

Formby Civic News

the
CIVIC
trust

Formby Civic Society Newsletter

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February 2009

Wicks Lane Footpath Problem



Left; This photo from our archives shows Wick Lane as it used to be. A pleasant, quiet and wide sandy track down to the beach which has been used by local residents for hundred's of years.



Above: The two photos above show the extent of narrowing now under consideration. Could this possibly be wide enough for a horse and rider to pass with safety a mother with a child in a pram?

The Society first submitted an application for the Section of Wicks Lane from Larkhill Lane to Spruce Way to be designated as a Public Right of Way (RoW) in 2003 when it was first realised that, although the path to the shore from that point on has been a RoW for a very long time indeed, the relatively short (nearer) section specified had not been so designated and could at any time be closed by the then new owners, a firm of property

developers who had purchased Larkhill Farm with a view to demolition and re-development of the site.

As Desmond Brennan reports in Planning Matters (p. 4) this matter is going to the Formby Area Committee at its next meeting on 12th February.

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**SEE Annual
Dinner
Details
inside !**

Planning Matters by Desmond Brennan

Concerning the Altmouth pumping station, there are only a few notable developments to report. We have received answers to some of the questions the Environment Agency (EA) undertook to ask on our behalf when we discussed outstanding issues with its Regional Director and two of his senior colleagues at the October meeting convened and chaired by Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, MP.

Scottish Power has confirmed that the maximum power available from the network is 3 MW and the EA report that Scottish Power has now been contracted to provide this level of power to the pumping station. Scottish Power say that failure of the network supply is considered very unlikely; the Formby network is one of the most reliable in the country and there has not been an interruption to the supply in the last 40 years. If there were a failure of the supply, it is understood that, because the pumping station will be connected directly to the substation, as soon as the supply came back on so would the supply to the pumping station.

The EA has made enquiries to determine the feasibility of hiring a mobile 1 MW generator to power one storm pump in the event of a power outage. Subject to availability (about which there would be serious doubt in the event of a severe storm affecting a

wide area), such a unit could be delivered within 24 hours at an approximate cost of £4,000 per week.

Issues surrounding the specification of the storm pumps remain unresolved, and a concerning new element has been introduced. The EA has now said that the pumping-head to be used in the selection of the storm pumps is to be the *most commonly encountered head*, as opposed to the *maximum head* as agreed at the October meeting. We have asked for a precise definition of the *most commonly encountered head* and how it is to be evaluated; explanations are currently not available from the project team and our enquiry has been referred to the consultants. We have also asked at what level of authority in the EA the change has been authorized.

We were promised that the data which led to the choice of one 2 MW generator as opposed to two 1 MW generators on site would be disclosed to us before Christmas, but our present understanding is that Halcrow, the EA's consultant, has not yet final-

Issues surrounding the specification of the storm pumps remain unresolved

ised its Report on the matter, notwithstanding that the EA's decision to have a single generator had already been made before the October meeting!

There has also been some encouraging news. A third storm pump is currently being constructed from the components of the two retired storm pumps and is due for delivery in March, which will then give three storm pumps, each with a pumping capacity of 20 cu. metre/sec, to provide adequate flood protection during the refurbishment process. The contract for the refurbishment of some of the penstocks has been awarded, and work started on site at the end of November. The contracts to decommission the original underground diesel storage tanks and to modify the weed-screen, so as to double its capacity, have also now been awarded. The new diesel storage tank has been completed.

There has been significant movement in relation to Wicks Lane footpath, which the Society applied to have designated as a Right of Way (ROW) in October, 2003. The Order to modify the definitive map delineating ROWs has at long last been published and the period in which objections may be made ended on 22 January. One objection has been received to the effect that the route

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IT'S AGM TIME! By David Willis.

This newsletter is the last chance to remind members of the Society's Annual General Meeting, before the formal Notice is sent out in about 6 weeks time. Just the time for you to jot the date into your diary and onto the calendar!

As with all AGMs you will be updated on the Society's finances,

membership and activities. It's also your opportunity to question, lambaste (or praise, even!) those who organise events or carry out the 'backroom' activities that keep the society afloat. However, it's also the occasion when members need to choose individuals to carry out those tasks. Each year one or two committee members retire as the rules require, or resign for personal reasons: this year is no different. We need some more "ordinary" members to

join the committee (it isn't onerous!), so please pass your name to one of the existing committee members to express an interest and do put your name forward at the AGM.

As usual, the AGM will be followed by a brief presentation, which this year will be by Council Officers Dorothy Bradwell and Daniel Byron on the subject of "The Future of Conservation in the Built Environment".

DICKENSIAN DAY by Alan Burton



The arrival of November is the signal for the Membership and Fund Raising Group to dig out their old clothes, boots and unusual hats to start preparations for Dickensian day which takes place on the first Saturday in December. Our display boards

were renovated and up dated to illustrate the aims of the Society and to highlight topical issues.

Usually we also have to prepare for wet cold and windy weather but this year the day dawned bright, sunny and windless which was of great benefit to exhibitors and spectators alike. In addition to information about the Society and our meetings, we took the opportunity to sell Sibley drawings, photographs, notelets and our Discovering Formby leaflets in addition to the traditional lucky dip for children. We also repeated our special Dickensian Day offer of a

reduced subscription for the remaining part of the year to attract new members.

Thanks to the good weather and lots of interest in the stand our takings were £104 and we were delighted that sixteen new members signed up on the day. We extend a warm welcome to them and trust that they will enjoy the second half of our winter meetings programme followed by future years in the Society. Thank you to all the members who called in for a chat on the day and to everyone who helped with the erection and dismantling of the stand or with manning it throughout the day.

Wildlife Notes by Phil Smith

NOVEMBER 2008.

A particular highlight this month was the news from Derek Forshaw of a record number of **Pink-footed Geese** in Lancashire and North Merseyside. The co-ordinated count on 2nd produced an amazing total of 90,455, of which about 24,000 were on the Ribble Estuary and 20,000 at Martin Mere. This follows on from the previous record count in October and may be due to bad weather during harvest time resulting in more grain etc. being left in the fields. Usually, many of the birds have flown on to Norfolk by early November to feed on waste from the sugar-beet crop, but I understand that, at the time of the count, few geese had arrived in East Anglia.

Also making the news was the annual influx of **Whooper Swans**, mainly from Iceland. At Martin Mere, these had reached an impressive and noisy total of 1230 by 25th. Visiting bird-watchers were also entertained by six or seven different birds of prey on a daily basis. Whoopers were also feeding on Hall-sall Moss during the month, Derek Williams reporting a peak of 766 on 24th. Meanwhile, Marshside had its

usual hoards of ducks and waders, including the Ribble's now resident **Glossy Ibis** which turned up again in the middle of the month.

Little Egrets seem to be increasing

The Formby Black Poplar hunt that I reported on in October continued throughout November, more specimens being found at Range Lane,

all the time and I heard that up to 80 were counted at Freckleton on the north Ribble. They are certainly a fixture at Marshside now, as many as 20 being seen on 7th. Several are roosting at night on one of the Southport Marine Lake islands. The closely related **Cattle Egret** is also spreading north from the continent, a pair having bred in Somerset this year. One was seen at Marshside but the first multiple sighting in Lancashire was of three associating with a flock of sheep at Downholland Cross, which I rushed over to see on 1st.

The more usual winter visitors included four **Snow Buntings** on Ainsdale beach and several reports of

Woodcock; I managed to see two of these elusive, well-camouflaged waders during dune walks. There was also a notable influx of **Jack Snipe**. This is a bird one has virtually to tread on before it flies. One of the big dune slacks produced 15 of these stripy skulkers, while smaller numbers were on Birkdale Green Beach, where I also flushed a **Water Rail**. Unfortunately, I missed the three **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** on Birkdale shore from 22nd. Twelve or more **Crossbills** were in the pines at Fisherman's Path and I was pleased to hear the characteristic flight call of one flying north over Ravenmeols woods.



The Formby **Black Poplar** hunt that I reported on in October continued throughout November, more specimens being found at Range Lane, Larkhill and the area west of St.

Continued on p. 6.....

Planning Matters continued from p.2.

specified in the Order relates to not only a footpath but also an established bridleway and, in some sections, it is too narrow to be used safely as both a foot-path and a bridleway. The matter was discussed at the Formby Area Committee meeting on 8 January, when the objector received a sympathetic hearing at the Public Forum and the Committee formally noted her concerns. Subsequently, the objector has had a site meeting with the case officer, the land owner and a Borough Councillor and it appears a solution has been found. The matter comes before the next Area Committee meeting (on 12 February) and there is now a good prospect that a Public Enquiry may be avoided.

It is anticipated that the Planning Bill will become statute in April, but one of its measures is already in effect so far as Sefton MBC is concerned. The Planning Department, at the invitation of The Planning Inspectorate, has joined the Pilot Project whereby householder appeals will be fast tracked. The purpose of the Pilot is to validate the new streamlined appeal procedure being enacted by the government before the new law comes into operation across the country in April. The new procedure for householder appeals, which relates to the *Written Procedure*, requires all documentation to be communicated via the Internet. The adjudicating Inspector will be concerned only with material available to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), including the officer report, at the time its decision was made; new evidence will be inadmissible. This means that there will be no appeal statement and that the LPA will not be able to comment on the appellant's grounds for appeal; however, third parties will still be permitted to comment on an appeal, but they will no longer be able to do so once the new measure becomes law. The Inspector will now be unaccompanied when making the site visit. At present, an appeal may be made at any time within a period of 6 months following the LPA's refusal of the planning application, but, un-

der the new arrangement, this has been reduced to 12 weeks, and the intention is eventually to reduce it to 8 weeks.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of the new procedure arises when Planning Committee refuses an application which officers have recommended for approval. Such a circumstance does not occur very often, but, when it does, the case usually has a high profile and has generated a good deal of local feeling. When this happens under the new scheme, the case for refusal will comprise the minutes of the meeting, which will include whatever resolution Councillors have managed to draft at the table; it will scarcely amount to a comprehensive rebuttal of the appellant's case. To redress the balance, Councillors inclined to refuse the application may feel compelled to come to committee with a well prepared statement of refusal; such a consequence would sit ill with the concept that Planning Committee is intended to function as a quasi-judicial body which decides an application only after its members

The Planning Department, at the invitation of The Planning Inspectorate, has joined the Pilot Project whereby householder appeals will be fast tracked.

have heard all the evidence. Alternatively, Planning Committee could refer the matter back to officers for the preparation of a second report which would now properly represent the views of the committee. If this were done, it is very likely that the decision on the application would be delayed beyond the statutory eight-week period in which the LPA is required to determine the case, so giving the applicant the option to refer the matter to The Planning Inspectorate in any case, this time on the grounds of non-determination. Even under the past procedure, the refusal by Planning Committee of an application which has officer support creates a problematic situation. This is because it was the same officers who

recommended approval of the application who now had to present the Council's case for the dismissal of the appeal; in doing so they were limited to making the most of Councillor opposition during the debate in the Planning Committee, while the appellant was making the most of the arguments presented by the officers themselves in their report to the committee. It is just under these circumstances that third parties were able to play an important role. On a number of such occasions, the Society has commented on the appellant's case in a comprehensive and cogent way, which, judging from the Inspector's report, has been influential in determining the decision. We believe that denying third parties the right to make such contributions to the appeal process is just one example of how the new law, when it comes into effect in April, will be detrimental to the quality of decision making.

I conclude with a brief note on the Region Spatial Strategy (RSS) for NW England which was adopted at the end of last year; the brevity of this note should not disguise the importance of this document, which sets out the development and investment policies within the region up to 2021 to which all LPAs in the region must conform. The meaning of the term Spatial in this context extends beyond just the geographical; it denotes a holistic approach to planning and embraces all the issues that have to be taken into account in modern day development, in contrast to the planning documents on which LPAs currently rely, which are more limited in their scope and reach. Although Sefton's Local Development Documents are still being drafted, it is important to understand that planning applications will now have to meet the requirements of the RSS, with its overriding requirement for sustainability. Consequentially, we can anticipate that the character of planning decisions is set to change. For a summary account of the several representations we have made concerning recent planning applications, please see the Society's website.

History Group activities, by Barbara Yorke

Over and above our normal Local History Meetings, considerable progress has been made by Tony Bonney on the digitisation of our Historic Archive. This was fully reported by Tony at our annual Archive Evening on 8th January and a summary of progress appears below. We will also include an update in our next Newsletter. Since his talk, Tony has photographed the ten sheets of the Formby Tithe Map. In order to preserve detail as fully as possible, each sheet has been photographed in four (quarter) sections, as was done some years ago for the 1906 25 inch OS Map. The detailed Schedule for the Tithe Map (the original for which is held at Lancashire Record Office) was also put on an Excel computer spreadsheet some years ago so it is now possible to use this in conjunction with the map without having to get out our copy of the original, thus protecting this valuable document from unnecessary wear and tear.

Tony has also continued to make good progress in digitising our Newspaper Cutting 'Scrapbooks', just part of our history archive. We calculate we have about 6000 cuttings held in 32 volumes, 18 of which have been indexed. It is now possible when dealing with our fairly frequent enquiries from members of the public, (often by people at some distance who have seen our website), or those

trying to locate information for research projects to identify what information we hold very quickly and make copies, for example, of relevant Sibley Drawings, now available for a small charge. Reg accessed the archive in this way when preparing for a well attended talk he gave, (organised by Sefton Coast and Countryside) on 4th February on 'The Sefton Coast at War'.

Our collaboration has also been invited in several proposed projects for the Sefton Council 'Historic Landscape Partnership' Scheme. The first year's work is just beginning. This will include projects on Asparagus Cultivation, Military impact on local landscape, and the development of local Heritage Trails, particularly Ravenmeols.

Future plans include our participation once again during July in the 'Festival of British Archaeology'.

A pleasant recent surprise communication was from a former Editor of the Formby Times, now retired and living in Australia, who had discov-

a new Tide Measurement Scale has been constructed by Sefton and fixed to the upper tide-pole, sea-ward of the old Lifeboat station remains.

ered our website, and enthusiastically made contact, sending a very good photo of members of the Committee at a very early meeting in 1953.

In the last week, our archive has had another addition from Jennifer Lewis, a former History Group Secretary, (and subsequently Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Liverpool), who has given us, among other archive documents, a survey of the foundations of the Lifeboat House carried out by Merseyside County Council in 1978, together with some interesting photos of work in progress on this.

Finally, I am pleased to report that in the last month a new Tide Measurement Scale has been funded and constructed by Sefton Council and is now fixed to the upper tide-pole, seaward of the old Lifeboat station remains. This is (anachronistically!) marked with a Metric scale, rather than Imperial but it has been accurately surveyed. It is interesting to note that, in anticipation of rising sea level, it is one metre taller than the scale it replaces! This new tide-scale is to be accompanied by an interpretive panel, explaining its history and purpose, the information for which, was provided by ourselves, and added to by Prof. Philip Woodworth of the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory..

Society's founders remembered.



Some of the Society's founders are to be seen in this photograph, recently e-mailed from Australia. It was taken at an early Committee Meeting, very probably in 1954.

In the group are - back-row, extreme left, Mr Pat O'Neil, a former Editor of The Formby Times and committee member, also Mr. Fred Beardwood, James McGregor, Bill Wallwork, Dr Tom Kelly (Chairman), Mr P. Bradshaw and Miss Thompson; Front row, Mrs Gladys Bevan, Eileen Bowstead, Dr. J. Murphy, Brenda Lindsay, Mrs M. Wason and Mrs Lilian Rushton.

Mr. O'Neil made contact after discovering our website and congratulates us on our progress.

Wildlife Notes continued from p. 3.

St Luke's Church. The grand total is now approaching 500!

Finally, Graham Jones of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust sent me details of 69 different moths that he and Richard Burkmar recorded in just two August visits on Birkdale Green Beach. They include a new species for Lancashire and one not seen in the region since the 1950s. These records add further to the already sky-high reputation of this fabulous wildlife habitat.

DECEMBER 2008

A mostly quiet month, the coldest December for forty years was enlivened by an unusually large flock of 40-50 **Twite** on the shore opposite Weld Road, Birkdale. These upland finches, closely related to the **Linnet**, are identified by their buffy faces, yellow bills and distinctive call. This bird is Red-listed as a Species of Conservation Concern in Britain, its Lancashire breeding population having seriously declined in recent years to an estimated 30 pairs, mostly near Burnley. Here, and elsewhere in the south Pennines, feeding stations have been set up to supplement the natural foods that are limited by farming practices. There has also been a programme of colour-ringing so that movements away from the breeding areas can be followed. Surprisingly, these studies show that most Pennine Twite winter in eastern England on salt-marshes from Lincolnshire to Kent, while those resorting to our northwestern shores mainly nest in Scotland, especially the Hebrides. This interesting story is told in more detail in the recently published book "Birds of Lancashire and north Merseyside".

As usual, the RSPB reserve at Marshside was home to great numbers of waterfowl during the month. An organised count by volunteers on 15th found, just for starters, 9200

Wigeon, 2081 **Teal**, 1425 **Golden Plover**, 1976 **Lapwings** and 2245 **Black-tailed Godwits**. A further 9000 Wigeon were on the tidal salt-



marsh nearby. An American **Green-winged Teal** was also visible from the hides on some days. Birds of prey on the salt-marsh included up to two **Short-eared Owls** and **Peregrine, Merlin, Marsh Harrier** and **Hen Harrier**, two silvery-grey males of the latter species being spotted from the coastal road. Unfortunately, this magnificent raptor is less often seen these days, a recent Natural England report drawing attention to its continuing illegal persecution on English grouse-moors during the Harrier's breeding season and even the suspicious "disappearance" of several satellite-tagged individuals in the north Pennines during winter. The report estimates there should be about 200 pairs of Hen Harriers in England

These records add further to the already sky-high reputation of this fabulous wildlife habitat..

but only 23 pairs attempted to nest in 2007, the majority in Bowland, Lancashire, where they are well-protected by the land-owners working with conservation bodies. Elsewhere, despite legal protection since 1952, Harriers are killed because they feed on Red Grouse and may reduce shooting bags. Some scientists consider there is little chance of this conflict being resolved because of the entrenched attitudes of hunters and conservationists, neither group being prepared to compromise. One suggestion is to set local ceilings on Harrier densities, translocating excess birds to other areas of suitable habitat. However, the feasibility of this has yet to be researched and there

would be legal barriers to overcome.

Other bird highlights in December included two **Bean Geese** with Pink-footed Geese near Fine Jane's Pumping Station reported by Derek Williams, three **Snow Buntings** on Southport beach which I saw on 18th and about 20 **Crossbills** at Fisherman's Path, Ainsdale National Nature Reserve on 28th. Although larger groups have been recorded in the past, this is the most I have seen in the pinewoods in forty years. Finally, we should be looking out for **Waxwings**, flocks of which have been widely reported on berry-bearing shrubs in north, central and east Lancashire, but not as yet locally

JANUARY 2009

Despite the cold weather, my first sighting of that harbinger of spring, the **Snowdrop** (*Galanthus nivalis*), was at Moor Lane, Ainsdale as early as the 18th. A heavy frost partly froze Sands Lake, Ainsdale causing an influx of duck, including 175 **Tufted Ducks** and 55 **Shovelers**, the latter being the largest number I have seen here. Nearby, Ainsdale beach held a small flock of five to ten **Snow Buntings** throughout the month, while between 30 and 50 **Twite** remained on the shore at Weld Road, Birkdale, attracting many bird-watchers. Another winter-visitor, the **Brambling**, was reported on Rachael Parks' garden bird-feeder; I caught up with half-a-dozen of these colourful northern finches in a large flock of about 400 **Chaffinches** on stubble at Churchtown Moss on 29th. Big finch flocks, like this one, used to be commonplace many years ago but the practice of ploughing cereal fields early and planting wheat in autumn instead of spring usually buries their winter feed. As a result, many formerly common farmland birds have sadly declined.

Another bird sometimes seen at garden feeders is the **Blackcap**, a warbler more usually thought of as a summer visitor to woodland. Catherine Highfield told me of a female (with a brown cap) in her Formby

Wildlife notes - continued

garden. Blackcaps only started wintering locally in 1959, numbers having steadily increased until the north Merseyside & Lancashire population is now estimated at 100+. Interestingly, our breeding Blackcaps still migrate to southern Europe and Africa, while those wintering here originate in central and western Europe, especially Germany.

Martin Mere's **Whooper Swans** peaked at 1600 during January; several are now wearing small transmitters so that their migrations to and from Iceland can be studied. The related but smaller **Bewick's Swan** makes a much longer flight from Siberia. Numbers have declined in our area over recent decades as warmer winters have allowed them to remain in Germany and Holland. Nevertheless, a few still make the extra miles to grace our wetlands, 19 being reported at Martin Mere and a flock of up to 49 at Hundred End on the Ribble. One of the Martin Mere birds was ringed in 1991 when four to five years old, so is now around 23. It has

travelled at least 100,000 miles during its long life!

The Marshside reserve had its usual **Green-winged Teal**, a **Spotted Redshank** and several **Little Egrets**, as many as 26 of which roosted at night on one of the Southport Marine Lake islands.

Mere Sands Wood Nature Reserve is another popular venue for bird-watchers in winter, January attractions here including a small flock of **Crossbills**, several **Goosanders** and, briefly, a **Bittern**. This is also a good place to see the handsome **Bullfinch**, now much scarcer in our region than it used to be.

One bird that has surprised everyone by its dramatic recent increase, especially since about 2000, is the **Buzzard**. It is now a widespread breeder locally and, since most of the population seems to be sedentary, lots can also be seen in

winter. Thus, on 24th January, a calm, sunny day, I counted eight soaring over Altcar Withins and another four on Altcar Moss. The harvested potato fields and stubble on the mosslands also attracted large flocks of **Pink-footed Geese**, their noisy skeins flying over my home each evening to roost on the shore. At the end of the month I was lucky enough to find one **Russian Whitefront**, four **Greenland Whitefronts**, a **Bean Goose** and a **Canada Goose** with about 7000 Pinkfeet just inland of Formby.



Red Squirrel Update by Sally Orrit

Figures released this week by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust have confirmed that the number of red squirrels in the Formby and Ainsdale pine-woods has fallen dramatically as a result of the epidemic of squirrel pox virus which has swept the area for the past two years. The woodlands have been surveyed six times a year by volunteers since 2002, enabling accurate monitoring of changes in red squirrel numbers.

The population had shrunk to 40% of its normal size by spring 2008 and to 20% by early autumn. Red squirrels have continued to be lost since then and it is likely that only one in ten of those present in 2006 have survived. It is possible that only a hundred or so animals now remain in the pine-woods.

The squirrel pox epidemic has not been confined to the main Sefton Coast refuge woodlands, very large

We have long known that the spread of squirrel pox from greys was the major threat to the survival of Sefton's red squirrels

numbers have also died in the urban areas of Formby and Ainsdale. But it has not yet spread south to Hightown or Blundellsands and Crosby.

Although no new cases of this deadly virus have been reported since Christmas there is no guarantee that the epidemic has burned itself out – it may reappear at any time.

Local nature conservationists will therefore redouble their efforts to save Sefton's red squirrels and they ask members of the public to continue phoning in sightings of any squirrels, red or grey, in the area to them on 07590-745862 or 0151-920 3769.

Steve White from the Lancashire Wildlife Trust said: "We have long known that the spread of squirrel pox from greys was the major threat to the survival of Sefton's red squirrels, but the speed with which this disease has taken hold has taken us by surprise. All is not lost, though. If we can prevent a recurrence of the disease then the surviving red squirrels could re-colonise the area quite quickly."

Local History - Formby Tide-Poles



Photo Dave McAleavy

William Hutchinson 1715 – 1801 was the dockmaster at Liverpool and recorded the first known systematic measurements in the UK. He envisioned a need for tidal prediction to ensure a more perfect theory of the tides, preventing loss and damage that may be occasioned.

In 1764 Hutchinson involved the ingenious mathematicians Richard and George Holden in order to record measurements on the time and height of the tides flowing at the old dock gates in Liverpool. This was in effect the beginning of the famous series of annual Tide Tables for Liverpool Bay, which have continued to the present day.

Hutchinson refined his observations by installing a board further down the river graduated in steps of six inch marks. Tidal observations were made for a further 25 years and, added to later these provide the longest series

of near continuous tidal records for anywhere in the world-approximately 230 years.

In 1834 Captain Denham, Liverpool first Marine Surveyor also had a very clear understanding of the importance of the scientific study of the hydrology of the estuary and he introduced self-registering gauges to provide a record of mean water level. At Formby visual readings continued over a long period using a set of tide poles set in a line between Formby Lifeboat Station and low water line. Each of them was marked in feet and inches up to 32 feet so that it was possible to gather data at all states of the tide.

From 1889, the Lifeboat Coxswain was paid an allowance of 3 shillings and six pence per day as the keeper of the tide gauge.

During the 1970's the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board required the resident of Lifeboat Cottage to keep a telescopic sighting record of the tide poles every 15 minutes from 9am to 4pm.

Even after Lifeboat Cottage was abandoned, 15 minute readings continued daily and were forwarded to

the MDHB. The last Formby 'Tideman', David Simpson described how he read off the depths using high powered binoculars. In poor visibility, he had to walk to the edge of the water and stay there taking readings every quarter hour.

Accurate tidal measurement in Liverpool Bay is still as important as ever and it is noteworthy that sea conditions are still being recorded at Formby, by the Proudman Oceanographic Observatory, Liverpool, using an array of specialised radar antennae situated on the Ravenmeols Dunes.



A new scale on an old pole!

Art Group Report by Barbara Mossop

Members enjoyed the many Art Exhibitions which took place before Christmas and some members had paintings in these. The Palette Club Exhibition is now on at the Atkinson Gallery, Southport and also supported by some of our members. We had our meal at Lydiat Hall Farm in January and were able to discuss our programme for the next three months at this time. We do not have firm dates for these, but if you wish to be notified when these become avail-

able, please phone me and I will see that you are advised of the date and other details.

We attended a Fine Arts Sale at Cato Cranes, Auctioneers in Liverpool on 3 February. This was the day after most of England ground to a halt with snow but, although it was cold and the roads a bit icy, we had no problems getting the sale room. The sale was being televised for a TV programme and it became very crowded, but we managed to have a look round before the

sale began. There were quite a few paintings being sold, though few by named artists. A lot of the paintings would have been enhanced had they been cleaned. Even the frames seemed to have a thin coating of dust on them!

We were also surprised to see furniture and porcelain selling well - though there again the furniture would have benefited from a bit of beeswax. A porter told us that they are very busy and have not been affected

Art Group Report, continued.

By the credit-crunch so far, although the Auctioneer did say, several times that all items must be paid for within 24 hours, or they would be resold, as they had several people who had not paid for items purchased at previous sales .. Mr. Cato has invited the Group to spend a morning at the Auction Room, when he will discuss paintings and valuation. We are going once more to The Liver Sketching Club in March and in April are hoping to have a day in the Tarleton / Bretherton area. I have contacted the

group who look after Bank Hall and whilst they are open on the last Sunday of each month, if we contact them beforehand, they will open the grounds for us on another day . We also have plans for early Summer, including sketching in Lydiate and also visiting Salmesbury Hall, when the Craft Guild have an Exhibition on and hopefully, we can sketch in the grounds

ART GROUP • FUTURE EVENTS

March – Life Drawing Liver Sketching Club-one Saturday, going to Liverpool on train.

April; Sketching Day, Tarleton and Bretherton. Date to be fixed.

May; Visit to Salmesbury Hall – Exhibition and sketching. Date to be fixed.

Advance notice; Our Annual Art Exhibition is due to take place on Saturday 27th June

Jean Noble - A tribute by her cousin Graeme Stokes



Jean and Frank Noble.

Jean's funeral Service was held at St Peter's on Tuesday, 13th January 2009.

Jean began her life's journey as JEAN MARY SCOTT; and became known affectionately by some as "Scotty". She was born at "Sunningwell", Piercefield Rd, and led a full life

Jean completed her schooling at Lowther College in Wales; and the strangeness of the Welsh language may explain her spelling problems. Not to be forgotten is Jean's prowess at sports and she returned to Lowther College to teach games. She was a natural golfer. But she was also a caring person, interested in others, willing to take responsibility, willing to be involved, willing to take the lead; all of which is reflected in the fact that Jean was twice captain of Formby Ladies Golf Club, and a captain for Lancashire Ladies County

Golf Association.

Jean also played hockey for the County, being brave enough - some perhaps would say foolhardy enough - to stand in goal! Jean had a natural affinity for anything sporting including horse riding, show jumping and tennis .

She did brilliantly at the Constance Spry School of Domestic Science

a caring person, interested in others, willing to take responsibility, willing to be involved, willing to take the lead

where she became both an expert florist and an expert cook. Her interest and skills in floral arrangements were well known in her home and garden, also at St. Peter's Church.

Jean's culinary skills - in her cousin's came a close second to her skills with flowers. Her interest in things artistic found expression in other ways. She wielded an artist's paint brush with much enthusiasm and although, so far as I know, there were no formal exhibitions, nevertheless her works can still be seen at "Sunningwell"

Jean also turned her hand to writing poetry and some of her poems were

published. She had a charming way with words which, coupled with the fact that she loved listening to music, revealed in Jean a special sensitivity. In particular Jean did not hide her love for animals. She especially adored horses and had the gift of being able to communicate with them. Anyone who has visited Jean and Frank will know that their home contains hundreds of horse figures and an impressive collection of horse brasses. This love of horses brought Jean one of the happiest times in her life when she served in a civilian capacity with the Army Remount Depot at Melton Mowbray during World War II.

Jean and Frank were married in June 1959 and Frank's preference for holidays abroad took them to many different places. Jean always had her address book with her and she would never fail to send post cards.

She was cheerful, great fun, caring, interested, determined, very able. In short "Didn't she do well?"

We all wish to convey our very sincere condolences to Frank.

b. 30th June 1924,

d. 30th December 2008

Together with her husband Frank, Jean was an active member of the Society for many years.

Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership – our support.

The Sefton Coastal landscape is as much under threat as other parts of our heritage, yet many take it for granted. Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced on 27 October 2008 that a new 'Landscape Partnership Scheme' has been set up "to help protect some of the UK's most spectacular scenery by bringing together groups with a shared passion for supporting the heritage of our natural environment, to form strong partnerships rather than working in isolation.". The then stated inclusion of the Sefton Coast "Merseyside's green lung" was great news to those of us who care for our local natural and cultural heritage.

A 'Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership' Scheme (led by Sefton Council), covering 80km² of coastal land to the north and south of Southport, is to be supported by HLF to the tune of £1.2million. The project will include improved understanding, access and management of the coastline and also it is hoped the re-invigoration of local asparagus farming

Sefton now has now been awarded, a 'Stage One Pass' which means that some funding has already been awarded towards the development of the scheme and further money has been earmarked by the HLF for the next stage of the project. In other words, money for the further scheme has been set aside. The Sefton Coast Partnership and its voluntary partners, including this Society, now need to progress to Stage Two by submitting a further, more fully detailed application to secure the full award.

The necessary partnership is intended to bring together members of the community as well as local, regional, and national organisations to deliver the final scheme which would greatly benefit our coastal landscape and communities. The possible finance available ranges from £250,000 up to £2million.

The Formby Civic Society has been honoured by being identified as a Community Partner. Some important

areas of activity with which we may be able to assist include

Asparagus Cultivation, 'Save our souls' - Lifeboats on the Sefton Coast' and 'Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen: - Their impact on Sefton's Landscape'.

Details of these are as follows:-

ASPARAGUS CULTIVATION

Through the project, the National



Bringing home the asparagus on Pinetree Farm

Trust and Formby Civic Society aim to; find out more about the history of asparagus cultivation, record the surviving cultivation ridges and landscape, produce a booklet on its history and cultivation methods and create an interpretive trail round part of the area.

A number of activities have already taken place, including the plans for the trail, the draft of a leaflet and events in local pubs celebrating asparagus through poetry, drama and song. 'Asparagus in season' walks run by the National Trust are well-subscribed.

A launch event 'Fresher than Fresh' would be held in May (asparagus season) to celebrate the life of Thomas Fresh who was instrumental in encouraging the expansion of asparagus growing (and also gave his name to Freshfield). This would include an asparagus supper. The main part of the project would see the layout of an interpretive trail, with waymarking, signboards and leaflet. The National

Trust and Sefton Coast and Countryside Service have invested in developing acousti-guides to the Formby landscape. Visitors will be able to take a handset to points around the site to hear information about dune management, woodlands, farming etc. New programmes can added to the 'acousti-guides' so a specific asparagus trail programme can be developed. A portable display on asparagus cultivation would be prepared for use in local libraries, museums and visitor centres.

Asparagus would be included in the annual programmes of guided walks by the National Trust, Formby Civic Society and the Sefton Coast and Countryside Service.

Archaeological field investigations (perhaps as

a community archaeology event) would investigate the field patterns and artefacts. A section of turf bank may be excavated to study the construction technique. A brick well, possibly used to wash asparagus, would be restored and a number of artefacts would be conserved. These include tools, bunching boxes, hammers, ploughs and rakes.

The 'asparagus trail' would become established as one of the thematic trails on the Sefton Coast with starting points at both Victoria Road and Lifeboat Road (gateway sites). Acousti-guides would be available at both sites.

The project highlights an important aspect of the life of the Formby community in the past; the gradual exploitation by certain local families of the barren and exposed rear-dune landscape not previously cultivatable.

Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership – continued.

It also illustrates the way that the need for sewage disposal in mid-nineteenth century Liverpool was used in a manner beneficial to the adjacent rural community at a time before the development of later methods of disposal at sea. By this means, Formby asparagus became nationally renowned and won prestigious trophies at such centres of excellence as the Vale of Evesham. Atlantic liners leaving Liverpool offered this regional delicacy to their passengers, during its six-week season. There is still a strong association between the National Trust property and some of the 'asparagus' families.

Sefton Coast and Countryside Service who manage the Ravenmeols dunes a former stronghold for asparagus farming will also be involved. Another trail will be created from the Lifeboat Road area. The History and Archaeology Task Group of the Sefton Coast Partnership will encourage more research into its farming history collate information on artefacts and assess contribution of farming to the present-day landscape. Local asparagus growers: support the project and of course will offer their crop for sale to local people **and visitors**. St Jerome's School, a National Trust 'guardian school'. will also take an interest..

SOLDIERS, SAILORS AND AIRMEN; THEIR IMPACT ON SEFTON'S LANDSCAPE

This project aims to identify and interpret the evidence for military activity on the coast from the creation of the Rifle Range at Altcar in the early 19th century, to the manner in which the coastal landscape was used for military purposes during the two World Wars and the subsequent Cold War. The project will focus on collating evidence from documentary and photographic sources and will be supported by a structural assessment of the remaining buildings and landscape features. Representative structures and landscape features will be identified for consolidation and repair and, where appropriate, will be made



Left; Stella Marris, a former children's home became a Radar Station.

available for public access and interpretation.

Several military structures are still standing but are in a poor state of repair or inaccessible. Phase 1 will consist of a rapid field survey aimed at establishing the location and general condition of sites. This will be supplemented by a documentary and photographic survey which will be used to inform interpretative material.

A later phase is envisaged as a structural survey of the surviving military buildings and earthworks. Training will be provided in photographic and metric survey techniques. The final phase will involve the repair and consolidation of selected buildings to allow public access and the creation of a 'military history' trail.

SAVE OUR SOULS; LIFEBOATS ON THE SEFTON COAST.

This project aims to record and interpret the remains of one of the oldest Lifeboat stations in Britain. It is now recognised that Formby, situated overlooking the approaches to Liverpool, did in fact have the first Lifeboat Station in Britain. The remains still to be seen, repre-

sent some of the earliest relicts relating to navigation and sea rescue in England.

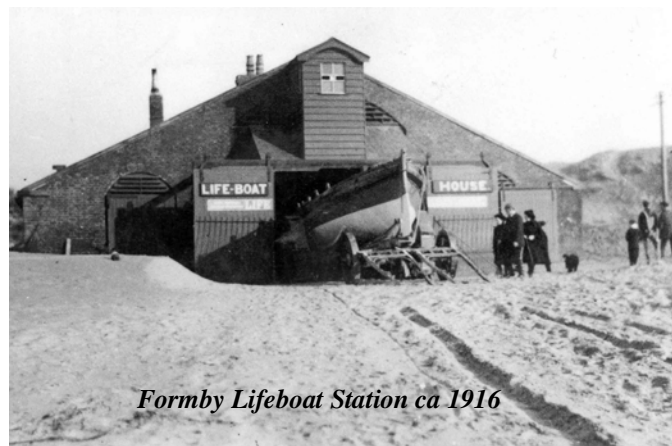
The first of these was Formby landmark (a brick tower or

lighthouse), built in 1719. Ship losses continued despite this, and in 1776, William Hutchinson, the Liverpool Dock Master, then established Britain's first lifeboat station at Formby. The original boathouse was rebuilt in 1793 on the same site at the end of what became known as Lifeboat Road and rebuilt again in 1809, surviving as a standing structure into the 20th century. It was finally closed in 1916 and operated as a café until it was demolished in 1965.

The project will include the production of a drawn and photographic record of the Lifeboat Station remains.

If the next stage is to be successful there will be plenty of ways for members of this Society and others to assist in this very worthwhile project.

We would greatly appreciate members views and possible offers of assistance.



Formby Lifeboat Station ca 1916

Formby Civic Society Newsletter

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GIFT-AID - A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

The last day of March sees the end of the Society's financial year and the usual request to members to pay their subscriptions for the following 12 months. Many of you have kindly made Direct Debit arrangements with your bank and we would encourage others to do the same as it simplifies considerably the treasurer's job! We'll be sending out renewal forms very soon and would particularly like to draw everyone's attention to the option of signing up to 'Gift Aid'.

Gift Aid is tax relief on money donated to UK charities. The tax people treat donations as if the donor had already deducted basic rate tax from them. The Society as a charity can then reclaim that tax to increase the value of a donation. Last year that reclaimed tax contributed several hundred pounds towards our running expenses, so we would urge anyone who pays tax to authorise us to reclaim the tax presumed paid on their annual subscription. The appropriate wording and place for signature will be shown clearly on the renewal slip sent out to you before the end of March. The only thing you will need to remember is not to sign if you don't pay UK income tax and/or capital gains tax. Incidentally, because Gift Aid can be back-dated, we can reclaim your subscriptions for up to 6 years prior to the date of the declaration. So please consider if you can help in this way. Thank you.

David Willis

Future Programme

Thursday 12th Feb., Pamela Russell, *"You get used to it" – Liverpool Children in WW2.*,

Friday, 27th February, Lucy Pengelly, *The Jewel of Persia – Isafahan,*

Thursday 12th March, Mr J. Halsall, *The Halsall's in the Civil War,*

Friday, 27th March, Tony Clishan, *Glass Making in St Helens,*

Friday, 24th April, *AGM*, followed by *The future of Conservation in the Built Environment*, Council Officers Dorothy Bradwell & Daniel Byron

Art Group Programme (See p 9 -Further details from Barbara Mossop)
