

Formby Civic News



The Formby Civic Society Newsletter

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SECOND BLUE PLAQUE FOR FORMBY WILL HONOUR BERYL BAINBRIDGE

Formby will now have a second Blue Plaque to help celebrate former members of our community. Following a proposal from Formby Civic Society, it has now been agreed that one will be placed on **47 Ravenmeols Lane**, the childhood home of author **Beryl Bainbridge**

We are delighted that the current property owner, Mr Paul Steiger, has given his blessing and, as no other 'official' permission is required, we can go ahead with design in the hope of it being fixed this summer.

Reg Yorke will write about this



in greater detail in the next Newsletter, when we hope to have a report and some photographs of the official 'unveiling'.

Beryl Bainbridge (1932 – 2010) was brought up in

Formby by parents Richard Bainbridge and Winifred Baines, having been born in Liverpool.

She had 20 novels published between 1967 and 2011, including 'An Awfully Big Adventure' which included descriptions of her years in Formby.



Biographer Huw Marsh described her as being a serious – and often seriously funny – writer."



Spring 2016

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REGULAR FCS ARTICLE IN THE 'FORMBY BUBBLE'

Since the launch of the free newspaper 'The Formby Bubble', Formby Civic Society now has a platform for a regular article that the whole community can read, as well remind everyone of forthcoming activities or talks. We hope you enjoy this. This is a free newspaper available every other week from Tesco, BP/M&S garage, MyLocal and all newsagents.

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

THE FORMBY LIFEBOAT - A QUIZ FOR READERS

Barbara and Reg Yorke have provided members with a Quiz on the Formby Lifeboat. See how much you know yourself about the U.K.'s first lifeboat.

Formby Lifeboat Station Questions

A test of local history knowledge.

1. When was the lifeboat station built?
2. What was the reason for the lifeboat station being built, had there been many shipwrecks or loss of life at sea?
3. Why was the lifeboat station built in Formby? *Is there significance in the fact it is near Liverpool.*
4. Who built the lifeboat station?
5. Was this life boat service the first known service for sea rescue?
6. How did the lifeboat station become so successful?
7. When did the last launch take place?
8. Are there any particular interesting stories about the lifeboat station? What is the legacy of the lifeboat station nationally and internationally? *to the formation of the RNLI.*

*The term 'Lifeboat' was not used until later.

The answers can be found on page 12



History Group Report Reg Yorke

'Lifeboat' pub. Following a suggestion that the new pub, based on the former Conservative Club in Three Tuns Lane Lane, should be called '**The Lifeboat**' we received a request for illustrations and historical information by the company (lctinteriorsolutions.co.uk), who are supplying the artworks and 'finishing touches', "with relevance towards the chosen site/ name and locality". We have been very pleased to respond with provision of historic images and information relating to the Lifeboat and have been suitably thanked.

Dune Heath/Woodvale interpretive panel.

We have received a generous Mayoral grant for the creation of an Interpretive Panel at the boundary of the Dune Heath / RAF Woodvale, to celebrate the contribution of RAF personnel stationed here who lost their lives during WW2. Other former RAF stations have done this but so far there has been nothing at Woodvale despite the considerable information we have, thanks to Aldon Ferguson. The present day Dune Heath was of course part of the airfield and a site for the Memorial has been agreed with Lancashire Wildlife Trust overlooking number two runway. It would be nice if the unveiling of this could be combined with a walk like we did last year but first we need to progress the design and construction of the panel with the Wildlife Trust.

Ravenmeols Trails official opening . This will take place on Sunday 11th September , Heritage Open Day. Meanwhile the trails are being marked out and Interpretation Panels created and placed. A full colour leaflet is already printed and available. A booklet is also a possibility.

Civic Day June 18th Formby Heritage display. I suggest we organise a display, in an appropriate place, on '**Local Heritage**'. New regulations give us an opportunity to add to the Local Heritage List and, with our records and local history knowledge, we are in a good position to review and update the list for submission to the Heritage Environment Record Officer. This would include the main War Memorials which surprisingly have never been listed. Most of the buildings and structures on the present 'list' will have been photographed by the Society in the past. This would be an opportunity to show new photographs of how they are looking now and add some suggestions for further listing under the new arrangements.

National Trust, proposed Early Flying interpretive panel; in relation to early flying development few visitors to the Victoria Road Reserve are aware that there was an early (official) aerodrome, with five hangers, sited at the beach end of Victoria, Road, where courageous early flying took place prior to World War I. I feel we owe it to these early pioneers to highlight this important historical period, which has until now been completely overlooked. We are in discussion with Andrew Brockbank regarding the creation of a suitable information panel and Informal advice is being obtained regarding design from ABC design.

World War 1 Formby Times reports. Thanks to the considerable time and effort put in since November 2014, by Tony Pawson, the Chairman and Tony Bonney, (not forgetting the Information Services team at Crosby Library), we now have a considerable archive relating to Formby and its people during World War I. I am hopeful that as a society we can make good use of this information to discover what happened in Formby during that time. Perhaps we should organise a special open meeting during the next season to discuss some of it?

SOME WORDS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I wish to thank again the contributors to our newsletter as well as the people who contribute so much 'behind the scenes' in term of work such as proof-reading, printing and distribution.

This is now the tenth year in which Phil Smith has put together his fascinating Wildlife Notes. Complete with the colourful images.

You will also see that Reg Yorke has hardly taken a backwards step with his wide range of ideas and suggestions for ensuring we do not lose sight of any of Formby's colourful past. Also, thanks to Barbara Yorke for joining Reg to create our Lifeboat Quiz. Is this the Newsletter's first ever quiz? Answers on a postcard to me, please.

You will find our Summer and Autumn Programmes outlined on the back page, and I hope you are able to join us in some of them.

One matter I have to raise is our shortage of members involved in helping out with running our Society. I am a relative newcomer to FCS but I believe that we as a group of Formby residents have a part to play in the present and future of our community. There are jobs that could help us all out a great deal, either by individuals or small groups of friends. Please do not be 'put off' by names such as 'secretary', we can always agree on what needs to be done and how it can be done. All help will be gratefully received, supported and welcomed!!!



The Battle of the Somme 1916 and Formby

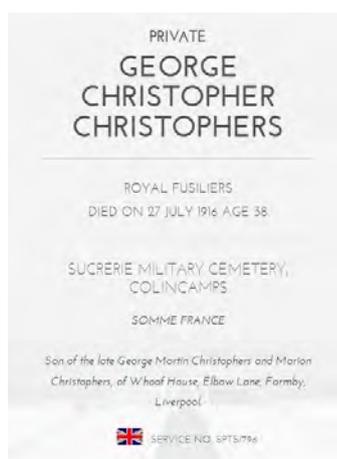
John Phillips

On July 1st this year we will commemorate the first day of the Battle of the Somme in World War I. Formby may have been a small enough place at that time but our community had sent many of its sons to fight in the army.

The Somme was not a 'one-off' battle. It consisted of three separate phases and many different contributory battles, beginning on 1.7.1916 with the Battle of Albert and concluding on 18.11.1916 with the end of the Battle of the Ancre. British casualties on the first day were the worst in the history of the British army: over 19,000 troops were killed and over 57,000 were injured.

We can find the stories of many Formby soldiers who fell in that conflict and can trace a number of them back to their families and their ordinary lives before they joined up. There will be a full report on this in the Autumn issue.

Pte. George Christopher Christophers for example, died aged 38 on 27 July 1916 during the Battle of the Somme. Known as 'Chris', Private Christophers was the son of two of the



Christophers family influential in opening the 'Wesleyan Church' in Elbow Lane, now the Methodist Church. Mother Marion and sister Hope ran a school at their home in Whoof House, Elbow Lane, at the outbreak of war. The Formby

Times reported that he was officially over the limit for joining the army aged 36, but found a way in through the Sportsmen's Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers.



Another story we wish to tell, is that of the men who fell between September and October 1916 and in whose memory a small cross was erected at the Ginchy Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery in France in October 1916. Later, after the War had ended, this cross was transferred to the churchyard of St. Peter's in Formby and stands proudly today just inside the wall and facing Green Lane. It commemorates 8 fallen soldiers, two of whom came from Formby:

Lt. Kenneth Lotherington Hutchings (of 'South View', Old Town Lane) and **2nd. Lt. George Eric Thompson**.

Is there anything you know about Formby and the Battle of the Somme that you can add for our article in the Autumn edition?

If so, please contact the Chairman.

Dr. Arthur Sykes of Formby

Most members of the Civic Society will know the story of Dr. Arthur Sykes of Duke Street and how he purchased the land that is now Duke Street Park from a local farmer and then gave it to the Formby Urban District of the time so long as it remained for use by the people. The story is well told by Reg Yorke and can be found on our Society website. Perhaps a number of you remember him. One of the three ladies who lived in my own house before me used to work as a receptionist at his surgery. Reg has painted a lively picture of him, but let us take the opportunity here of filling in the picture even further, as well as show a photograph of him.



Dr. Arthur Barry Sykes had been born in Formby in 1876 and lived here all his life. He used his home, Ashhurst in Duke Street, as a surgery. The old stone gates show the name of the house. Originally, however, he had been brought up in Manor House in Freshfield Road; the family later moved into another family home, Ashhurst, which had been built by his uncle, Joseph Rimmer (an estate agent in Liverpool).

Dr. Sykes' father, Benjamin Sykes (1846 – 1905) planted about four hundred fruit trees in the garden of the house, and this area of what was probably three to four acres stretched back to Brow's Lane. The family

His mother was Sarah Whitley Mullin (1849 – 1909), sisters Margaret, Aida, Evangeline and Doris, and brothers Eustace, Richard, Rhea, Noel, Reginald, Jack and Harry.

Dr. Sykes' son, David, made his living selling aeroplanes in the 1950s and 1960s, ending up living in Canada. He was amused that while he enjoyed travelling, his father seems much happier in Formby! He had, indeed, served in the Royal Navy during WWI, but son David felt that he may also have been affected adversely by the Hall Road train disaster in which his brother was one of 20 people killed when the 16:30 Liverpool Exchange to Southport express collided with a local train at Hall Road.

David Sykes recalled the family interest in sport. Both Dr. Sykes and his brother, Jack, played amateur football, and cousin Frank Rimmer was 6 feet 7 inches tall and played cricket for Lancashire, a "mean left-handed bowler". Brother Jack also enjoyed a passion for guns having been allowed to buy a 2.2 repeating rifle when he was 17! He left a number of 'marks' on the walls of the house but was lucky on one occasion not to have caused much more serious damage. He was showing his mother just how safe the gun was whilst they were in an upstairs room when he accidentally fired through the floor, narrowly missing the domestic servant Polly Hughes who immediately dived under the breakfast table in the dining room. The family managed to have it repaired quickly by one of the Formby Brothers (who had built the house originally); the job was so good that Dr. Sykes never saw it, though you might manage to see it if you knew where to look.

Arthur Sykes died in December 1960, aged 84.

Remembering 'Jacky Water' - the old Breweries of Formby

John Phillips and Tony Bonney



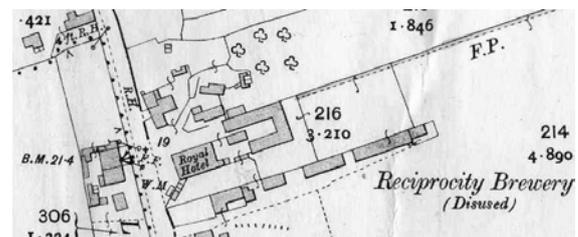
At a time when Formby has a new brewery and welcomes two new pub ventures, it is a good time to look back at what existed here in the past. Glen Monaghan & David Blanchard decided to open Red Star Brewery on Formby Industrial Estate. He contacted the Civic Society to ask what there had been in terms of breweries in our community in former years. Well, we are happy to oblige and here is what we know; we would be pleased to hear from anyone who can provide further information or correct any mistakes.

There were two breweries serving the community in the 19th and 20th centuries, though prior to then there was the Formby Arms in Green Lane, opposite St. Peter's Church. This is now a private house and also served in the past as a parsonage. There were also the Southport Brewery in Scarisbrick Road, Southport and the Crown Brewery in Upper Aughton Road, Ainsdale.

The Formby Brewery in Brewery Lane was run by the Dickenson family. They are shown as Thomas and William Rimmer Dickinson in the late 19th century and they provided the beer for the Railway

Hotel in Duke Street, the Grapes in Thornton and the Liver at the top of South Road, Waterloo. They both appear in the 1885 Voters List. An Edward Dickenson can also be found as a publican at the Grapes.

The Royal in Liverpool Road was the main outlet for the Reciprocity Brewery which stood behind it. In the late 19th century, the brewer / publican was Thomas Rimmer who also appears in the 1885 Voters List as well as various Seeds Directories of Formby. A map of 1892 shows the brewery still in operation but the 1904 OS map lists it as being disused.



We have more information and comment about the Dickinsons' Formby Brewery than the Reciprocity Brewery. We also have two drawings by Muriel Sibley, both shown on these pages. An interview enjoyed recently with Paradise Lane resident Stan Bourhill alerted us to the 'character' of the Formby Brewery and its reputation within the com-

munity, and this enabled us to track down reminiscences about it from the mid-twentieth century. In 1966, **John S. Roberts** described in the 'Formby Times' the taste of the ale from the 'Old Brewery, "It was a very dark, 'unfined' (i.e. 'cloudy' drink). Visitors used to hold it up to the light doubtfully, taste it, then hold it up again. But eventually they grew to like it and Formby beer became very popular. Many of the older men would drink nothing else. There are stories that some of them made friends with the brewery workers and spent a good deal of time on the premises, drinking out of a bucket to save glasses. They seem to have found Formby Ale fairly potent because they were often fighting amongst themselves. Apparently pigeons used to roost on the rafters above the vats and this is supposed to have added 'something' to the drink." Well, we first heard that story from **Stan Bourhill** who chuckled as he remembered those times.

The Old Brewery

We also have two accounts from 1980. In July 1980



Albert Aindow, a Grapes Hotel regular, recalled, "The ale they served then was brewed locally and was known as Jacky Water because it was meant to come from a local ditch that had 'Jackies – little fish – in it. The thicker the ale was, the better it was. The doctors wouldn't prescribe Guinness, they would prescribe this Jacky Water. It was certainly better than ale anywhere today. You could drink it all night and never get drunk or have a bad the following day."



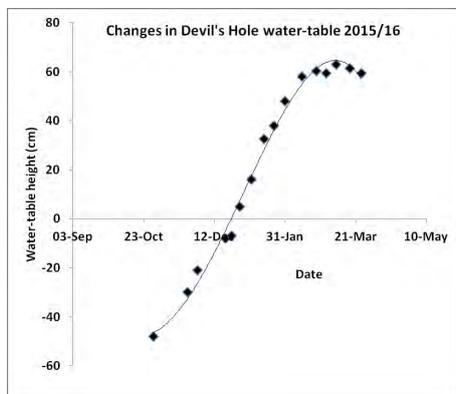
Albert and friends in the Grapes 1980

In September 1980, **Thomas Sutton** added his own memories. He had grown up on Ravenmeols Farm and his father used to provide the horses for the Formby Lifeboat. He said, "I used to go twice a week to the brewery to pick up the mash, which was left over from the brewing, for our cattle. And I was still going in the 1940s.... Mr. Sutton described how he used to watch the beer being brewed. The ingredients were put in a large copper boiler and then the liquid ran out into a vat to ferment. It was then cooled on a wooden-louvred floor. There was also a malting room where sometimes barley was put into a big vat to soak and to germinate. When this had happened, the seeds were spread out in the malting room and were then turned over with big wooden spades. They were crushed afterwards between two iron rollers. Mr. Sutton described the 'Jacky' as a little fish and not a tadpole as some people thought; he said the beer was called 'Jacky Water' as a joke because it was so cloudy and it was not anything to do with a local source of water for brewing. "It may have been cloudy but it never made you ill the next day. There were no chemicals in the Dickinson's brew. The locals used to drink nothing else but strangers to the area used to send it back because it was so cloudy." Remembering times past at the Formby Hotel, he described how the bowling green regulars used to play for a gallon of Dickinson's Ale. He recalled that it was called William Rimmer Dickinson's Brewery – by this time the brewery was run by only one of the brothers. "The best thing about 'Old Uncle's' (that's what we used to call Bill Dickinson) brewery was that he used to give away more ale than he sold."

Dr. Phil Smith *Wildlife Notes*

Winter 2015 – Spring 2016

An incredibly dry autumn meant that coastal wetlands like Wicks Lake at Formby Point were bone dry at the end of October. However, the following three months were much wetter than average, including several named storms, leading to flooding further north and a dramatic increase in the dune water-table here. I monitored this in the deepest part of the Devil's Hole slack at Ravenmeols. Starting well below the ground surface, the water was over 60cm deep by early March, representing an extraordinarily rapid rise of 110cm in four months (see graph). However, a return to a typical spring drought in March led to a marked downturn in the level. By late winter, as well as **Devil's Hole**, wetlands all along the coast were flooded, including Wicks Lake, now with plenty of water and returning **Mal-**

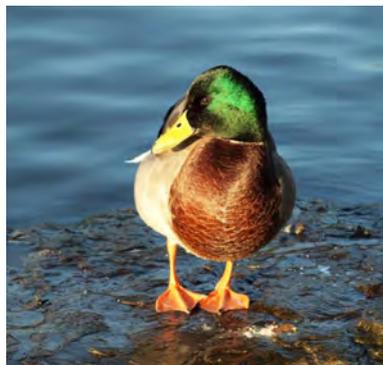


lards for visitors to feed.

It was also a remarkably mild autumn and winter with few cold spells,

hardly any frost and no snow at all in Formby.

This had an effect on wildlife sightings, with lots of insect activity throughout the autumn. An October highlight for me was a **Red-legged Shield-**



bug at Pinfold meadow, Ainsdale National Nature Reserve. Although it is supposed to be relatively common and widespread, this was my first for the Sefton Coast and brings the total of Shieldbugs I have recorded here to eleven.



Another surprise was a **Ruddy Darter dragonfly** (pictured) at Birkdale on the 2nd October, the latest

date for Lancashire and North Merseyside. As usual, patches of flowering **Ivy** at Ravenmeols were graced by superb **Red Admirals** and **Commas**. Plants also provided some October excitement. **Mount Olympus St. John's-wort**, a garden escape spotted by Patricia Lockwood, had not been recorded before in Northwest England. Well-attended guided walks to explore saltmarsh vegetation at Marshside turned up three new plants for me, the scarce **Taschereau's Orache** and **Kattegat Orache** and the even rarer **Long-stalked Orache**.

Continuing mild weather in November provided sand-dune flowers throughout the month, such as **Blue Fleabane** and **Sea Mayweed**. Unusually late insects included a **Speckled Bush-cricket** at Freshfield and a **Birch Shieldbug** on my car in Formby. Floods at the Marshside RSPB reserve attracted a spectacular flock of 4000 **Black-tailed Godwits** from their Icelandic breeding grounds. These long-billed waders are renowned for

long-distance migrations, coloured leg-rings being used to track them. Between 2003 and 2014, as well as being reported in Iceland, one individual was seen in northern France, Portugal and numerous English localities, including Hampshire, Essex, Kent, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Leighton Moss in Lancashire. Also typical of November was an influx of **Short-eared Owls** from the continent, small numbers being widely reported. I saw one at Cabin Hill but the Wildlife Trust's new Lunt Meadows reserve had up to half a dozen owls, bringing bird photographers from far and wide.

As usual, December was a relatively quiet month for wildlife, though one major distraction was a whole **Coconut covered in**



Goose Barnacles

found by Sefton rangers on Crosby beach. No doubt this had come from the Caribbean on the Gulf

Stream. Part of my spare time was spent helping to supervise the excavation of three shallow scrapes for **Natterjack Toads** in the Ainsdale sandhills funded by the Landscape Partnership Scheme. The largest was in a slack infested with dense **Sea Buckthorn**; so "two birds with one stone".



Other essential management work involved organising 14 volunteer "buckthorn bashes" between October and February in the southern Birkdale frontal dunes

Twenty enthusiasts were recruited to clear invasive **Sea Buckthorn** from about 15ha of botanically-rich dunes and slacks.

I also spent three days in December presenting evidence on behalf of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust at the Sefton Local Plan inquiry. This concerned the Trust's formal objection to planned development on several designated and proposed Local Wildlife Sites.

By January, the Cabin Hill wetlands were beginning to flood, my monthly visit producing 21 **Common Snipe** and 10 of the smaller and scarcer **Jack Snipe**. Large insects are a rare sight in mid-winter, so I was surprised to find a big hairy **Fox Moth** caterpillar on one of my dune walks. Also unexpected was a **Chiffchaff** calling at Freshfield Dune Heath reserve, though this summer-visiting warbler has been seen more often in winter since the 1950s.

My attention was also drawn to lots of small puffballs on long stalks. These turned out to be **Winter Stalk-ball**, a rather local fungus of calcareous dunes. Even rarer, however, was the **Red-eared Terrapin** washed up dead on the tideline at Ainsdale. This American freshwater turtle was far more likely to be a dumped pet washed out of Sands Lake, than a trans-Atlantic voyager.

Although February is considered the depth of winter, it is easy to find signs of approaching spring, perhaps reflected most obviously in the **Snowdrop**.



Having escaped from gardens this lovely flower has become increasingly abundant since the 1960s, being especially prolific at

Cabin Hill Wood. By

late February it had been joined by other spring bulbs, such as the delightful **Early Crocus**, **Garden Grape-Hyacinth** and ubiquitous **Daffodils**. The latter are mostly garden varieties, apart from a long-established colony of the small wild **Daffodil** near the entrance to Ainsdale National Nature Reserve. One of the first native flowers is the tiny white-flowered **Common Whitlow-grass**, a member of the cabbage family. Also appearing before the end of the month were **Lesser Celandine** and **Colt's-foot**, while the earliest of the "pussy-willows", **Siberian Violet-willow** supported its characteristic decorative catkins. Increasing bird song is also a feature of February, **Robin**, **Blackbird** and **Great Tit** being prominent songsters in Ravenmeols Woods. A **Song Thrush** came regularly to food in my garden but its tuneful repetitive phrases are heard much less often these days. Most powerful of all, however, was a **Mistle Thrush** really letting rip from one of the tallest trees in Freshfield.

The March meeting of the Altcar Training Camp Conservation Advisory Group brought news of Steve Cross's monthly counts of the high-tide shorebird roost south of Formby Point. This may well be the largest single wader-roost between the Dee and the Ribble with a remarkable December peak of 37,500 birds, **Knot** being the dominant species. Many of these waders feed on the

north Wirral shore, flying across Liverpool Bay to take advantage of disturbance-free conditions on the Rifle Range frontage. Mobile flocks of **Crossbills** during March included ten on Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve with their unmistakable chipping calls. Late in the month, catkins on **Goat** and **Grey Willow** attracted numerous queen **Buff-tailed Bumblebees**, together with a few **Red-tailed** and **Tree Bumblebees**. I also called in at Larkhill, Formby, to enjoy the wonderfully colourful male catkins of **Purple Willow**. Nearby, three **Red Squirrels** were showing in the National Trust's "squirrel reserve", the dark fur of one individual being a reminder of their continental origin. Finally, a sunny Good Friday brought out the first **Sand Wasps** and a **Groundhopper** at Ravenmeols and a report from Pete Kinsella of **Vernal Mining Bees**, three **Wheat-ears**, and his earliest ever **Swallow** at Hightown.

March 2016

A fairly wet start and finish to the month were separated by a prolonged settled spell of about two weeks, rather typical of recent early springs. The dry period caused a fall of about 3.5cm in the sand-dune water-table, according to my weekly measurements at the Devil's Hole slack. However coastal wetlands remained deeply flooded throughout, attracting the usual early breeding amphibians. A visit to Wicks Lake on 10th was enriched by the gentle purring of male **Common Frogs** in the reed-bed, while more strident calls came from male **Common Toads** competing for females. Near the brim-full lake were lots of spring flowers, including the first **Primroses** and garden-escapes such as **Siberian Squill**, **Corsican Hellebore** and **Spring Snowflake**.



A couple of days later, large numbers of **Common Toads** were assembling to spawn at Cabin Hill. It was rather disturbing to count 58 individuals recently killed by a predator that had mainly eaten just the back legs. We have seen this kind of mortality at Cabin Hill before but have never been able to identify the perpetrator. It seems to be quite unusual because **Common Toads** are protected by poison glands in their skin. On 25th, I counted 12 **Smooth Newts** in the scrape near Range Lane, Formby. These newts are common and widespread in the dunes but often hard to see because they prefer deep water at this time of year. Through my binoculars, I watched a female trying to eat **Frog** spawn, a behaviour I hadn't observed before, though it is mentioned in the literature.



Also new to me was a pale blue "tide-line" around a scrape at Birkdale Green Beach.

Closer inspection revealed thousands of 1mm-long jewel-like **Ostracods**, a type of planktonic crustacean sometimes known as "**Seed Shrimps**". Other signs of spring

included the flowering of several kinds of willows. At Ravenmeols, the male "pussy willow" catkins of **Goat** and **Grey Willow** attracted hosts of queen bumblebees, mainly **Buff-tailed** but also a few **Red-tailed** and **Tree Bumblebees**. I also stopped off at Larkhill, Formby, to photograph the wonderfully colourful catkins of **Purple Willow**, one of my favourite plants. Nearby, three **Red Squirrels** were showing at the National Trust's "squirrel reserve", one particularly dark individual reflecting the likely continental origin of this population. Another targeted visit was to the Southport Marine Lake dunes, where the nationally rare **Early Sand-grass** is locally abundant. Being only about 3cm tall, it is often described as "the smallest grass in the World" and also has a particularly early flowering season from February to April.

Early insects included a **Small Tortoiseshell** on 7th and a black beetle I encountered on the frontal dunes at Ainsdale on 13th. I knew it was a weevil but this is an enormous family. Nevertheless, it didn't take long to identify it on the internet as the **Black Marram Weevil**, a local insect confined to dunes around the British coast. A warm sunny Good Friday produced a **Sand Wasp** and a **Groundhopper** at Ravenmeols, while Pete Kinsella reported the first **Vernal Mining Bees** at Hightown, where he also saw three **Wheatears** and his earliest ever **Swallow**.

Other birds on the move included **Crossbills** reported at several places along the coast. A mobile flock of 10 with their unmistakable chipping calls was at Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve on 16th, while five **Redpolls** feeding on **Sea Rush** seeds made an attractive picture at Weld Road saltmarsh, Birkdale at the end of the month.

The **Redpoll** used to be a common bird hereabouts but has undergone a massive decline both nationally and locally since the 1970s. **Avocets** continued their spring influx to the RSPB's Marshside Nature Reserve, where I counted 60 on 14th.

Remaining winter visitors included 38 **Common Snipe** and three **Jack Snipe** at



Cabin Hill, where the flock of curious and surprisingly tame **Herdwick sheep** from the Lake District strolled right up to me. This attractive and hardy breed is ideal for conservation grazing on the National Nature Reserve.



A meeting of the Altcar Training Camp Conservation Advisory Group brought news of Steve Cross's monthly counts of shorebirds for the national wetland birds survey. During the winter, up to 37,500 waders flocked to the high-tide roost on the Rifle Range frontage, **Knot** being the dominant species. This is probably the

largest single wader roost from the Dee to the Ribble. It seems many of these birds feed on the north Wirral shore, flying across Liverpool Bay at high-water to take advantage of the disturbance-free beach at Altcar.

The Sefton Coast's reputation spreads far and wide. Recently, I was contacted by the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew to request a sample of **Dune Wormwood** seed for the National Collection. Crosby Coastal Park is one of only two British localities for a plant first found here in 2004.

LIFEBOAT QUIZ: THE ANSWERS

When was the lifeboat station built?

The original station was built before 1776 as its existence was marked on a navigation chart of that date. The 'original station' would however have only been a light-weight structure, described in the contemporary documents as a 'shade'.

What was the reason for the lifeboat station being built, had there been many shipwrecks or loss of life at sea?

Yes, there were increasing losses of ships and lives at that time due to increasing trade, the dangerous and ever-changing channels and inadequate provision of navigation aids such as buoys and beacons.

Why was the lifeboat station built in Formby? *Is there significance in the fact it is near Liverpool. Yes, the port of Liverpool which by definition at that time extended from the mouth of the Ribble to Anglesey was rapidly increasing in importance but the seaward approaches were extremely risky and continuously changing. The two main channels had not been stabilised and the sandbanks were constantly shifting.*

Who built the lifeboat station? *When "a boat for saving lives" was initiated at Formby Point, it became necessary for, a "lifeboat station" to be constructed. Originally this was a light wooden structure. It was built on the orders of the Dock Master William Hutchinson and Dock Trustees. Prior to this the Dock Trustees had supported a 'scheme for saving lives from drowning' at the Old Dock. This had been initiated by a Liverpool Physician Dr Thomas Houlston.*

Was this life boat service the first known service for sea rescue? *Yes, it was the first ever vessel, stationed, manned and dedicated to the sole purpose of saving life from the sea. Following researches Patrick Howarth of the RNLi visited us, look at the evidence and the site, and recorded the fact that Formby was the first in his book 'Lifeboat, In Dangers Hour'.**

The term 'Lifeboat' was not used until later.

How did the lifeboat station become so successful? *Simply because it was placed in an appropriate geographical position and fulfilled an increasing need when new docks were constructed and the port of Liverpool developed. The volume of shipping entering and leaving increased. The work of the Litherland Lifeboat builder Richard Costain who developed improved and specialised boat design also played a significant part.*

When did the last launch take place?

15 April 1916 : a practice launch with the aid of the Royal Artillery men and horses then stationed at Altcar. A film was made of this launch and is now available on CD from North West Film Archives.



Are there any particular interesting stories about the lifeboat station? *Yes, perhaps the most interesting is that involving the then village doctor Richard Sumner; the loss of the Pilot Boat No 1 'The Good Intent', in 1833. Unfortunately the Formby lighthouse keeper drowned, and of a crew of 22 only 9 were saved. (See pp 27-42, 'Britain's First Lifeboat Station'; Yorke & Yorke, Alt Press 1982).*

What is the legacy of the lifeboat station nationally and internationally? *The success of the station led to the establishment of similar stations by the precursors of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, at Liverpool itself, the Magazines, (now New Brighton), Hoylake, Hilbre Island, and Point of Ayr. Subsequently other coastal organisations and port authorities followed suit, subsequently leading to the formation of the RNLi.*



FORMBY WAR MEMORIAL

Reg Yorke



A Formby War Memorial, was first proposed in April 1919 when a special committee was established to look into it. The first question was where it should be placed. The Weld Blundell and the Formby Estates were approached but needed to know how much land was required and the proposed nature of the Memorial. The provision of a park was considered but thought to be too expensive. Following discussion it was resolved unanimously that a monument be erected in memory of the fallen and the necessary appeal be made to finance it, after which the design was to be left in the hands of a committee. It was finally agreed that the Weld Blundell estate would provide a suitable site. In addition to a monument a letter was received from the Lord Lieutenant of the County suggesting an application to the War office for two German guns to be allocated to Formby! The local government board offered to sanction "reasonable expenditure" but it was resolved unanimously that Formby Urban District Council should bear the cost of the peace celebrations and Memorial out of the general district rate.

Cllr Fred Stephenson (an upholster) then recommended the creation of a Memorial Garden with gravel walks, and seats; "a place in the fresh air a central point to meet

a friend ,or take a stroll". A Memorial to those who died which will give joy and pleasure to the young and old who when passing through the gates of the garden will ever remember the fallen".

It is now largely forgotten that at that time there was very little open public space in Formby. Despite it being a rural village, what is now the Duke Street Park was still a farm, the sand dunes and pinewoods were private property and intruders prosecuted. The only recognised sports area was the Cricket Club ground. The small local private schools may have had some playing fields but the three local church schools only had playgrounds. The present day open fields at Deansgate Lane were intensively farmed. The idea of "a Memorial Garden" was greatly welcomed and now differentiates Formby's Memorial from most others.

It so happened that the site at the corner of Three Tuns Lane and School Lane was still undeveloped as it had been considered for the site of new council offices, the previous Council Offices in Moorhouse Buildings, Church Road becoming inadequate as Formby grew.

In a letter to the Formby Times Mr Stephenson suggested a stone archway entrance carved on which would be its name 'Formby Memorial Garden'. Inside the gates a tablet could be erected suitably inscribed and the names of "our comrades who have fallen" written. For the expert gardeners in the district the planning and planting would be a labour of love to make a park or flowerbed to take part or flowerbed under their special care. It would be surrounded and provided with gravel walks, seats and a 'shelter house'. "A place to go to sit in the fresh air a central point at

Summer Programme

A copy of our Summer 2016 Programme can be found with this Newsletter. It has a variety of activities throughout June, July, August and September and includes a number of walks of differing but not challenging length.

Putting together this Programme has been more difficult than usual this year as we have no individual or small group of Members who keep an eye on this area and liaise with the Committee to decide its final composition.

We would dearly welcome some support in what is not an onerous job in itself and which would receive every support and encouragement from the Committee. The work is done mainly in the early spring and with extra tweaking in early summer.

All Meetings and Activities will also be advertised on the website and the fortnightly free newspaper, 'The Formby Bubble', alongside a regular article written by FCS members.

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