Crossens later in the month. I had better luck at Hightown on 14th. While recording the erosion damage, I bumped into a tame **Common Seal**, hauled out on the bank of the Alt. This individual had been reported from time to time since the autumn, an orange tag on its hind flipper showing that it was rescued as an underweight youngster on the west coast of Scotland in August 2018 and released at Clachan, Tarbert the following month. It was also seen on the north Wirral foreshore at Leasowe during the winter. The **Common** or **Harbour Seal** is extremely rare on the Sefton Coast, *The vertebrates of Lancashire* (2017) published by the Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society giving only two previous records, in 1998 and 2006.



Common Seal at the Alt Estuary

By mid-month, several tiny dune annuals, such as **Sea** and **Little Mouse-ear**, were in flower, while I found the first red catkins on the native **Black Poplars** at Formby Point on 19th. As usual, salt-resistant **Danish Scurvy-grass** lined the main road verges, a particularly richly-coloured patch being at Ainsdale Discovery Centre. The colony of **Moschatel** in a small area of relict woodland at Ashdale Close, Formby was still there, flowering at its only known site in the district. Showy garden-escapes on the dunes included the superb **Summer Snowflake**, originally found by Patricia Lockwood at Wicks Lake in 2013. This has now made quite a large clump.

*Fabricius' Nomad Bee,
Ainsdale*



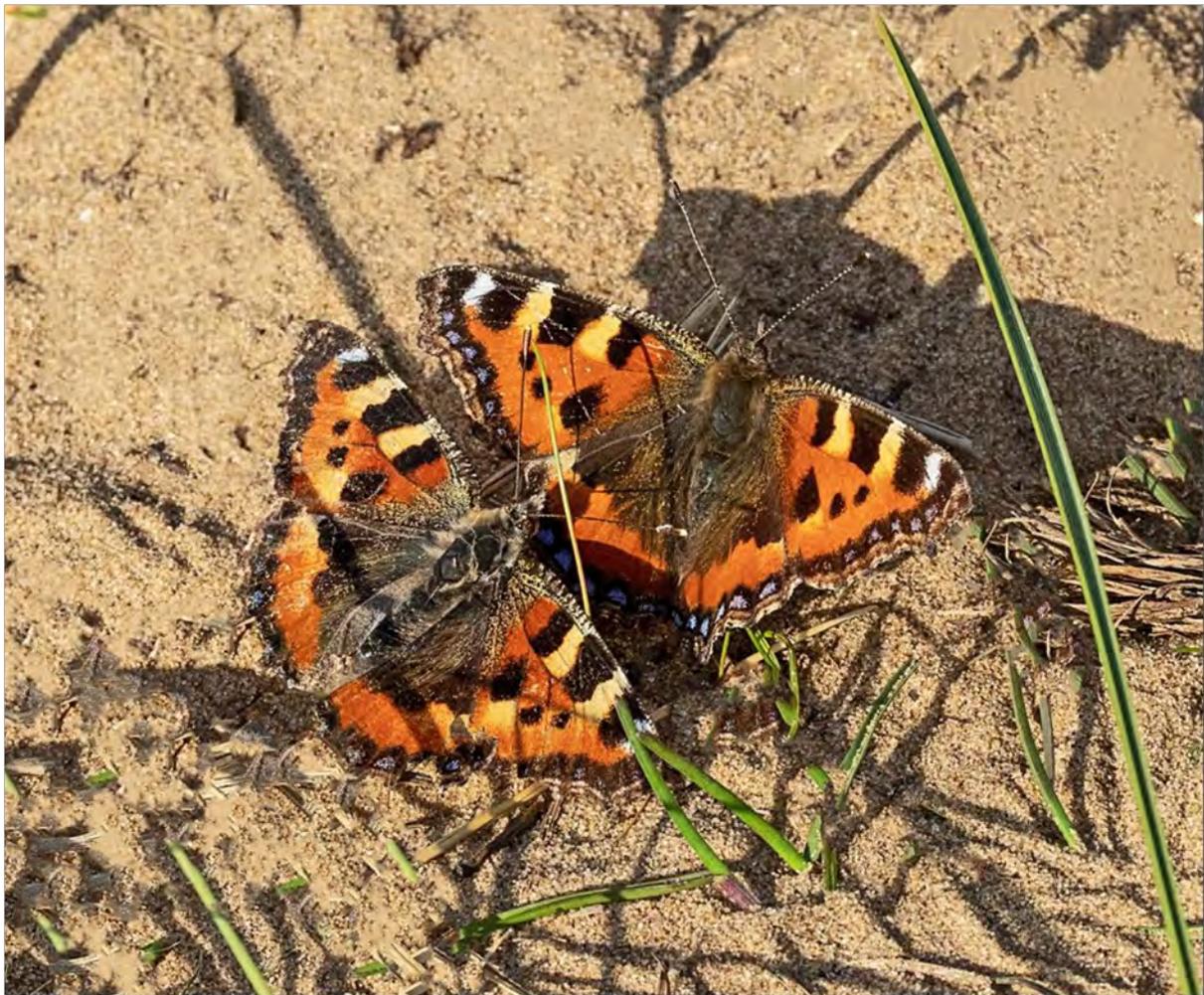
Early insects were represented on 11th by the brown over-wintering form of the **Green Shieldbug**, a **Drone-fly** and a **Ruby Tiger** caterpillar at Crosby Coastal Park. Even better, a few days later, I photographed the uncommon **Fabricius' Nomad Bee** and an early spring hoverfly, *Melangyna lasiophthalma*, on **Grey Willow** catkins at Ainsdale NNR. Several vibrant **Peacock** butterflies, just out of hibernation, were joined by a pair of amorous **Small Tortoisshells**.

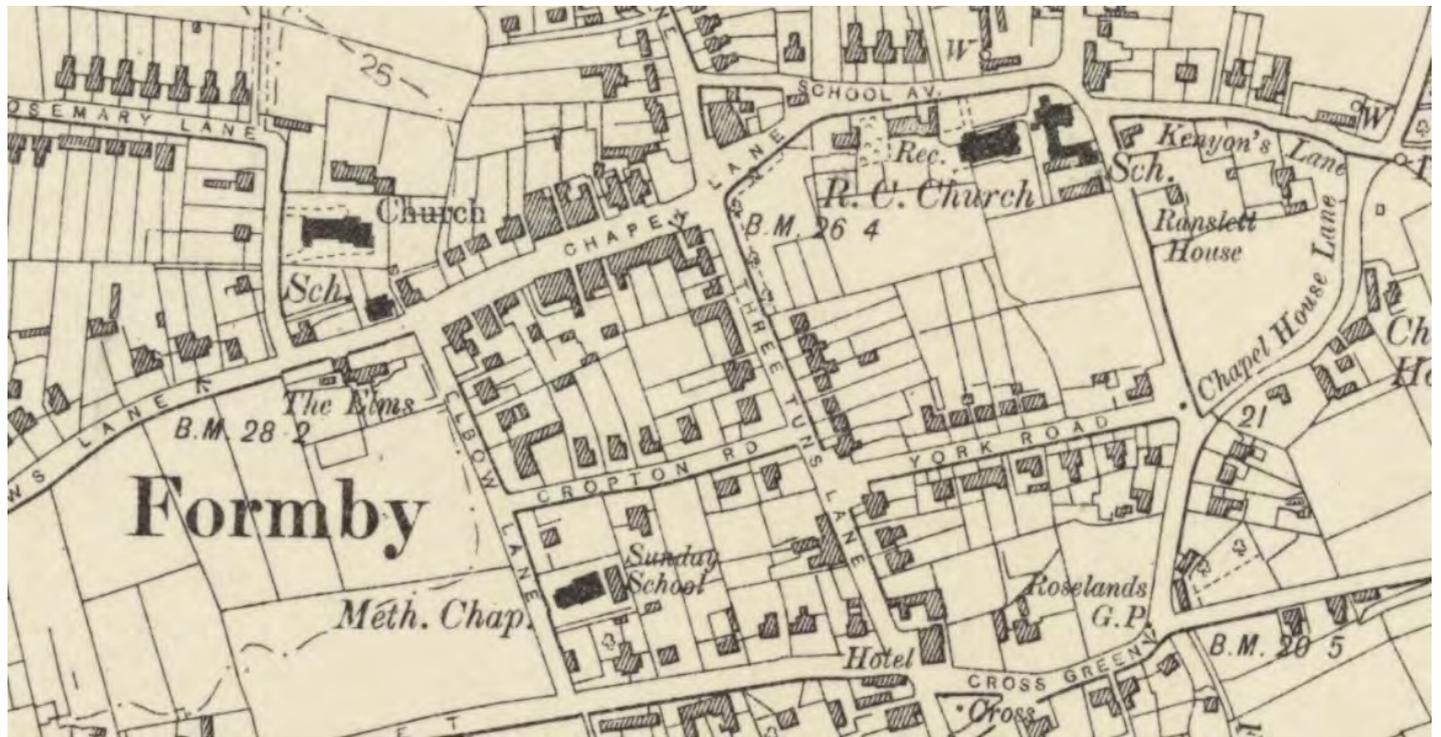
The Corona virus 'lockdown' towards the end of March restricted my activities somewhat, though a daily exercise walk provided opportunities for some wildlife observations. On 27th, I set off to trek round the playing fields next to my home but didn't get far before I spotted a **Juniper Shieldbug** on a **Leyland Cypress** hedge. This colourful insect was only the third record for Sefton of a species that used to be confined to native **Juniper** in southern England but has taken to exotic cypresses and junipers grown in gardens and is extending its range. It is certainly worth looking for while people are spending more time in their gardens. Having recently emerged from hibernation, the shieldbug may be found on the sunny, sheltered side of an appropriate conifer. I would be pleased to know of any sightings.

Juniper Shieldbug
on a ***Leyland Cypress*** hedge



Small Tortoiseshell
Butterflies

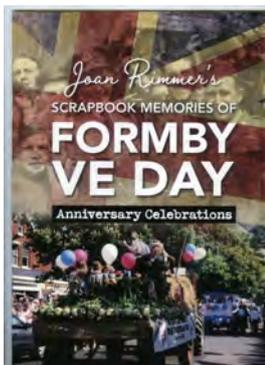




Old maps are always popular points of interest for members, and this is one that is always well-received.

It shows the centre of the Village about 1914, a time before supermarkets but many independent stores. There is no sign, of course, of either Formby FC or Formby Pool, just land off Elbow Lane owned either by a local farmer or the Formby family. We can identify, however, 'The Elms' which was later re-named 'The Priory'.

What can you spot here?



Just a reminder that FCS member Joan Rimmer brought out her new book just a few weeks before the world went haywire

If you want a copy you can find it in Derbyshire's and the Post Office on Chapel Lane.

Article from the 'Formby Times' in 1945 - just for Phil Smith!

LIVERPOOL NATURALISTS AT FORMBY MOSS

RARE PLANTS AND INTERESTING BIRD LIFE RECORDS

[By ERIC HARDY, F.Z.S.]

Formby's wealth of wild life lies not only in the flowers of the famous dunes Freshfield way, but also in the prolific flora of the mosslands around historic Formby Hall.

Such interesting finds as 86 butterfly orchids, creeping pillwort, a very rare water-plant, in a pond, and great skull-cap along the banks, were among the many items of Sunday's well-attended war-time field meeting of the Merseyside Branch of the British Empire Naturalists' Association (the Merseyside Naturalists' Association), the largest nature study society in the north-western district, whose activities cover between the Ribble and the Dee, and whose meeting was attended by nature lovers from Southport, Ainsdale, Formby, Liverpool, and the Cheshire towns.

NATURE'S MEDLEY

Many interesting records were made among birds and plants.

The great spearwort, water-violet, water-dock, water-plantain, frogbit, pearlwort, valerian, viper's bugles, henbit deadnettle, marsh-sulphurwort, marsh cudweed, the rare branched bur-reed, and water blinks were found in a number of places on the mosses between Formby Hall and Barton.

The most interesting finds were 39 lesser butterfly orchids in one field near Formby Hall and 47 in another field, growing near cotton-grass, towards Barton.

These lovely, highly-scented, white orchids are fertilised by the night-flying moths, but there are also a few specimens of the broad-leaved, marsh-orchid,

There were also some specimens of the small-flowered species of forget-me-not, *Myosotis collina*, that lacks the pink centre to the flower so attractive in the common plants of the dykes, and bell-heather was flowering freely.

THOSE TURTLE DOVES

Turtle-doves were nesting freely in the woods around Formby Hall, and on the mosses there were a pair of wild duck and at least a dozen pairs of snipe nesting, a family of young snipe being discovered, while in a cabbage field a pair of redshanks were discovered with their youngsters.

The redshanks have steadily increased their nesting range in recent years, but they are much more numerous on the damp dunes near the shore than here so far inland.

Lesser redpolls and linnets were very numerous in the birch plantations, and whitethroats among the bracken. Sedge-warblers were feeding young in the numerous beds of iris and reed-mace that lie between the dykes of banks of willow-herb, and reed-buntings and larks were also feeding young. Young lapwings, mistle-thrushes, and swallows, tame enough to approach within a few yards as they perched along the fences, were also noted.

At one point a water-shrew ran across the path before some of the party, while the entomologists found plenty of the black and yellow caterpillars of the cinnabar moth on the ragwort, and the crescent moth larvae had damaged many of the leaves of the flag iris.

Butterflies, however, were few on the wing, and only the small blue small