

# Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

Registered charity No 516789



June 2017

## **FCS HELPS CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF THE NATIONAL TRUST AT FORMBY VICTORIA ROAD**



*The Chairman joins National Trust officers Kate Martin and Sally Orritt to cut the anniversary cake.*

The National Trust celebrated 50 years at Formby Point on April 12th with a special 'Media Call' with newspapers, magazines and television and radio stations from across our area.

Formby Civic Society was invited to play a full part in this and help with interviews and photographs being taken on the day.



Reg Yorke had put an enormous amount of work into helping produce a Memorial Plaque for Woodvale Airfield and can be seen here making a presentation on behalf of Formby Civic Society at its unveiling on Wednesday 7th of December 2016. Further details can be found on pages 2 and 3.

### Contents

The Woodvale Memorial	2
A Formby Boy in WWI - Tom Bailey	4
National Trust celebrates 50 years at	6
Dr. Phil Smith's Wildlife Notes - March and April 2017	8
Lynnette's memories of WWII: from Bootle to Formby	12
Pat and Bill's Christmas Decorations	14
From the Chairman	15
Meetings, Events and Committee	16

*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.*

# RAF Woodvale Historical Interpretive Panel

On Wednesday 7th of December 2016, Dr. Reg Yorke was the leading representative of Formby Civic Society at Dune Heath for the unveiling of an RAF Woodvale Historical Interpretive Panel. He was joined by members of the Civic Society, Fiona Whitfield of the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, Officers of RAF Woodvale and Aldon Ferguson, the airfield historian.

This moving ceremony was a celebration of peace and the efforts and sacrifice of many on the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Woodvale Airfield.

The Panel bears the wording:

**'Lest we forget':-**

***"In memory of all airmen and aircrew killed on service at RAF Woodvale during the Second World War***

It also shows their names, rank and squadron. The Plaque is located at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve, the single largest lowland heath site on Merseyside.

Next we hope to have this plaque recognised officially as a **War Memorial**.

**RAF Woodvale** was designed as an all-weather fighter airfield for the defence of Merseyside. The decision was made in early 1941 but It was completed too late for the 1940-41 Blitz on Merseyside but provided strong support for the defence of the entire region until the end of WWII. Previously, the site had been partly a large private Golf Club as well as a good amount of farmland adjacent to the new By-Pass; indeed, much farmland on the other side of the new road was requisitioned also to provide space for the

accommodation of 2000 personnel. It was opened officially on 7th December 1941 and became operational when a Polish squadron arrived from RAF Northwich with 6 Spitfires.

Flying began on 15 December 1941. In 1943, No.222 (Dutch) Squadron's Spitfires added to the Polish squadrons already based at Woodvale. Night protection was undertaken by Beaufighters and Mosquitos, and Woodvale became Sector Control Station for the North West, controlling all operational flying, especially enemy aircraft interceptions. Second line RAF units also operated from Woodvale, flying a variety of types of aircraft used for calibration; some of this work was undertaken with the Royal Navy gunnery training range at HMS Queen Charlotte on the beach at Ainsdale. After the defeat of Germany, Woodvale was transferred to the Fleet Air Arm: six squadrons moved in but it was not required after the fall of Japan.

*(The information included here was collated from "Royal Air Force, Woodvale: the First Fifty Years" by Aldon Ferguson)*

*The airfield today is surrounded by Freshfield Dune Heath, the largest lowland heath site in Lancashire. Amongst the wildlife recorded as inhabiting this area are common lizards, sand lizards, short-tailed field vole, water voles, red squirrels, weasels and more than 75 species of birds.*

21st Dec 1941	P/O E. Krawczynski (28), No.308 (Polish) Squadron RAF
9th Jan 1942	Sqn/Ldr M.J. Wesolowski (28), No.308 (Polish) Squadron RAF
16th Jul 1942	Sgt. T.T. Nawrock (28), No.315 (Polish) Squadron RAF
15th Aug 1942	F/O E. Fiedorczuk, No.315 (Polish) Squadron RAF
28th Aug 1942	F/O B. J. Sawiak (23), No.315 (Polish) Squadron RAF
31st Oct 1942	Sqn/Ldr R. De W.K. Winlaw, Commanding Officer, No.256 Squadron RAF
31st Oct 1942	P/O C.T. Ashton, Navigator, No.256 Squadron RAF
28th Dec 1942	F/O W. Pucek, No.317 (Polish) Squadron RAF
9th Feb 1943	Flt/Lt D. Toone (29), No.256 Squadron RAF
9th Feb 1943	P/O W.F. Hutchings (30), Navigator, No.256 Squadron RAF
14th Feb 1943	F/O A. Aleksandrowicz, No.219 (Polish) Squadron RAF
14th Feb 1943	F/O P.Z. Jan Domanski, No.219 (Polish) Squadron RAF
10th Mar 1943	P/O P. Harrison-Yates, No.256 Squadron RAF
9th Apr 1943	Sgt. W.A. Dixon (24), Canadian, No.195 Squadron RCAF
26th May 1943	P/O R.R. Walters (20), No.198 Squadron RAF
17th Oct 1943	Sgt Duckworth, No.285 Squadron RAF
21st Mar 1944	Flt/Sgt Kowalski, No.316 (Polish) Squadron RAF
21st May 1944	F/O G.L. Storey, No.63 Squadron RAF
9th Aug 1944	Flt/Sgt D.L. Edmunds, No.12 (P) AFU - (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit RAF
9th Aug 1944	Flt/Sgt J.C. Stones (22), No.12 (P) AFU - (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit RAF
25th Oct 1944	Seven airmen (US), 706th Bomb Sqn, 446th Bomb Group, US 8th Air Force
4th May 1945	W/O T. Price, No.577 Squadron RAF



# YOUNG TOM BAILEY, A FORMBY BOY IN WWI

*John Phillips*

One of the most pleasant aspects about belonging to the Formby Civic Society is that we can help each other in different ways. In late 2016 we were approached by Mrs. Elsie Whalley following a talk at the Library about Formby and the Battle of the Somme in 1916. She said that her elder half-brother Tom Bailey had died in that battle before she was born herself, but that she wanted more people to know a little more about the man and what he gave for his town and his country. She loaned us two photographs of him after he had 'joined up' and also shared with us her own journey to France to see the Memorial in which he is remembered and the fields in which he tragically lost his life. Elsie and her younger brother, also Tom Bailey, met up with us and shared their stories that had been in their family from over a century ago. I am sure many families could share memories with us also, but this is the story of Tom Bailey.

We were able to trace Tom's story through the census Returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911, his military records and historical records for the King's Liverpool Regiment in World War I. We checked family stories against the printed records and gradually were able to piece together his story. Of course, after all this time the detail is limited but we do have enough to piece together some of the basic elements of Tom's short life.

We were able to trace Tom's story through the census Returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911, his military records and historical records for the King's Liverpool Regiment in World War I. We checked family stories against the printed records and gradually were able to piece together his story.

Of course, after all this time the detail is limited but we do have enough to piece together some of the basic elements of Tom's short life.



Young Tom Bailey had been born in Goosnargh in Lancashire in August 1897. When his mother died in 1901 giving birth to his brother, Jack (the father of Elsie and Tom), Tom's father Robert had to find a way of bringing up his two lads alone. He ended up in Formby not very long later, and family tradition suggests he may have had a helping hand in finding work on a farm through his brother Dick. Tom soon had a stepmother, when his father married Margaret, the daughter of William Ball who had a butcher's premises in Old Mill Lane. They went to live at 2 Furness Avenue, part of a row of five cottages: the only one now remaining is the building that was 'next door', which later became a Baptist Church and is today The Village Church. Margaret and Robert Bailey lived the rest of their lives at that address and added seven more children to Tom and Jack.

There are people in Formby today who remember Margaret and her children, particularly Wally Bailey. Tom Bailey went to St. Peter's School and then went to work as a gardener. However, when he was 17, the 'Great War' broke out, and we can only imagine the feelings that ran through the young men of Formby as well as their families as that situation began to unfold. The call to fight for your country was strong and by the end of October 1914, Tom signed up in Southport as Private Tom Bailey, 5183 1<sup>st</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the King's Liverpool Regiment. He was 17.



Tom arrived in France in April 1916. On the 9<sup>th</sup> August, an early morning attack was scheduled but

there was much confusion behind British lines. Tom Bailey lost his life in that early morning encounter, a few days before what would have been his nineteenth birthday.

The family lived on in their cottage for a long time. Robert Bailey died in 1922 but Margaret lived on until 1962, being buried with others of her family in St. Peter's Churchyard. Her children with Robert were: Ethel, Robert, Dorothy, Edith, Elsie, Tom (born in 1918) and Walter. Neither Dorothy nor Walter were married and continued to live in 2 Furness Avenue for the rest of their lives: Walter, in particular, was well-known in the village: he worked for a Mr. Price at what used to be Ross's Shop and also as a postman throughout the village. He is still very well-remembered in Formby. Walter died in

October 2003 aged 82 and his sister Dorothy followed him three months later, aged 95. She would have remembered Tom – just: he would have been killed when she was 8.

Tom Bailey is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme battlefields in France, his body never having been recovered. Tom's is one story among so many, but there remains just one anomaly that is worth pointing out. 'Tom' was usually short for 'Thomas' and in those days people could be quite insistent upon the correct spelling. However, 'Tom' was a traditional name within the Bailey family and it was spelt as such quite deliberately. When the Civic Memorial was being prepared in the early 1920s, the name '*Tom Bailey*' was carved. However, this was noticed by someone with a higher authority and - as it was now not possible to effect any change – it was decided to carve underneath, '*Thomas Bailey*'. I had noticed the two similar names and had tried without success to locate 'Thomas Bailey. It was Elsie and Tom (note the spelling!) who told me what had happened.



# FORMBY CIVIC SOCIETY HELPS THE NATIONAL TRUST CELEBRATE 50 YEARS AT FORMBY POINT

On Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> April, the National Trust celebrated its 50 year association with Formby – only a short time after announcing an increased role in our community by taking over responsibility for managing and protecting another 204 hectares of land from Sefton Council. What is particularly interesting for us is the role played by the Formby Society in helping to gauge public opinion at the time and to play a full part in assisting the National Trust to set up at Formby Point in 1967.

As The Trust prepared to celebrate this anniversary, they contacted Formby Civic Society so that we could let them know what we knew about the time when they took over Formby Point and to ask us to support their 'Media call' that would take the occasion across the Region's radio and television stations. We had already been in touch with the Trust regarding future developments to highlight their work in the community and to discuss ideas for involving local people in guided walks and updates on future development. Three FCS members joined in the celebrations on the morning and we were interviewed for radio and television so that it became more widely known just how much a part the Formby Society played in helping the Trust in its early days here. John Phillips with Trust Officers Kate Martin and Sally Orritt were interviewed 'as live' by Jenny Lee Summers for the Radio Merseyside Sean Styles show, for 'That's Lancashire' Freeview channel and 'Lancashire Life' Magazine.

We were able to inform people across the North West that, prior to a final agreement with the National Trust, there were



meetings with interested parties and public meetings. The regional organiser was C.H.D. Acland,

better known as 'Cubby'. He said, at an initial meeting with the Formby Society, that the money needed to be raised locally and thanked Formby Urban District Council for providing £3000 and Liverpool Corporation for £9,000. In late October 1966 a public meeting was called by the Formby Society in order to consider in detail the proposals for the Formby sandhills and shore. The meeting was conducted under the chairmanship of Formby Society Chairman, D.A. Crighton and held at the Council Chamber, which was packed to the rafters. The meeting lasted two and a half hours and the Formby Times reported that there was a clear feeling that the proposal should go ahead as swiftly as possible. Indeed, the headline to the article was that the Lancashire County Council "should leave all shore future in the hands of the National Trust".



It was Cubby Acland who made the most telling arguments for proceeding. He told the Formby Times, when asked how it felt to be working with Formby people when he was based in the Lake District, that "... No-where have I received a more kindly welcome ... The Formby Society arranged a public meeting and then asked us to state our plans." In fact, the development of the NT in Formby was gradual and received many kinds of help and support from the community. It still needed help in putting into practice all its plans, not least in the matter of funding! Again, we can find the Formby Society helping out and in a rather unexpected way. In 1973 our Society had published a history of Formby, 'Viking Village' by Edith Kelly. The book was very popular and sold many copies, going into paperback editions and reprints. In 1975 the Society was able to donate £150 from the sales of the book to the National Trust here – something we could not imagine happening in the present day. This is a lovely example of the Trust and the community working together.

In May 1980 the Formby Times published a



lovely drawing of the entrance to the National Trust land at Victoria Road by Muriel Sibley.

She wrote at that time that, "...in spite of vandalism and diminishing funds, (the Trust) is trying by good management to maintain the woodlands as a public open

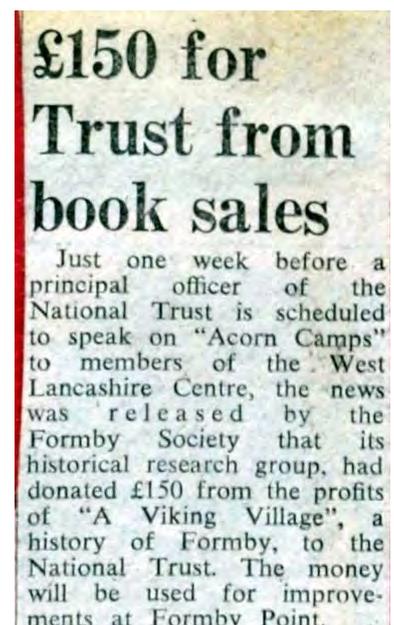
space for quiet enjoyment. The red squirrels and a good variety of birds were first attracted to this entrance by the food thrown to them by workers in the woodlands who brewed up in the hut."

At the Media call FCS was able to tell read-



ers and listeners about the part that the Formby Society played in helping the National Trust to start up in Formby and keep going in the early years. George Evans was one of the first 'Rangers' at the site and who was known by many children in the 1970s as the 'Squiggle man' because the children visiting the site associated him with the read squirrels they were so keen to see. The Formby Society presented the Trust with a cheque for £150 out of the profits from the book "Viking Formby" to help out and played a formative role in organising meetings prior to the acquisition of the land in April 1967.

In those days it was even the local Formby community that raised the money to provide the Rangers with a car to help them patrol the area.



# WILDLIFE NOTES March 2017

Dr Phil Smith

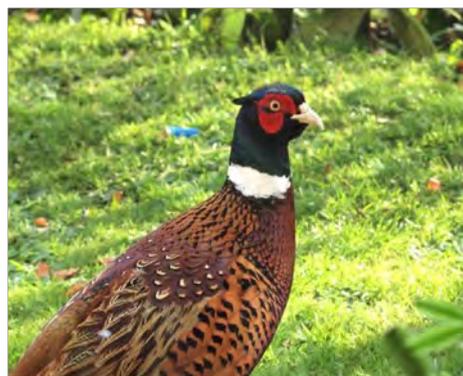
## MARCH 2017

In contrast to the previous six dry months, March had average rainfall with measurable amounts on 12 days, most notably on 22<sup>nd</sup> when several hours of steady rain was something we haven't experienced here for over a year. Despite this, there was minimal recharge of the water-table, my measuring point at the Devil's Hole dune-slack being still 5cm below ground by the end of the month. Breeding by **Common Toads**, **Common Frogs** and **Smooth Newts** was therefore restricted to the deeper wetlands on the coast. **Common Toads** were active at Cabin Hill on 4<sup>th</sup>, when about 100 batches of frog spawn had already been laid in the main scrape.



Later, I counted 50 dead **Common Toads** at this site, only four of which had been predated. I have seen mass mortality of this species here before but those corpses had been partially eaten. This time, the cause of death remains a mystery. The Lifeboat Road **Natterjack** scrapes were almost dry but it was good to see many immature **Smooth Newts** under pieces of wood, reflecting last year's better breeding conditions.

A bird-watching trip to Marshside on 2<sup>nd</sup> produced 23 **Little Egrets** on the saltmarsh and three **Mediterranean Gulls** in front of the main hide. Even better were two **Water Pipits** which I was able to view from Ron Jackson's Land Rover parked on the coast road embankment. Breeding in the mountains of central and southern Europe, the **Water Pipit** is a scarce winter visitor to our shores. One of the most reliable places to see this bird in "Lancashire" has been Warton Bank on the north side of the Ribble. Latterly, however, small numbers have occurred most springs on the saltings opposite Crossens Sewage Works. They are usually accompanied by **Meadow Pipits** and **Pied Wagtails** but this time there was also a smart **Grey Wagtail**. As usual, **Avocet** numbers gradually increased at Marshside during the month, my largest count being 64 on 13<sup>th</sup>. The first **Wheatears** were reported locally around 18<sup>th</sup> but I had to wait until 28<sup>th</sup> to see two perky males and a female on the Southport Marine Lake dunes.



During March, my garden was dominated by a resplendent male **Pheasant**. It turned up out of the blue and took up residence, eating me out of house and home, even pecking my lounge window, as if to say "Please sir, I want some more".

To cap it all, he then brought along a girlfriend, frequent noisy displays to her sometimes waking me up at 7.00am!"

One of this month's highlights is the emergence of **Vernal Mining Bees**; these honey-bee-sized solitary bees are often abundant on south-facing dune slopes with bare sand for their tunnels. On 25<sup>th</sup>, I estimated as many as 1170 flying on the Hightown sand ridges that were created near the Sailing Club after sea-defence works in 2011. A Red Data Book species, once confined to Northwest England and North Wales, this entertaining insect is now invading southern England from Europe.



Also unmissable in March is the flowering of the nationally rare **Early Sand-grass** on the dunes west of Southport Marine Lake. Patricia Lockwood and I went to see it on 23<sup>rd</sup>, returning a few days later with members of *The Biodiverse Society* group who are surveying the flora and fauna Marine Lake and its surrounds this year. As well as an abundance of this tiny grass we recorded a range of other spring annuals, such as **Sea Mouse-ear**, **Little Mouse-ear**, **Hairy Bitter-cress** and **Lesser Chickweed**. Nearby, but not yet flowering, were four plants of **Isle of Man Cabbage**, another speciality of this site. Completely unexpected, however, was a colony of **Winter Stalk-ball**, an uncommon fungus not seen here before.

Walking down Range Lane on 21<sup>st</sup> past golden blooms of **Lesser Celandine**, I was delighted to find the first bright-red catkins of the native **Black Poplar**. Continuing on to the Devil's Hole, it was even more gratifying to note large catkins on the rare hybrid willow **Salix x friesiana**. Although there are over 100 bushes here, they were previously too young to flower.

My developing interest in mosses and liverworts led to several bryophyte safaris with Joshua Styles, Cabin Hill National Nature Reserve (NNR) being one of our targets as there is no list for this site. We soon found about 30 kinds, several being restricted to the bark of an old **Crack Willow**. They included a strange purplish liverwort, the **Dilated Scalewort** and **Elegant Bristle-moss**, a new species for the Sefton Coast. Another successful trip was to the pine-woods of Ainsdale Sand Dunes NNR. I am not a great fan of conifer plantations but the damp, acidic conditions and partial shade is ideal for a rich variety of bryophytes. Small slacks surrounded by trees produced a stunning red *Sphagnum* which Josh keyed out to **Acute-leaved Bog-moss**, previously thought to be extinct here. It was growing with **Bog Beard-moss** and an unknown liverwort that was eventually identified by John Lowell, the county recorder, as **Common Pawwort**. This is mostly found in mountains and is also new to the Sefton



## APRIL 2017

Since I started these notes in 2007, almost every April has been characterised by prolonged drought conditions. However, with a total of about 5mm of rain falling on five days during the month, this has been arguably the worst yet. The Met. Office acknowledged that April 2017 was the 10<sup>th</sup> driest on record for the UK but most other parts of the country had far more rain than us. Climate scientists have shown that spring droughts here are linked to persistent high-pressure systems over Greenland. These interfere with the North Atlantic Jet Stream that controls our weather and are the result of a warming trend in the Arctic brought about by climate change. This has major implications for our wildlife, not to mention agriculture and water supply but the TV weather presenters were still having apoplexy at the slightest hint of rain in the forecast. So much for our “green and pleasant land” as vegetation became parched and numerous grass fires were reported, one destroying Heysham Moss Nature Reserve in north Lancashire.

The **Natterjack Toad** breeding season looks like being a disaster. I counted 23 fresh spawn strings on Birkdale Green Beach on 1<sup>st</sup> but none subsequently as the water-level fell rapidly. My first **Swallow** flying north hinted at more migrant birds to come. As many as 1100 **Sanderlings** on the shore would soon be heading for breeding grounds on the tundra in Greenland and Arctic Canada. The following day, there were still at least 2500 **Pink-footed Geese** at Marshside, waiting for the northerly winds to change, while two pairs of **Mediterranean Gulls** and a second-summer had joined the noisy ranks of **Black-headed Gulls** in front of the RSPB



hide. Later in the month there were about 2500 of these gulls at Marshside, many of them on nests, as were two pairs of **Avocets** on a cockle-shell island.

Most plants and insects seem to have been a couple of weeks early, a **Speckled Wood** being at Queen's Jubilee Nature Trail on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Dune Tiger Beetles** also enjoyed the sunny weather, with 13 at the southern end of the Green Beach, while **Vernal Mining Bees** were abundant, turning up in several places where I hadn't seen them before. One of our most delightful spring butterflies, the **Orange Tip** was widely reported during the month, Haskayne Cutting Nature Reserve contributing four males and a female on 22<sup>nd</sup>.



At Haskayne, I was also surprised to find a patch of the uncommon **Bog Beard-moss** in a ditch. Another interesting moss was **Thickpoint Grimmia** which Josh Styles had reported earlier at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve. I returned with Josh to confirm it in three places on pieces of old concrete, these being the first records for the Sefton Coast.

The importance of disturbed ground to our coastal flora was demonstrated when Patricia Lockwood and I explored a new fence-line on the edge of Formby's Range High School playing field.

The strip of exposed sandy soil supported a



wealth of flowers, including three species of **fumitory**. There were masses of the rose-pink **Common Ramping-fumitory**, together with a few patches of the rarer **Tall Ramping-fumitory** which has smaller salmon-pink flowers. A careful search also revealed the nationally scarce **Purple Ramping-fumitory**, listed in the Red Data Book as "Vulnerable". Finally, we were amazed to discover a single flower-spike of **Green-winged Orchid** in perfect condition. Largely confined to Altcar Rifle Range, its only other location on the Sefton Coast is a field off Range Lane where I found a spike three years ago, increasing to two last year. Sure enough they were still there; a vision in magenta.

Another important fence-line for wild flowers is on the boundary of Woodvale Airfield. The strip of land between two security fences is occasionally treated with a herbicide. This creates bare ground which is then colonised by annuals from the seed-bank in the soil. Two years ago and again this year the result was a spectacular flowering of a scarce white-flowered crucifer, the **Shepherd's-cress**. There were tens of thousands of plants, resembling an unseasonal snowfall and surely one of the largest populations in Britain of this nationally declining species. Patricia Lockwood and Joyce and David Jarvis helped me to compile a list of 48 associated plants, most of them also annuals, including several notable species.

Ainsdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve is now grazed by cattle during the winter, the aim being to open up stands of coarse vegetation and create patches of bare sand on the ridges. I was very pleased to see that this has produced the desired effect with lots of annuals, such as the gorgeous **Early Forget-me-not** colonising the bare ground, but also many **Heath Dog-violets**, one of our most characteristic dune plants and the food-plant of the **Dark Green Fritillary**. I was able to walk into a usually deeply-flooded slack, now bone-dry, to confirm from its catkins the identity of a bush of the extremely rare **Don's Willow** spotted during the winter. Nearby, were the earliest flowers of **Bog-bean**, a wetland plant now with few localities on the coast.



## LYNETTE'S MEMORIES OF WWII: FROM BOOTLE TO FORMBY

*Lynette Siler was brought up by her parents in Bootle but, during the early years of WWII, she moved to her grandparents' house in Formby. She continued to attend Bootle Secondary School for Girls in Bootle but returned to Formby each day. Her grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Morrison, lived in at 3 Cambridge Road; in a house called "Pentrick". She later emigrated and was last known living in Canada.*

I look back at the war, and in my ignorance, I think only of the fun times we had. The bombs that fell seem only a part of a dream, and not really a very scary dream at that. I was ten when Great Britain declared war on Germany. I had never been away from my home or my parents before. But, as with many other parents, mine had decided that if war was to come, it would be better if my sister and I were out of danger. My father and older brother had already been mobilized from the reserve army into the regular army and my other brother could not wait to get into the Air Force.

The morning of Monday, September 4th, 1939, began as usual with going to school, but this time we took packed suitcases with us. My sister and I went to different schools, and although we did not know it then, this would be the last time we would see each other for some weeks. Buses took us down to the railway station at Bootle, exciting for me, because I had never travelled on a train before. Our parents were there to see us leave, many parents and children in tears. I was too excited to cry when my mother said goodbye. I climbed into the train with the other girls from my school, each of us trying to grab a windows seat. We did not travel very far, just to Southport, 18 miles away, but far enough away that we supposedly would not be in any

danger from the expected air raids on Liverpool, and its surrounding dock areas, which were expected to be prime targets. I told my mother I was not going away again, and under great protest, she allowed me to stay home. Liverpool and its surrounding districts were being heavily bombed. I was not at home on the night that the bomb went under the house and failed to explode. Air raid wardens woke my mother and the other people who were staying there. Houses on either side of ours were burning and they were allowed to grab only their handbags and shoes and leave immediately. My mother went to Formby to stay with my grandmother and the next day went looking for a house to rent in Formby. She had no intention of going back to Bootle to stay. She found the house that we lived in for the next 28 years. Down a country lane, no street lights, no electric, but no bombs either.



I had won a scholarship to attend Bootle Secondary School for Girls in Breeze Hill, built in 1932. So every day, I travelled into Bootle to go to school. I was not the only child who had ended up back home due to one reason or another, bad billets, homesickness, etc, and the school had been reopened as a co-educational school, as the boys' school had been burned down in a recent bombing raid.

Each day, there would be barriers in an area. Perhaps there was a bomb that had not exploded. We would have to go to school a different way because of ruins and debris from a raid the night before.

Sometimes, a friend from school would be missing because of that same raid. Yet each day was a new day, and we did not think about the war as we woke up each morning.

The school corridors were filled with sand-bag walls to hold back the blast of any bomb that might land. All windows were criss-crossed with tape to minimize the spread of any glass from shattered windows. On the occasions when the bombers came over to make daylight raids, we would go into the big school shelters and play memory games, mental arithmetic, spelling, geography, until the sound of the all-clear. At break-times and lunches, we would all congregate around the Royal Air Force battery stationed at the school with the barrage balloon. These balloons were in the air during all air raids. Naturally, we called ours after our headmistress 'Ethel Mary.' (The Headmistress of the School from 1926 to 1955 was Dr. Ethel Mary Steuart). We got a lot of fun watching the older girls in the school flirting with the air force boys.

In Formby, there was a platoon of the Royal Inskilling Fusiliers stationed in a large house further down the lane from ours. They had a mascot, a large bear. It seemed to me that it was a grizzly, but I was small and it was very large, a large black or dark brown bear. I was in the garden the first time the keeper brought it past the house. We had a pear tree not far from the gate. The fruit from this tree was uneatable, hard and bitter. But the bear could smell it, and planted his feet firmly and would not go by the gate. The sergeant eased off the chain and let the bear lead him to where it wanted to go. It sat down on its haunches under the tree and sat happily munching on these awful pears. It would never pass by the garden after that until the pears were gone and winter was well on its way. I could hear the bear at night, before I went to sleep.

The sound of the bear and the sound of the sea, memories I do like to remember from those days.

I can remember sitting listening to the inspiring speeches made by Winston Churchill, and the broadcasts when first the European division of the war ended and then a couple of months later, the Japanese division. There were parties in the streets, red, white and blue streamers, flags of all the different allied, and everyone pooled their food, although there was not very much of it. But it was so gay and cheerful, except when somebody remembered someone who would not be coming back.

I remember the ration books, with their little tear-out squares for meat, butter, sugar, etc. After we were bombed out and moved to Formby, my mother kept chickens for eggs, but I didn't like eggs anyway. She grew her own vegetables in the garden, and we had apple trees and pear trees. We could go blackberry gathering, but there wasn't enough sugar to make jam, so we gave them to my grandmother (Nan) who didn't use sugar in her tea, and she would make the best apple and blackberry pies I have ever tasted. She baked them in an old-fashioned iron oven. She lived like a real pioneer, no gas, no electric, wood fires and paraffin lamps. She was a real country woman.

*DO YOU HAVE ANY MEMORIES, MEMOIRS,  
PHOTOS OR FAMILY HISTORY YOU CAN SHARE  
WITH US TO HELP BUILD A BROADER AND MORE  
PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE IN  
FORMBY IN THE PAST?*

*Lynnette Siler's wonderful memoirs came to FCS purely by chance and the quick thinking of member Des Brennan who met by chance a relative still working in this area. He traced her through e mail and carried out the original research into her tale with Reg Yorke.*

# PAT AND BILL'S CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

## John Phillips

Recently we put some article into the Formby Bubble describing what the two cafes on the Formby shore were like and shared memories of people who remembered them and enjoyed happy times at one or other of them. It was following these articles that Pat and Bill Roberts got in touch with the Civic Society to add their own memories and shed some light on an even different aspect of how they were able to make positive use of the old Boathouse even after it had been allowed to fall into disrepair and eventual destruction by the tides. We are very grateful for them for getting in touch, and this is their reminiscence.

Pat told us that the articles had brought back her childhood in the 50,s and 60s when she and a group of friends used to cycle from their homes in Knotty Ash on weekends during the summer months to spend wonderful times on the beaches of Formby and Freshfield. Her memories of those idyllic days never really left her as when she eventually got married they moved to Formby as soon as they could to make sure their own children would have the opportunity to enjoy a carefree childhood. Alas, she said, "sadly by that time, the cafe was in ruins, with the debris and hundreds of pieces of slate from the roof littering the beach. However, in a way, that actually provided us with an opportunity –



and the remains of the cafe continued to play a big part in our lives once again over the 20 years that followed!"

Pat and Bill eventually had four children who all attended St. Luke's school, and "one day a letter came home appealing for saleable items for their forthcoming Christmas Fair in aid of school funds. Having always been an avid potter, crafter and recycler, I gave it some thought and decided that a Christmas table decoration might fit the bill, thinking of all the pine cones carpeting the pinewoods. It was when I was thinking of what to use as a base that I remembered the remains of the cafe roof and the hundreds of pieces of slate scattered along the beach their edges smoothed by the tides."



*Photograph of the Lifeboat Cafe courtesy of Joan Rimmer*

From that time onwards, for about 15 years, their children collected and used their sledges to drag dozens of pieces of slate up over the sandhills. As per the plan, they then made them into lovely Christmas table decorations every year and the resulting products were very popular.

"Even now, when I am out and about around Formby, I often get people stopping to tell me they still have my Christmas

decoration made from that slate that had come from a derelict building and which would otherwise have been lost to the tides.”

Although their children are now in the 30s & 40s and have moved away, they still visit the beach a couple of times a week and often wonder if anyone has ever been puzzled by the gradual disappearance of what was the cafe roof. As Pat said, “I hope the family who owned the cafe would approve of the use of the roof for such a good cause.” Well, that family was the Norris family and some are still well-known members of the Formby community.



Although their children are now in the 30s & 40s and have moved away, they still visit the beach a couple of times a week and often wonder if anyone has ever been puzzled by the gradual disappearance of what was the cafe roof. As Pat said, “I hope the family who owned the cafe would approve of the use of the roof for such a good cause.” Well, that family was the Norris family and some are still well-known members of the Formby community.

Pat concluded that, “People who still have the decorations might like to know that the slate base represents a little bit of Formby’s local history, as I never revealed at the time where I managed to get the slate from.” Fortunately they still have photographs of some of the decorations and so even today we can see just what they produced for the school funds a number of years ago.

## *From the Chairman*

As this is the month of the Annual General Meeting, it is fitting to look back over a year in which we have seen changes and developments in both our Society and in our Community.



One of the aims of the Committee has been to play our part in the development of Formby and we have been building links with the National Trust, Formby Pool and local schools, as well as working with people from near and far who are looking for information on families and people who may have lived here many years ago. We have continued to research the Formby Home Front in WWI and have made presentations on this topic on a number of occasions. The book that will be the end product of the research is well under way.

As ever, the members who are most active in running FCS would really welcome some extra support no matter how small. Any help would be most gratefully received.

And, of course, this has been a year in which **Reg Yorke** has gradually reduced his workload within the Society. He is still available for support and advice and is still very much ‘one of us’, but his main responsibilities lie with Barbara. We wish both of them well and I know that what they have given to Formby will always be respected and fully appreciated by us all.

# **FCS Programme: Spring 2017 - Winter 2017**

## **SUMMER PROGRAMME June - September**

13th June	Ormskirk Church Tour with Jean Gidman: - meet at Church Porch 11am
29th June	A History Walk around Ainsdale: meet at Ainsdale Station at 1.30pm
11th July	The National Trust in Formby - a short tour: meet at 2pm
18th August	Formby's Conservation Area: meet outside Grapes Hotel at 2pm
30th August	Liverpool Past - meet at Exchange Flags, Liverpool, at 11am
14th Sept.	Society Meal and Get-Together at the Cross House Inn: 6pm - 8pm.

There will also be two Walks through the National Trust properties led jointly by **FCS** and the **NT**. They take place on Friday 23rd June 2 - 4 pm & Wednesday 5th July 6 - 8 pm

## **MEETINGS 2017**

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

They are open to guests on payment of the small admission charge of £2.

<i>Thursday</i>	<i>12th October</i>	<i>8pm</i>	<i>The Bluebird K7 Story</i>	Keith Hick
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>9th November</i>	<i>8pm</i>	<i>Formby and Ypres 3</i>	John Phillips
<i>Friday</i>	<i>8th December</i>	<i>2pm</i>	<i>Muriel Sibley: a Retrospective for Christmas</i>	

## **OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY**

### **Chairman**

John Phillips

[chairman@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:chairman@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **Treasurer**

Bob Prescott

[treasurer@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **Amenities Secretaries**

David and Yvonne Irving

[amenities@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:amenities@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **Hon. Secretary**

Nathalie Phillips

[secretary@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **History Group Secretary**

Post vacant

[historysec@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:historysec@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **Committee**

Colin Cooke, Ray Derricott, Lynn Gibson, David Skelton, Shelagh Crosbie

### **Membership and Distribution Secretary**

Tony Bonney

[membership@formbycivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@formbycivicsociety.org.uk)

### **Webmaster and IT Advisor**

Noel Blundell

### **Digital Archives**

Tony Bonney

### **Archivist (printed materials)**

Dr. Reg Yorke