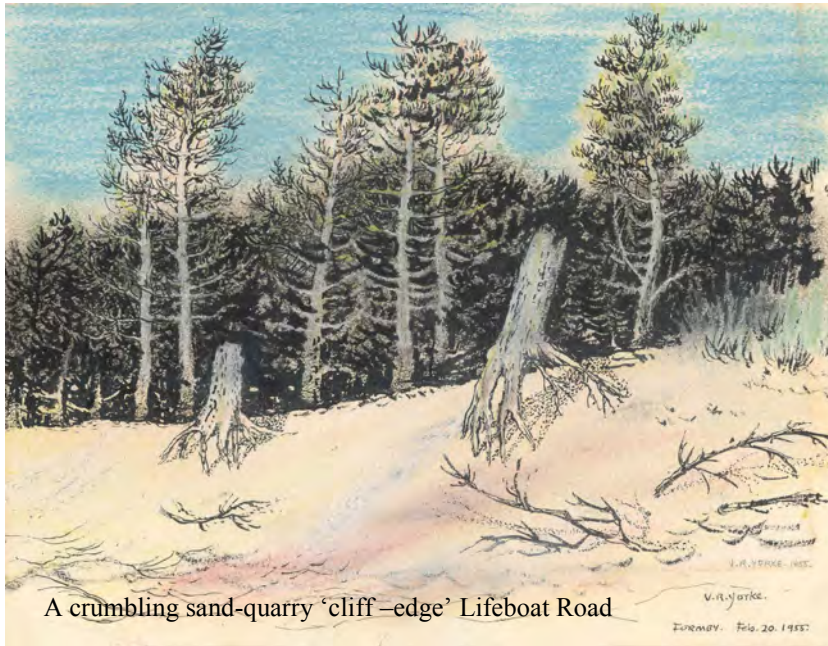


# Formby Civic News

The Newsletter of the Formby Civic Society

## Sand-winning Project forging ahead



Members of the FCS are giving their help in an important local research project being undertaken with support from Natural England and Sefton Council on the 'sand-winning' which previously took place on the 'dune backlands' south of Wicks Lane and in Ravenmeols.

This seems to have started in the 1930's on an industrial scale and gave employment to dozens of local men, a financial return to the then cash-strapped Formby family, established several local haulage businesses, such as Woodward's, Kelletts, Steven and Hooks and Rainfords; provided vast amounts of very valuable sand for glass making (Pilkingtons) and foundries in the 'black country'. It also left a 'dune-backland' levelled and ready for

asparagus cultivation. Finally it left the dune landscape with its scrub willow, dewberries, Evening Primrose and Grass of Parnasus we are familiar with today.

The dune area concerned was mainly owned by descendants of the Formby (manorial) Family who it is said first started selling sand to pay Death Duties in the 1930s. This may be an oversimplification A significant tract of their land was acquired by the Formby Land and Building Co. incorporated in 1875. We have a map of the area concerned and the original plans to construct a new 'resort' type development inland of the double-decker Promenade now under the dunes between Albert Road and Alexandra Road. Apart from the now sand-buried double-decker promenade the only surviving building on the coast itself is Sea-bank House. Stella Maris, once a home for disadvantaged Liverpool children and then a Radar Station

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November 2007

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Field Gentian (see p7)

The Planning and Amenities Sub-group has now settled into an effective routine for dealing with business, mainly local planning applications, but also more general issues from time to time. All significant documents drafted by me on planning and related matters in the Society's name are vetted by the group's members so that an agreed document is the end product. We make generous use of e-mail and the telephone to sort out anything problematic, so document preparation goes smoothly. We meet regularly, generally a few weeks before Society Committee meetings, viz. once a quarter, so we can take stock of past issues and anticipate what may be relevant to the future. We make a detailed report to the Committee and seek its endorsement of our activities. The group is informal in its constitution and at present consists of me as its chairman/secretary, the Society's chairman - *ex officio* – and two others, viz. Dr. Reg Yorke and Mrs. Dru Haydon. We need a fifth member to reach our full complement and members of the Society are invited to volunteer to join the group. Access to the Internet is essential – dial-up is quite adequate – but no special knowledge of planning is necessary. All that is needed is an interest in the built environment and in the amenity of the Formby community. It is important that opinions expressed publicly in the name of the Society are not idiosyncratic, but are subject to a broad accountability within the Society, the vitality of which depends on the readiness of its membership to participate in and take responsibility for its activities. So we do hope we shall hear from you.

We have continued to be concerned about the intentions of the Environment Agency (EA) in relation to the refurbishment of the Altmouth pumping station which protects Formby from flooding by the river Alt. We wrote to the case officer, who dealt with the planning application to the Council by the Environment Agency (EA) for a flood control pool at Lunt Meadows and other works related to

improving flood protection in the lower Alt, asking that the Council give further consideration to Condition 15 attaching to the approval of the scheme given in August, 2006. That condition requires the retention and reconditioning of two of the existing very large diesel pumps for standby at the refurbished station; it is the only means the Council has of influencing arrangements and standards at the station. We explained that the EA has put on public record that the old diesel pumps will be *completely* dispensed with and that all the replacement pumps will be electric, so Condition 15 will *have* to be renegotiated at some stage if the flood pool comes to be built. That being so, there are now only two options available for backup, viz. dual electricity supply or a diesel electric generator; on purely security terms, there are strong arguments why the latter is to be preferred. We further explained that the fate of the existing diesel storage tanks is in the balance. An earlier decision to remove them is now on hold, but, if they were to go, that would pre-empt the possibility of diesel-electric backup. We urged the

**“Because of its importance, we hope to engage the interest of Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, MP on the implications of the White Paper”**

case officer to engage with the EA with a view to renegotiating Condition 15 while all options are still available. We were concerned that her first contact with the EA led her to believe that there was no intention to change the nature of the scheme, but our further explanations caused her to make additional enquiries, in consequence of which she has now written to the EA to remind them of the condition. She has also pointed out to us that the Council can enforce Condition 15 only if and when the overall scheme for the flood control basin is implemented.

The Planning White Paper from the Department of Communities and Lo-

cal Government has loomed large on the horizons of all those engaged with planning matters, and it is the subject of another article in this issue of the *Newsletter*. I made a comprehensive and largely critical response to the consultative document *Improving the Appeal Process in the Planning System*, which is an ancillary document to the White Paper, because it bears most directly on everyday local planning applications. I also made a selective and again largely critical response to main document itself which includes proposals for nationally significant changes to the planning system. Because of its importance, we hope to engage the interest of Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, MP on the implications of the White Paper.

The Society's Chairman made a selective and largely approving response to the DEFRA consultative document *Implementation of the right to apply for orders to extinguish rights of way and associated rights of appeal*.

I have had a long and constructive conversation with the Assistant Director of the Planning & Economic Regeneration Department, in which matters that had been outstanding for several months were discussed, viz. telecommunications masts, the Council's Planning Delivery Grant, the three remaining appeal cases which are yet to be reconciled and changing the phrase *notification period* as used on the Department's website to *period for comments*. Regrettably, I have to report that none of the responses promised me during the conversation has been delivered.

We were all very disappointed that the Planning Inspector found in favour of Orange despite our best efforts to have the appeal dismissed, so in due course we will have a phone mast and its obtrusive ground equipment in the centre of the pavement outside Barclays Bank at its Halsall Road frontage. We believe that the Inspector's Decision Report fell below the standard of analysis that we are entitled to expect. Our Chairman wrote to the Company Secretary of  
*Continued p4*

## History Group Report by Barbara Yorke

We have had a very busy summer organising the 'At Home' Local History Conference for the Lancashire Local History Federation which was successfully held at Formby Hall Golf Club on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October. About 90 people (including Speakers) attended from all over Lancashire and Merseyside and we have had some very positive feed-back. After three formal presentations Tony Bonner ran a small 'Think Digital' Workshop' (Chaired by Ray Derricott) in the afternoon but most participants enjoyed the beautiful weather to visit several sites of historical / archaeological significance on the coast.

These visits were greatly helped by the availability of two coaches which we were able to provide thanks to financial from *Express Sefton*.

Tony Bonney has been scanning all Muriel Sibley's 35mm colour transparencies (as well as most of the Society's other photographic records), onto the Society's new computer, a very time-consuming process but very worth while. These images (over 2000), are also being labelled and indexed so that they can be identified and found much more easily than has ever been possible in the past. He is also scanning her Line-drawings and watercolours which also can be correlated with other images. This is a huge project and as we have recently

discovered, similar in scale and standard, to many highly publicised professional archives. Community Archives are now becoming increasingly valuable and accessible in exactly this way and as a voluntary society we are leading the field locally

Our main task for the next few months is to help John Houston with his 'sand-extraction' project. John is trying to find out when 'sand-winning' on the Formby coast started, what areas were involved and which firms did the haulage. Also where the sand went and for what use it was put. We would like to record any personal memories and see (or just as important) be allowed to make copies of any photographs which show the actual work or its aftermath. We already have one or two. We plan to discuss progress at our History Group meeting on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December as the initially arranged speaker is now unavailable.

Our first (and very interesting) meeting of the new season was by Diane and John Robinson on 'The Light-

**"Our main task for the next few months is to help John Houston with his 'sand-extraction' project".**

houses of Liverpool Bay'. Their book with this title has recently been published. Formby and the two former Crosby lighthouses are very much part of our Formby lifeboat Story and it has been a delight to share information with Diane and John. We have now acquired a copy of their book for our Local History Library.

We have had the usual periodic requests for information including a particularly interesting one from Sara Lane whose mother had been brought up in Freshfield. Sara who now lives in Surrey paid an unexpected personal visit to Formby clutching a photograph of her parents standing in the front garden of an unknown house in about 1912. Fortunately we were able to identify the house and take her to it. It has hardly changed. Sara has very kindly written an account of her visit which we are including as an article in the next Newsletter in our recently commence series on 'Formby Roots'.

Speaking about this subject, we were very pleased to cooperate with U3A in their organisation of a Family History Day at Holy Trinity Church Hall during October. Our stand attracted quite a lot of interest, perhaps particularly Tony Bonney's ongoing computer display of images of historic Formby and Freshfield.

## The Planning White Paper by Desmond Brennan

The Planning White Paper – *Planning for a Sustainable Future*, to give it its official name – has as its inspiration the *Barker Review of Land Use Planning* (see the May, 2007 issue of the *Newsletter*) which sought to devise planning policies with the primary purpose of facilitating economic development. The White Paper, if it translates into statute, would radically change the way planning issues are dealt with, and it is an appropriately hefty document

(over 200 pages in length, with over a further 100 pages of supporting ancillary documents). To merely list the topics covered would take up the whole of the space available for this article, so I will deal with just a couple of topics that are of particular interest. One is the fundamentally new way in which major infrastructure schemes would be determined and the other is proposals for speeding up the processing of householder planning applications. However, be-

fore embarking on reviewing these topics, it is a relief to be able to report that the very damaging recommendations of Barker in relation to green belt policy have not made their way into the White Paper, and that the government has unambiguously declared that it has no intention of changing its present green belt policy. For major infrastructure developments, such as major airport and port projects, strategic road network (Continued p 10.....)

## Planning Matters (Continued from p2)

Orange in one last effort to get the Cloisters car park considered as a preferable alternative site for the mast – amazingly, it was not even included in the list of candidate sites. Apart from an acknowledgement, we have not had any response.

We are currently heavily engaged in opposing three appeal cases which are before the Planning Inspectorate at the moment. One is by the proprietor of the Flames Pizza and Kebab House at 35 Brows Lane, who is seeking to extend the opening hours of his business; this is his second attempt to do so, despite there being no change in the planning considerations relevant to the conduct of his business. Particularly unfortunate, therefore, is the very recent decision of the Local Licensing Authority (LLA) to grant a licence for even later opening hours, a decision which is all the more incomprehensible given that a similar application in May, 2006 was dismissed by the LLA. The new licence cannot be legally exploited because it is incompatible with the planning permission for these premises. The second appeal concerns a high wall and gates at 5 Argarmeols Road, for which the situation is complex, because there are really two appeals, one against the refusal of planning permission and the other against the Enforcement Order (the structure already exists). The planning appeal is by the Hearing Procedure and the enforcement appeal by the Written Procedure, and each appeal will be decided by a different Inspector. This over-elaborate and irrational situation would not occur if ever the relevant proposals in the Planning White Paper evolve into statute. The third appeal is by Firwood Timber and Building Supplies against the Council's refusal of its planning application to develop the site at 89 Altcar Road (on the corner opposite Tesco at the junction of Altcar Road with the by-pass); it will be decided by the Public Enquiry procedure. There is not space in this article to provide details about these cases; more information is available on the Society's website.

The Flames licensing application referred to above has created an unexpected difficulty for the Society. We had made a submission to the LLA opposing the application on the grounds that it would be harmful to the amenity of residents living nearby, but our submission was refused by the LLA despite its having accepted previous submissions from us. The reason given is that the Society does not qualify as an *interested party* within the meaning of the Licensing Act 2003. The relevant Section of the Act is 13(3b); it specifies that *a body representing persons who live in the vicinity [of the premises which are the subject of the application]* qualifies as an interested party. The licensing officer has decided that *representing* has the very restricted meaning of *acting on behalf of a named person or persons at their request*. As a matter of policy, we do not undertake to act as an advocate for individuals; the Society is committed to taking the broader view and seeks always to further the *community* interest. We challenged the decision with the law officers, but, after an intense series of exchanges by e-mail and telephone, they have confirmed the decision. We are very fortunate in having the benefit of advice from one of our members, Paul Flodman, who is a lawyer; he is confident that the Council is in error in making this decision. Our response has been to complain to the Chief Executive of the Council, in the form of a detailed exposition of the legal arguments upon which our case stands, in the hope that the matter can still be resolved at local level. In response, the Council's Legal Director, while endorsing the LLA's decision, has sought the opinion of Counsel. Subsequent to rejecting our submission, the LLA rejected the submission of the Parish Council and for the same reason, even though the official guidance to the Licensing Act clearly states that a Parish Council qualifies as an interested party. We are giving the PC all the support we can to assist them in challenging the decision.

Unfortunately there is not the space

in this article to detail the several planning applications about which we have made submissions to the Council's Planning Department, but information about them is available on the Society's website. However, mention must be made of a particularly pleasing result concerning the appeal to The Planning Inspectorate to change retrospectively the semi-detached house at 9 Devon Farm Way from a *Residential Property* to a *House in Multiple Occupation*. The Planning Inspector who decided the case robustly dismissed the appeal and endorsed the arguments that the neighbours and the Society had submitted to him.

### Coastal Access

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007 at the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth, Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, announced that the Government intends to legislate so that the public will have the right to walk around the English coast for the first time. This decision follows the end of the consultation on options to improve access to the English coast. DEFRA expects to publish a report on the responses to the consultation before the end of the year. Fortunately we do not of course have a problem of individual public access to our coast, but as we recently discovered if we take an organised party Sefton MBC require us to have £5 million public liability insurance, even if it is just a guided walk.

I am very unsure how justified this is, particularly the vast amount of documentation they have requested. I certainly think this should be looked into and if necessary challenged. For our last event Rachel Northover conceded on a personal level that she was willing to accept our present public liability of £2million but I think that was a personal favour on that occasion and not one we can count on in the future.

**David Willis**

## Summer Outing to Beetham by Alan Burton



*Society members at Leighton Hall*

The weather was set for a good day as 25 members and friends boarded the coach at Cross Green for an 8-30 start on 20th September. To avoid delays in Preston we took a cross country route to the M6 and headed north to our first stop at Carnforth railway station and museum. Much of David Lean's classic film *Brief Encounter* was made here in 1945 and the waiting room has been refurbished as it was at this time. The museum showed many interesting exhibits of Carnforth and its railway history from that period giving us a dramatic time shift as we stepped out onto the platform to see the Intercity 125 trains rushing through.

A short hop in the coach took us to the village of Beetham where Rosemary Buchanan kindly opened up the

church for our group and with her husband gave an interesting talk on its history. We had been told that we would not be able to go inside the nearby water powered corn mill as a major project would be underway to install a large

water turbine to generate green electricity for the adjacent paper mill. Fortunately for us a delay in starting the work meant that those who wished were able to see the ancient machinery still in working order and learn about the use of the mill for local art and community projects.

The Wheatsheaf Hotel provided us with what they described as a light two course lunch in a delightful upstairs private room before we headed off to nearby Leighton Hall.



*The Wheatsheaf, Beetham*

We were given a very informative tour of the hall by our jolly guide who told us about the Gillow family and their famous furniture making business in nearby Lancaster. It is still the family home and unlike some stately homes we were encouraged to sit on the furniture and one of our party ventured a few notes on the Bechstein concert grand piano in the music room.

On the lawn in front of the hall birds of prey from the aviary were flown for us, including an enormous eagle owl, after which we were able to tour the grounds and aviary before afternoon tea was served. This proved to be on the same generous lines as our "light" lunch and several of us made good use of the doggy bags requested.

Our journey home was delayed for a few minutes by the breakdown of a large blue lorry right on the exit roundabout of the M6 slip road but we arrived back around 6-45 pm after an enjoyable day. Unfortunately our numbers were lower than normal possibly because the visit took place after the end of the school holidays and many people were away. In future we should probably arrange our event a few weeks earlier as we did in 2006 to make it more convenient for our members. Please let us know what you think about this



*Above; Outside the Wheatsheaf, Beetham.*

*Left; Enjoying Lunch in the upstairs Room*

# MORE ABOUT FOOTPATHS....by David Willis

September's meeting of the Society featured a presentation on the long-term plan for Sefton's footpaths. This elaborated on FCS Newsletter items earlier this year about the Formby-Hightown footpath and a bid by Sustrans for funding that could affect that path.

Well, the good news is that the Sustrans bid has reached the final six of the high-profile projects competing for a single grant of up to £50 million from the Big Lottery Fund. Unusually, the competition "Living Landmarks: The People's Millions" will have the winner decided by public television vote next month (December). Sustran's entry (known as "Connect2") is the only UK-wide project. Sustrans is working with 79 local communities across the UK to

overcome long-standing barriers, such as busy roads, railways or rivers, that are dividing communities and making it difficult for people to travel on foot and bike as part of their everyday lives. By creating new bridges and crossings, providing access routes to local places for pedestrians and cyclists which, in many places, link into the National Cycle Network, Connect2 will contribute to promotion of healthier living, safer access to local services, particularly for children, and help to reduce local car journeys and the pollution caused.

Although the Hightown to Formby link isn't one of the chosen 79 projects it is in the list as one of 20 reserve schemes that will be called forward should any of the final 79

schemes find they are unable to complete their programme. The bid's description for this route is "This connection will make a huge difference to the journey between Hightown and its nearby centre of Formby. At present the route by road is circuitous and quite unsuitable for family cycling. The proposed route will make use of an existing footpath to create a high quality promenade between the two towns that is direct, convenient and will change the mental map of the area for local people".

Local support will be vitally important in making sure that Connect2 succeeds. So when the programme goes on air you may want to look closely at what Connect2 offers and consider voting for it.

## Wildlife Notes, Autumn, by Phil Smith



### August

August is the month of the "Glorious 12th" – not particularly relevant to our grouse-free coastline you may think, but we do have the Red Grouse's food-plant, Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), and in some abundance. Thanks to recent work by the National Trust at Larkhill, Natural England at Montagu Road and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust at Fresh-

field, joy gloriously released from the grip of dense woodland and heathland, human activity has quickly reduced the loss of wildlife. The reserve, by voluntary work, has now that the Red Grouse (Common Lizard), a UK list of Priority Species for conservation action because of its national decline.

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**"recent surveys .....show that Freshfield Dune Heath Nature Reserve now supports about 200 Common Lizards"**

The reserve also has an extraordinary variety of plant-life, some 297 different kinds according to the latest cal-

culation. More good news is that a series of ponds recently dug on the nature reserve with the help of the Environment Agency have been colonised by Water Voles (*Arvicola terrestis*). And let us not forget that this land is now open to the public for the first time in over 60 years!

Another visually stunning wild flower that puts in a welcome appearance at this time of year is the Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*). Not a grass at all but a relative of the saxifrages, its starry white blooms can be seen in drifts in dune-slacks all along the coast, especially where grazing by Rabbits or livestock controls the taller-growing plants. This species is so abundant here that it is easy to forget that it is officially listed as "endangered" in Lancashire. Grass-of-Parnassus was also a favourite of the Victorians. Writing in 1883, E.D. McNicholl observes: "There are localities among the sandhills beyond Birkdale where, in favourable seasons, so vast is the quantity of the Parnassia that the .....p7

## Wildlife Notes, Autumn, continued

whiteness of the ground may be compared to that given by daisies to the sward.” It is gratifying that, over 120



Smooth Cat's-ear

years on, this description still applies.

In my June notes, I mentioned the discovery of a rare plant, Smooth Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*) at Formby Point. This led me to search more widely and, to my amazement, I found it on almost every area of suitable habitat visited. This tiny annual likes sparsely vegetated acid grassland, usually heavily Rabbit-grazed. So far, I have recorded 24 colonies between Lifeboat Road and Ainsdale National Nature Reserve. These contain over 2600 plants, a population explosion that is difficult to explain, bearing in mind the fact that this is a nationally declining and “Vulnerable” species which our most celebrated botanist, the late Vera Gordon, never saw in over 60 years’ recording on the Sefton Coast. Presumably, the record-breaking weather conditions this year are responsible for the changing fortunes of the Smooth Cat's-ear, one of many local plants and animals apparently responding to climate change.

### September

The “mists and mellow fruitfulness” of autumn are invariably heralded by the evocative calls of Pink-footed Geese which start arriving from Iceland and Greenland in September. This year they came early and in record numbers, no doubt encouraged by northerly winds. Derek Forshaw, who organises the goose counts in the Northwest, reported a single flock of 18,000 birds on Scarisbrick Moss on

18th and reckoned there were at least 20,000 in the area. Many could be seen feeding at the RSBP Marshside reserve, joining a much more exotic visitor – a Great White Egret from southern Europe.

The other bird of the month was arguably the Common Buzzard. Not long ago, we hardly saw any but in recent years it has begun to breed here with spectacular success. Thus, Derek Forshaw saw 10 soaring together over Downholland on 22nd, while Derek Williams counted an astonishing 23 Buzzards on a tour of the mosslands.

There are still plenty of wildflowers to be seen on the sand-dunes in September. A visit to Crosby dunes with members of the Liverpool Botany Group was rewarded with the discovery of four young specimens of Dune Wormwood (*Artemisia campestris* ssp. *maritima*), close to the original plant that was found in 2004. It's only other known British locality is a small dune area in South Wales.

**“here are many wonderful slacks, cleared of scrub and pine trees in 1992, which now support thousands of Field Gentians (*Gentianella campestris*).”**

Another nationally rare Sefton Coast speciality is the beautiful Grey Hair-grass (*Corynephorus canescens*) which is mainly found in East Anglia. It was first recorded at Formby in 1928 but in recent years has been largely confined to Southport & Ainsdale Golf Course. Here, it lives in the “roughs” on some of our oldest and most acidic duneland. As it hadn't been surveyed for ten years, I was keen to see how it was doing and the Club kindly granted permission. Happily, my survey shows that, under the care of Course Manager Mr Mike Mercer,

the grass is increasing. Recent warm summers may have helped, as its seed production and germination are known to be badly affected by low temperatures.

In my August notes, I mentioned the study of another rare plant of acid soils, the Smooth Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*). This has undergone an extraordinary population explosion this year, again possibly for climatic reasons. One of the best areas for it proved to be the Dune Restoration Area on Ainsdale National Nature Reserve where I recorded nine colonies. Also here are many wonderful slacks, cleared of scrub and pine trees in 1992, which now support thousands of Field Gentians (*Gentianella campestris*). Rapidly declining in Britain, this most attractive flower has its English headquarters in Cumbria, but even here it is in trouble, so the Sefton Coast population is now one of the most important in the country.

Last month I said the Dragonfly Atlas Survey had been a wash-out. September wasn't much better, but a visit with Reg Yorke to Formby Hall Golf Course on 11th did produce a decent total of 18 Migrant Hawkers (*Aeshna mixta*). Another highlight on the edge of a pond was a spectacular golden flower I didn't recognise but which turned out to be a form of Nodding Bur-marigold (*Bidens cernua* var. *radiata*). Apparently, this variety is only found in the Northwest of England and was last recorded in the Formby area in 1928!



Nodding Bur-marigold

## Wildlife Notes, Autumn.

### October

A lot of my spare time this month has been spent as a participant in a fascinating project on the history and effects of sand-winning at Formby Point. This was a major industry from about the 1920s to the 1960s, removing several sand-dunes, such as Beacon Hill, Shorrocks Hill and Cabin Hill, which were imposing enough to have been given local names. The massive quarries can be seen on old aerial photographs going back to 1945. In addition, large amounts of sand were taken from dunes by the sea, despite the fact that Formby Point had been eroding since 1906. This so weakened the coast-protection role of the dunes that the then Mersey & Weaver River Authority built a sea-defence bank 750m long at Cabin Hill in 1970 at great public expense.

The effects of quarrying on landscape and wildlife must have been pretty catastrophic at the time but, fortunately, sand-dune habitats can recover quite quickly from major disruption and the quarries, although still visible on the ground, have now re-vegetated. The project organiser and Civic Society committee member, John Houston, is keen to hear from anyone with memories or pho-

tographs of the sand-winning industry. While surveying one of the old quarry sites on 21<sup>st</sup> October, I was surprised and delighted to find a juvenile **Sand Lizard**, still active despite the late date. This was in an area where over 100 captive-bred individuals were released in the 1980s, so it is encouraging that this “flag-ship” species is still present and breeding here. The North Merseyside Amphibian & Reptile Group hopes to



study this area in detail next year.

October is a great month for migrating birds, including Arctic-breeding species either passing through on their way south or arriving to winter with us. They include **Pink-footed Geese** from Iceland and Greenland which have turned up in unprecedented numbers. Derek Forshaw, who has been organising goose counts for over 30 years, tells me that the Lancashire & North Merseyside count of Pinkfeet on 14<sup>th</sup> October was

just over 46,000, of which 22,000 were on the Fylde. This is the second highest count ever in the region and the largest for October by a considerable margin. Many of these birds will soon be leaving us to feed on the harvested sugar-beet fields of Norfolk, before returning in the New Year.

Bird-watchers are also out and about this month looking for rare vagrants blown off course from their normal routes. As usual, the east coast scored most points, **Brown Fly-catcher** and **Red-flanked Bluetail** at Flamborough Head being among the highlights, but Wirral also had more than its fair share of extreme rarities, with **Radde's Warbler** and **Blyth's Reed Warbler**. Martin Mere pitched in with a **Great-grey Shrike** in mid-month, while Marshside's **Glossy Ibis** was present throughout, joined by an American **Green-winged Teal** from 14<sup>th</sup> and up to eight **Little Egrets**.

More prosaic were the 900 **Coot** and 188 **Mute Swans** I counted on Southport Marine Lake on 26<sup>th</sup>. The Marine Lake is actually one of the major haunts of these two birds in North-west England. Can anyone beat the record counts here of 1299 Coot and 260 Mute Swans?

## Sand-winning Project (Continued)

then a Radar Station during WW2 and other properties have long since gone. This development did however include the area closer to the railway including Carrs Crescent, Elson Road and the neighbouring residential area. In this connection we have a description of a light railway used to bring building material from Formby Station Sidings via Cambridge Road to the (then) Promenade development. This light railway may have later been used in levelling the nearby

dune backland area for asparagus cultivation as well as possibly in sand extraction. A much more important light railway constructed by a Mr Sherstone ran from sidings close to the Power Station straight down the Hoggs Hill path to the very high dunes then at Cabin Hill. Quite a few (now elderly) Formby gentlemen remember this railway with some affection. The removal of vast amounts of sand from Cabin Hill over a long period of time was subse-

quently thought to be sufficient to **(Continued p 9)** cause danger of flooding from the sea. Work had then to be done by the Alt and Crossens River Authority to remedy this by the creation of a (still existing) flood protection embankment on what is now the Cabin Hill NNR. The dune area between Hoggs Hill path and the sea-ward end of Range Lane became a 'Star-fish' decoy during WW2. (Contd p9).....



## Visit to Hall Road Coastguard Station by David Willis



The staff on duty at the “Coastguard Station” were surprisingly relaxed and accommodating considering their working space had been invaded by a 20-strong group of FCS members. We very nearly didn’t get to make the visit at all as, only a short time before, there had been the makings of a

major incident developing off the coast, which would have closed the control room to our group; fortunately it was averted.

Our guide to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) Liverpool Maritime Rescue Sub-centre was Ian Jackson, who gave us an introduction to HM Coastguard. This was followed by a DVD/Video presentation which, for many of us, was an eye-opener: we learned, for example, that MCA have helicopters, hovercraft, a plane and a tug; cover 10000 miles of coastline and a million square miles of sea; and that Coastguards are but one part of their remit. The local team coordinate

(with RNLI, RAF and Police) all search and rescue from North Wales into Cumbria as well as coordination for the administrations in Eire and the Isle of Man. The familiar blue and yellow patrol vehicles, however, are staffed by volunteers, of whom there are 20 working out of Crosby. This volunteer team is expert in dealing with rescues from mud and, using inshore rescue boats, from mud banks, for example. We well overstayed our allotted ½ hour in the Ops Room, where the questions and keen responses seemed endless. Our thanks again to Ian and his colleagues for a fascinating and educational introduction to this, our local, rescue service.

## Sand-winning Project (Continued from previous page)

Professional input to this research is being coordinated by John Houston and carried out by Dr Jen Lewis, (Field archaeology), Alan Crosby, (historical archives at Lancashire Record Office and elsewhere), Dr Phil Smith on the ecological and wild-life aspects and Dr. Steve Suggit of Edge Hill University have a geomorphological interest. When information has been Sefton Coast and Countryside Service will work with the FCS on the production of a leaflet and interpretation materials.

The Society research effort is mainly being focussed on local newspaper accounts and identifying and interviewing local individuals who have been involved in activity in some way in the past. Researchers include Barbara and Reg Yorke and Tony Bonney, Jean Beer, Jack Gore, Anthea Royden, and Pat McGregor.

Currently valuable information is being obtained from many people including Gordon Milles, Joan Rimmer, Walter Norris, Frank Noble, John & Molly Rathbone, Mr Bell, Dougie Knight, Brian Brankin, Peter Norris, Arthur Sutton, John Burns and Brenda Hall. We would very much like to hear from anyone else

with personal knowledge of this important aspect of Formby’s history.

Our interviewing and Recording aids include copies of the 1955 OS 6inch to 1 mile OS map (a copy for each interview, to be freely drawn and written on!) Also a small sound recorder.

Background official (and other) local printed or written records which have been identified include the Formby UDC Minute Books, Formby Times (on microfilm), Correspondence from Ministry of Housing & Local Government re Proposed extraction of sand from land between Wicks lane and Lifeboat Road (with map) 1966. and personal accounts written by several individuals in the past..

Photographs records include Muriel Sibley transparencies, particularly of Lifeboat Road Caravan Site; (now digitised). B/W photos of landscaping Wicks Lane extraction site to form the ‘man-made lake’; photographs of Dune Repair work at Cabin Hill and serial aerial photographs of dunes.

**We would very much like to see any surviving photos of the Hoggs Hill Path light railway.**

Progress is to be discussed at the next meeting of the History Group on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December, (as the programmed speaker has cancelled) and then a reasonably final account given at a General Meeting on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> February when John Houston, Alan Crosby and others involved in the project will speak.

**For further information or offers of information please contact Barbara Yorke on 01704 872187 or Tony Bonney on 01704 872862**

*The project has been made possible by a grant from Natural England through Defra’s Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. All present-day extraction of aggregates from quarries has to pay a levy to the Government to be used for social and environment projects which offset some of the problems caused by the industry. Here we are using a small grant for a research project linked to local history. The grant has been given to Sefton Council who will guide the work and submit all the grant claims. The project involves Sefton Coast and Countryside Service, Sefton Council Coast Defence Team, Sefton Coast Partnership, Formby Civic Society and Lancashire Wildlife Trust.*

## The Planning White Paper (continued)

major reservoirs, etc., the intention is to have a clear separation between policy and decision making. The role of ministers would be to put in place *National Policy Statements* (NPSs), which would define in detail planning policy for the relevant types of infrastructure. An *Independent Planning Commission* (IPC) would then examine a given development proposal, to ensure it conformed to the relevant NPS, and decide on the proposal in a quasi-judicial manner. So we need to examine critically how NPSs would be created and, no less critically, at how the IPC would be constituted and how it would operate in applying the NPSs.

The White Paper describes a mechanism for the creation of NPSs which involves the taking of evidence from experts in the field, from promoters of infrastructure schemes and from the public. NPSs would set policy for 20 to 25 years, with reviews about every five years and would be approved by parliament. In principle, it would be a marked improvement over the present situation in which a lack of clarity concerning government policy and indecision by ministers has too often caused long delay in determining large infrastructure proposals, delay frequently attributed unfairly to the Public Enquiry procedure itself. However, there is no escaping the party political influence the government of the day would bring to bear in deciding the content of NPSs. Thus, at the moment, there is every indication that the government wishes to bias planning policy in favour of the developer, and, since the relevant NPS would be mandatory on the IPC, that bias would be reflected in the decisions reached by the IPC. When a NPS is being created, few local community bodies would have an input, either because they did not realise it was relevant to them, or just because it would be so difficult for them to contribute. By the time the IPC came to consider an actual proposal, it would be too late for the affected

local communities to express a view on the all-important NPS by which the proposal would be decided. To make the process transparent and accessible to small interested groups, I believe all submissions to government relating to the creation of an NPS should be published on the website of the Department of Communities and Local Government, as should the proceedings of any public hearings. Further, the government should have a statutory obligation to demonstrate that it has given due consideration to the views expressed to it in the consultative process. Just how serious the government is in implementing the high standards it has described for the creation of NPSs is brought into doubt by its proposal that some existing Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) should be accorded the status an NPS, given that no PPS has been subjected to nearly a corresponding degree of rigour in its formulation. I am also concerned that, while it would be possible to challenge an NPS in the courts, the proposed grounds for doing so would be very narrow – illegality, procedural impropriety or irrationality; I would like to

**“an adequate period at the end of public proceedings allowed for community bodies, such as ours, to respond to statements made by the protagonists.”**

see added *failure to gather sufficient evidence*. Too often in the past, we have seen both government and commercial interests failing to carry out essential research for fear of what might be found; thereby, the precautionary principle could become a requirement.

The IPC would be responsible to the minister and ultimately to Parliament for its performance, but not for its decisions; its decisions could be challenged only in the courts and then on rather narrow grounds. A major infrastructure proposal would be determined by a panel of three to five commissioners, although, worryingly, a smaller, but

still significant, proposal would be dealt with by a single commissioner. It is a matter of concern that a sufficient range of expertise necessary to cope with a many faceted project could be found in so few panel members, and unlikely that professionals of sufficient distinction could be found who did not have unacceptable links with the major developers or other conflicts of interest. In the main, submissions would be in writing, although a concluding “open floor stage” would be a possibility. Only the commissioners would ask questions of the protagonists – cross examination of one protagonist by another would not be permitted. The complete elimination of the adversarial element in a situation in which very contentious claims can be expected to be made is a matter of great concern, especially to community groups which may have relevant local knowledge not otherwise available to the commissioners. I would like to see the commissioners able to look beyond the NPS. New evidence relating to policy should not have to wait for its consideration by the minister and incorporation in a revised NPS. Further, I believe the Commission should be free to make a reasoned judgment in respect of the relative importance of NPSs compared to contrasting policy statements made by internationally recognized authoritative bodies. It is worrying that the implementation of an approved project would be overseen by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), even though it may have been implacably opposed to the proposal. Once again, I believe that all documents connected with a proposal and the proceedings of any public hearing should be published on the Commission’s website and an adequate period at the end of public proceedings allowed for community bodies, such as ours, to respond to statements made by the protagonists. The government is anxious to reduce the number of domestic planning applications and is seeking ways of speeding up and at the same time cheapening the procedures for processing them

## The Planning White Paper (continued)

The delays in the system are seen as a reflection on the system itself, rather than as being due to its being under-resourced. The greatly increased number of householder planning applications is the direct result of the shortage and high cost of new housing, causing people to extend or modernize their present premises rather than to move. I believe the remedy is not to diminish planning standards, but to increase resources to LPAs and The Planning Inspectorate so they can continue to ensure good quality development. To reduce the number of planning applications, the government proposes greatly liberalizing permitted development. Some of the changes are sensible, but over all their effect would be to noticeably diminish the amenity of neighbours and the wider community. Most concerning, however, are the proposed changes to the appeal system.

It is suggested that an appeal against a decision made by a planning officer – as opposed to the Planning Committee – should be heard by a *Local Member Review Body*, comprising three or five local councillors. Such a body would lack jurisprudential consistency. The Council's Planning Committee is the representative body charged with deciding any given planning application. When an officer exercises their delegated authority in deciding an application, they are in effect acting on behalf of Planning Committee. It is not possible for a small group of Councillors, acting together as a Review Body, to be given powers considerably in excess of those possessed by Planning Committee and still maintain the democratic legitimacy of the decision process. The concept underlying the present appeal system is rational in the sense that the Planning Inspector brings to bear a high quality of professional judgement based on experience and a thorough knowledge of planning policy and law, *with detailed public exposition of the grounds for their decisions*. A Local Member Review Body would always remain an amateur body and

lack the independence, both actual and perceived, essential for the integrity and fairness of the appeal system.

Another very worrying proposal would limit the evidence before the Planning Inspector to what was before the LPA when it determined the application. Reliable evidence is the foundation of sound decision making. While it is sensible that it should not be permitted for new *issues* to be introduced at appeal, there should be no restrictions placed on the introduction of new *evidence* by any of the parties, including third parties. There can be no valid justification for wanting to exclude relevant new evidence from the Inspector's consideration. The mind set that has led to this proposal should have no place in the reform of a quasi-judicial process. No less objectionable is the suggestion that there should be a limit on the number of words in an appeal submission. Third parties find it difficult to gather essential evidence in the period allowed for comments on the initial application – nominally 21 days, but in effect usually nearer 10 days – so it is important, particularly

**“There can be no valid justification for wanting to exclude relevant new evidence from the Inspector's consideration”**

when matters are in contention, that additional evidence be permitted at the appeal stage. For example, in the Barracuda case, it was possible to refute inaccurate statements made by both the appellant and Council officers by the submission of additional evidence, which by its nature, required about thirty pages for its exposition. The Inspector, in dismissing the appeal, made it clear that the new evidence was an important factor influencing the decision. Had there been any restriction on the presentation of new evidence or in the number of words allowed for its exposition, there is every possibility that the appeal might not have been dis-

missed. The length of a document, whether it be short or long, does not correlate with its quality. What matters is that a document is relevant, and well prepared and presented.

Although the White Paper is a consultative document, it leaves a strong impression that the government is set on its proposals. While many of its proposals are to be welcomed, it is to be hoped that reasoned criticism from bodies such as the Civic Trust, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, the Royal Town Planning Institute, etc. will moderate its more worrying policies and, above all, that evidence-based decision making will be at the heart of any new legislation.

## ART GROUP REPORT

### Barbara Mossop

There is not much to report at the moment as, due to holidays, we did not return to Inca Blundell Hall to paint in September and we are still trying to find a Saturday which is suitable for members to go to the Liver Sketching Club for life drawing. Hopefully this will take place in the next few weeks. It is some time since the Group visited the Tate Gallery in Liverpool and we are therefore going to spend a half day there shortly. Our annual get together has been arranged for Saturday 12 January 2008. This is usually a popular event and an opportunity for us to discuss our future programme. There are a number of Exhibitions taking place locally in November and December and some of our members are exhibiting at these, for instance the AFA Exhibition in Holy Trinity hall and the Chat Exhibition in Little Crosby, both in November. The West Lancs Craft Guild will be at Rufford Old Hall one weekend in December for their Christmas event and this is an opportunity for people to purchase original hand made gifts. I hope to see some of our members at these events.

## **SOCIETY OFFICERS**

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**History Group;**  
Barbara Yorke

**Art Group Rep;**  
Barbara Mossop

**Amenities Secretary;**  
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9 Brows Lane, Formby

**Newsletter Editor;**

Dr Reg Yorke  
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## **DICKENSIAN DAY**

SATURDAY DECEMBER 1ST 2007

As previous years we will have a stall in the village between 9-30 am and 4-00 pm to publicise our activities and encourage new members. We will also be selling Sibley drawings, photographs, notelets and our leaflet Discovering Formby to raise funds for the Society.

If you are in the village please drop by for a chat and anyone who could help for an hour or so to man the stall and explain to people what we do would be doubly welcome.

Dickensian costume is not essential but something warm and cosy is certainly advisable.

If you can help or would like more information please contact any committee member or Alan Burton on 876454.

## **Future Programme**

Thursday, 13/12/07, '*Sand Extraction in Formby*' – update on current research with John Houston.

Thursday, 10/1/08, *Archive Evening*

2008

Friday 25/1/08 '*Movie Memories of Merseyside*' Film & DVD presented by Angus Tilston

Thursday, 14/2/08, Mike Stammers, '*Sefton 'Mock Corporation'*'.

Friday 22/2/08 '*Sand Extraction at Formby Point*', John Houston - Sefton Coast Partnership, and Alan Crosby - Honorary Research Fellow, Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster.

Friday Wed 12/3/08, 430pm,\* '*Coastal Flooding and Protection - the Policy Implications of Climate Change*' at Formby High School (FCS Contribution to National Science and Engineering Week); Dr. Kevin Horsburgh, National Tidal and Sea Level Facility, Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory, University of Liverpool

Thursday, 13/3/08, Mr J. Halsall, '*The Halsalls of Halsall 1212 – 2002*'

\* *Please note earlier meeting time.*

## **ART GROUP**

For details of the proposed visits to the Liver Sketching Club and Tate Gallery, due to take place shortly, please telephone me early November,

If you are coming to the Get Together at Lydiat Hall Farm on 12 January 2008 please contact me by the end of December so that tables may be reserved.