

OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity no.278266
www.ova.org.uk



VOLUME 26/1 JANUARY 2005

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: OVA WALKS AND TALKS,
JANUARY TO LATE MARCH 2005**

5 JANUARY, WEDNESDAY 10 a.m. CROOKS PLANTATION, G.R.057866. 2½ HOURS, 5 MILES, MODERATE. COMMONS WALK, HAWKERLAND, CANTERBURY GREEN. GOOD VIEWS, MUDDY AFTER RAIN. *Walk leader:* BRIAN TURNBULL, 01395-567339.

15 JANUARY, SATURDAY 10 a.m. PEAK HILL CAR PARK, G.R.109872. 2½ HOURS, ENERGETIC. MUTTERS MOOR, SEVEN STONES, KEBLE'S SEAT, THE OLD SIDMOUTH MULE AND COACH ROADS. *Walk leader:* JED FALBY, 01395-445455.

18 JANUARY, TUESDAY 7.30 p.m. TALK BY CYRIL SHERE: 'A DEVON FARMER LOOKS BACK'. OTTERTON VILLAGE HALL.

26 JANUARY, WEDNESDAY 10 a.m. LIME KILN C/P, BUDLEIGH SALTERTON. G.R.073820. 2½ HOURS, EASY. BIRD-WATCHING STROLL ALONG THE RIVER OTTER. *Walk leader:* DAVID JANNAWAY, 01395-567159.

5 FEBRUARY, SATURDAY 10 a.m. WHEATHILL PLANTATION, G.R.041847. 5 MILES, 2½ HOURS, MODERATE. COMMONS, WOODLANDS, DISCOVERING HOW MILITARY CAMPS, WATERWORKS AND RAILWAYS HAVE SHAPED THE LANDSCAPE. WET IN PLACES. DOGS WELCOME. *Walk leaders:* DAVID AND NICKI DANIEL, 01395-445960

Cover illustration by Megs Rimmer,
*Cormorants roosting by the River
Otter at Tipton St John*

(Continued on inside back cover)

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

In the last Newsletter, I asked each of you to try to recruit at least one new OVA member by Christmas. A big thank-you is due to those who took up this challenge with enthusiasm, especially to those who have recruited more than one new member. Well done!

If you HAVEN'T yet recruited a new member, don't delay. You will be doing them a favour as well as helping to look after this beautiful valley. In addition to receiving four Newsletters a year, they will be able to enjoy our excellent programme of walks, talks and visits. OVA membership is remarkably good value at £3 a year (£5 for couples/families). To make it even more attractive, anyone joining between now and the end of March 2005 will not be asked to renew their subscription until April 2006.

Application forms are available from Budleigh Salterton Tourist Information Centre, Budleigh Salterton Library, Fairlynch Museum (when open), any member of the Committee or the website www.oval.org.uk.

A report on the OVA Christmas party held on 8 December appears later in this Newsletter. The event was so popular that some members were regrettably unable to get tickets. We are investigating the possibility of a larger hall for next year.

The good work of the OVA continues apace. You can read the reports of our hard-working sub-committees in this Newsletter, as well as descriptions of some of the walks and talks held in recent months.

Finally, we particularly welcome the approval and adoption by East Devon District Council both of the

Budleigh Salterton Town Design Statement and of the Otterton Village Design Statement, both of which were supported by the OVA. These will now be used as Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance for development and control purposes. They are highly significant and constructive documents, produced after extensive consultation with their respective communities. They will make an important contribution towards ensuring that planned development is in harmony with its setting, and contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the local environment.

Both the groups responsible for producing these Design Statements deserve our warmest thanks and congratulations.

Brian Turnbull

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Vacancy on the Executive Committee

Brian Hawkes, our long-serving Membership Secretary, has decided to stand down at the AGM next May. We will therefore have a vacancy on the Executive Committee for a new Membership Secretary.

About 90% of our members pay their subscriptions by standing order, and the membership details are all on computer, so it is a pretty efficient operation.

This is a real opportunity for a new or long-standing member to join the team running the OVA and do something positive for the Otter Valley.

If you have access to a computer, and think you might be able to help - or if you know someone who might be suitable - please contact Brian Turnbull on 01395-567339 or by e-mail at brianturnbull@ova.org.uk

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OVA VISIT TO SAND, 15 MARCH 2005

Sand, a delightful 15th-century Hall House set in a six-acre garden at Sidbury, is rarely open to the public. The OVA is organising a visit to both house and garden on Tuesday 15 March 2005 at 1.45 p.m. at a cost of £5 per person. Numbers are very limited and you are advised to buy your ticket/s promptly from Rowan Turnbull, Hayes, Church Road, Colaton Raleigh, Sidmouth EX10 0LH, tel. 01395-567339, enclosing a cheque made out to the OVA and an s.a.e for the return of the ticket/s.

Arrive in your own transport (there is plenty of parking space) by 1.45 p.m. to be ready for a 2 p.m. tour of the house, to be taken by the owner, Mrs Huyshe-Shires or by her husband. (There will be two tours simultaneously, about a room apart.) We will have time to explore the gardens - bring suitable footwear - and have tea, to be bought independently. Good weather cannot be guaranteed but you are promised a fascinating and rewarding afternoon.

Rowan Turnbull

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LAUNCH OF THE BUDLEIGH SALTERTON DESIGN STATEMENT

The Budleigh Salterton Design Statement was launched on 23 November 2004 in front of a packed Public Hall audience. Over 200 people alternated between serious listening and enthusiastic applause, during first a brief AGM in which the Chairman Canon Roy Henderson also gave the project's history, followed by a comprehensive talk, plus question-and-answer session, by the guest speaker, Karime Hassan (Corporate Director, Environment, East Devon District Council).

Mr Hassan said that the subject of design was close to his heart. EDDC aimed to raise the quality of life for residents and improve the standard of design in new developments. Twenty years ago, planning officers were discouraged from questioning design, but in the 1990s central government established the principle that design was relevant to planning applications. High-quality design was fundamental to economic growth and the fostering of civic pride. There was an increasing emphasis on the promotion of local identity and character, and the need for new buildings to fit into the locally distinctive environment.

Village (and Town) Design Statements were firmly based on expert local knowledge and a clear understanding of the area and context in which proposed new developments needed to be viewed. Good design could not be achieved without understanding the character of the community and local landscape. Design Statements go through a long and detailed process to distinguish

3 years ago
90 Authorities
observed by ODPM
John Prescott

This year we are no longer 'suspect'
Meeting Government guide lines..
SUKI / BOB / CONES } pre-planning meetings
TANPUN

IF WE MADE A MISTAKE IN THE PAST
WE WILL NOT MAKE A MISTAKE IN THE FUTURE

I BELIEVE WHAT I SAID IS RIGHT
WERE GONS FORWARD NOW
IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS WE NEED
TO KNOW WHERE THE SERVICES
ARE GONS TO GO



MAYOR
ALAN JONES
LISTENING TO
KARIME HASSAN
23 NOV 04

and highlight the crucial elements which designers, developers and planners need to take on board.

Modern innovative designs needed to respect local identity and character. This was a big challenge for clients, architects, designers and planners. People look favourably at their architectural heritage because of the foresight of their predecessors. How can we raise the quality of design, and leave a legacy for future generations? New buildings should comply with local character, but not be restricted to pastiche to gain rapid planning consent. Nor should new housing be designed for indiscriminate use countrywide; ideally, each dwelling should be tailored for its intended site.

Mr Hassan concluded by telling us that EDDC had so far adopted five village design statements. Five more were nearing completion and 21 were being prepared. These figures were higher than for any other district in Devon. Design statements were now recognised as Supplementary Planning Guidance for development control, and were given weight by Inspectors at appeals. As it takes a year for a developer to get an appeal decision, it was in his interest to heed the design statements in order to avoid delay.

Mr Hassan's final point, that the production of a design statement binds the community and raises the awareness of local people of their built environment, was appropriately demonstrated by the detailed questions from the audience which followed. Each question was fully answered, giving hope that past mistakes would not be repeated, that more would be done to enforce regulations, and that note would be taken of all the issues that had been raised.

To illustrate this, he told us that EDDC'S own Supplementary Planning Guidance on trees had been prompted by the then Mayor of Budleigh Salterton's protest about the loss of trees at Elvestone.

The interest and enthusiasm for the Design Statement shown by the people of Budleigh Salterton, through their earlier support in attending exhibitions and completing questionnaires, was underlined by the success of the launch evening. The hard work that had gone into its production felt very worthwhile.

Anita Jennings

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More on the Design Statement ...

A full-colour A3 folded leaflet about the Design Statement went to every household in Budleigh, with brief information on the natural environment, the built environment and the planning context. Opened out, the leaflet contains guidance for developers, with extracts from different chapters of the Design Statement. A sub-heading stresses that the Statement 'does not set out to stifle responsible innovation, but it does focus on encouraging good design compatible with the character of our town.'

Budleigh Library has copies of the full document to lend to members on request, or it can be bought in the town for £6-00. Apparently several people have bought it as a kind of town guide, such is its interest.

**With thanks to Mo Bowman, OVA
Publicity Secretary, for supplying
all Design Statement information.**



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The last three months have been rather quiet for the Built Environment Sub-Committee, with the notable exception of the application to demolish the detached house at 5, Westfield Road, Budleigh Salterton and replace it with a four-storey block of 14 apartments. A vigorous campaign by local residents, supported by this committee together with both South-West Water and the County Highway Authority, rightly led to a second refusal for such a large-scale development on this site.

There was also an outrageous application to build two blocks, each of three garages, in the forecourt of the ongoing construction of six apartments on the site of The Chance at 12, Coastguard Road in Budleigh Salterton. This was always a controversial development for which the appeal inspector stressed the importance of landscaping this forecourt in order to soften the impact of the new building on the street scene. The effect of siting these garage blocks in this position would be to reduce the proposed landscaping to insignificance and further aggravate the existing parking problems. The committee strongly objected to this proposal but no decision has yet been taken by the planning authority.

The government has recently put pressure on all local authority planning departments to reduce delays and speed up the planning process by requiring some 90 per cent of all applications to be determined by

Planning Officers acting under delegated powers without reference to Council Committees. Apart from reducing the previous delays, it also appears to have given the planning officers more confidence in refusing unacceptable applications, especially those supported by inadequate drawings. It is to be hoped that this will eventually lead to a more considered approach by applicants to the design and presentation of their submitted schemes.

One other significant event occurred in this period which should also encourage higher design standards and provide a more objective basis for the rejection of sub-standard architecture. That was the launch (described in detail earlier) of the Budleigh Salterton Design Statement. This document has now been adopted by East Devon District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance to all potential applicants for planning approval, and has the authority to be referred to by Planning Officers and Appeals Inspectors in reaching their decisions. A similar document has now been produced and adopted for the village of Otterton and it is hoped that this will be followed in due course by the other villages in the Otter Valley.

One note of caution should be made at this point. There is the risk that the imposition by this Design Statement of what might be seen as worthy but restrictive design policies could have a regressive effect on the future development of Budleigh Salterton. Most of the great architecture of the past which we now so much admire was considered extraordinary and

unacceptable at the time. We must not close our eyes completely to the possibility that something architecturally unfamiliar may turn out, in the end, to be a great visual asset to the townscape. After all, the town is not really blessed with a surfeit of high-quality buildings. It would be unkind to future generations to allow Budleigh Salterton to become trapped in the past.

Brian Brown

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OVA CHRISTMAS PARTY

On a bleak night in mid-December (well, it was a bit cold, although 'bleak' might be a slight exaggeration), 82 brave souls set out for East Budleigh Village Hall. Their destination? The OVA Christmas Party. And what was it that drove them to such extremes of endeavour and why?

The answer lies in the not-so-well-hidden agenda. Having been plied with sherry by David (not the royal one) in a flashy (flashing, actually) hat, these gallant souls were greeted by Chairman Brian. Then, needing to build up strength for what was to follow, they were made to sit down to a traditional festive delectation of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and veg. - enough to fill a king (or even a wise man). However, their trials were not over. Desserts, many and varied, were waved before them and they were forced to choose. Such agonies of choice were then compounded with coffee.

But the real test of the evening was only just beginning. Alan Ford had earlier prepared a fiendishly tricky local quiz in which the only survivor to get out of the jungle did so with a score of 16 out of 20. The torture continued as Belinda Mountain picked the winning entry ticket and Nick Speare forced individuals to draw the raffle. Saving the best till last, Haylor and Ruth Lass tested the group's knowledge of shepherds before finally raising the roof in festive carols.

Thanks go to Rowan and Santa's helpers for organising the splendid evening had by all, and we left with the lingering threat that next year's quiz will be even harder.

Nick Speare

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Charles Snow, 1912-2004

Charles Snow, a founder member of the OVA, died in October aged 92. Born in Exeter in 1912, he trained as a water engineer and worked in that field in Northern Rhodesia and later in Goring-on-Thames. Retiring to Budleigh Salterton, he was instrumental in forming the OVA and served as its first chairman. He also became a town councillor and played an active role in Budleigh Salterton Hospice Care.



FOOTPATHS

The Right to Roam Act of 2000 requires local authorities to prepare a plan for improving rights of way in their areas. It doesn't require them to carry out the plan, just to prepare it. Since the authorities have no extra powers and no extra money you might expect the plans to be fairly short. But the draft plan for Devon runs to 140 pages. The County Council says it intends to carry it out.

Those of you who have read the draft will have your own opinions about it. I can see little in it that is new. In effect the plan sets out what the County is already doing and will be continuing to do. The document is interesting, however, because it sets out in detail the Council's existing policies. It is almost a text book on footpath law, even if a rather verbose text book with much repetition and pointless references to other documents. Still, I can't help feeling friendly towards a document that tells me that there are at least 143,660 dogs in Devon.

Parts of the document will perhaps help us to put pressure on the Council to get done things which are needed. For example, there are warm words about permissive rights of way which might help us to get new agreements on permissive rights of way in the valley which have run out and which the Council has been unwilling to renew. Just don't hold your breath.

On the path along the river between Colaton Raleigh and Otterton is a kissing gate which has been damaged

for some time now. Someone has complained, saying it is dangerous. I rather prefer it in its damaged state, and I suspect that many other walkers do too. One of the fences defining the box for kissing in is missing, except for the bottom rail. As a result people can walk straight through without operating the gate.

Judging by the wear on the surface most people do this. They have to step over a board reaching about 15cm. above the ground. On the other hand, the ground has worn evenly so that it is level; with intact kissing gates the ground inside the box gets very uneven because of shuffling inside the box to leave room to swing the gate. I think it is safer as it is than it would be if intact. Those who insist on taking the regular route through kissing gates can still do that.

Of course, if the gate is in its usual open position it will let cattle through, but this can be prevented simply by a loop holding the gate closed. If, next time there are cattle in the field, the Estate is dissatisfied with this, we can very quickly nail a few boards in place to replace the missing side of the box. It just shows invention can result from mere negligence.

New Walks Coordinator

We now have a new coordinator to organise our walks programme in place of David Jannaway. This is Patricia Doran (01395)-445954) whom many of the walks leaders know already. Many thanks to David for all his work over a number of years, and to Patricia for taking on this important job.

Alan Jones



NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Restoration of the River Tale

On 14 October Alan Bruford gave an interesting talk on 'The Restoration of the River Tale' to a group of 55 people in the Colaton Raleigh Village Hall. He began by showing a few slides to illustrate problems on the river that have occurred because of bank erosion and excessive silting. He then went on to describe the various measures that have been taken by the Tale Valley Trust and other agencies to enable habitat restoration and to rectify some of the problems.

One simple but very effective measure of preventing bank erosion has been to fence off areas of the river from access by grazing cattle. This has been achieved by the use of relatively cheap electric fencing which has been established to limit, rather than prevent, the access of cattle to the river banks. Local farmers have generally been cooperative when the aims and objectives of the programme have been explained to them.

Control of excessive silting has been helped by the decline of pig farming near the river, thus removing a major source of water pollution. Reduction of bank erosion and control of silting has helped to restore aquatic habitats for invertebrates which provide food for fish populations. Control of silting has helped to restore the natural vegetation but some problem weeds such as the exotic Himalayan Balsam need to be controlled, either by spraying with glyphosate or by hand removal.

Of all the topics reviewed in a wide-ranging talk, the plight of the water vole attracted most attention and debate. Immortalised as Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows*, the water vole is an attractive little creature, about the size of a small guinea pig. Nationally, the population of water voles has declined by about 90 per cent, and they are now virtually extinct in Cornwall and Devon. The Tale Valley Trust is working with the Environment Agency, English Nature and Oxford University in a long-term project designed to promote the return of water voles to the catchment area of the River Otter.

The major enemy of water voles is the aggressive intruder, the American mink. The mink are small enough to get into the burrows of the voles and where they have proliferated they have virtually wiped out the voles. To control the mink, various agencies are promoting a (legal) trapping programme and this is meeting with some success. But it could still be a very long time before water voles can repopulate their former habitats in Devon. In an attempt to speed up repopulation, the Tale Valley Trust has introduced about 100 water voles collected from various places in southern England. The voles were released at two locations on the river and their numbers will be monitored to assess their survival.

Norman Crossland

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Secretary Required - *the Natural Environment Sub-Committee is seeking someone who would be willing to act as Sub-Committee secretary. The post involves issuing agendas for six meetings a year and taking the minutes of meetings. If you are interested, please contact Robert Sellin on 01395-443283.*

TRAFFIC IN BUDLEIGH SALTERTON

The Design Statement publicity and launch have tended to overshadow another important OVA project: the Budleigh Salterton Traffic Working Party.

This group, under the able leadership of Stuart Yerrell, has studied in depth the various problems that modern traffic gives an old town like Budleigh Salterton.

Stuart Yerrell presented his report to the Budleigh Salterton Town Council on 25 October 2004. It covered many areas not usually thought of under the heading 'Traffic': parking, signage, shopping, tourism, schools and public transport.



The report was very well received by the Town Council and some of the first improvements will be seen in the New Year: improved signage for tourists; shoppers' free parking near the High Street; and simplification of parking regulations.

The larger question of how to handle increased traffic (both lorries and cars) is still under study. There are no simple solutions!

Jed Falby

HISTORY OF DEVON FARMHOUSES

Newton Poppleford Church Hall was the venue on Monday 15 November when Mr Tom Coleman, a Devon farmer for some 40 years, gave a fascinating talk on 'The History of Devon Farmhouses' to about 50 members of the Association.

Quickly by-passing caves, he led us on to Bronze Age houses made up of circles of stone such as those at Tavy Cleave and Grimspound on Dartmoor, where doorposts and walls are still visible. With the coming of the Romans there was a move to rectangular housing, though in places such as Anglesey it is possible to make out that circular and rectangular housing co-existed.

The arrival of the Normans led to housing becoming more sophisticated in the south-east of the country but in the West Country standards lagged behind. In the 13th century houses were being built such as those that can be seen on Hound Tor. These consisted of single-storey buildings with opposing front and back doors, with people living at one end and cattle at the other end - always, it should be noted, the downhill end!

Fifteenth-century lowland dwellings did not have the cattle in the house, the lower end of the building being a working area. The next step was to put in partitions splitting the living area into two: a sleeping area and a living area (hall) where the fire would have been. Flooring was put in at first-floor level at each end of the house, with the central area still being open up to the roof.

These farmhouses were typically made of whatever materials were available in the location. On Dartmoor, granite was used, with stones from other local quarries where available, but largely it was a rubble construction. This contrasted with other parts of the country where timber-framed and brick buildings were being constructed. Bricks were not often used in the West Country unless a village had its own brick pit, but extensive use was made of cob - earth and straw being built up in layers. So long as the roofing and the foundations are sound - 'a good hat and shoes' - then cob is a very durable material.

Timber was mainly used in the West Country for holding up the roof. In other parts of the country these timber 'crucks' would go from ground level up to the apex of the roof, but here two timbers were used, one going up the wall and one to hold up the roof. The original partitions, designed to give more privacy, were movable woven screens, which over time were replaced by wattle and daub. Around 1650 stud and panel wooden screens were introduced and these were often skilfully painted.

In the older farmhouses which had no chimneys smoke had to find its way out either through the doors and windows or through the thatched roof, and soot can still be seen on the rafters in many older farmhouses. Smoke hoods were initially built to try and funnel the smoke and over time these became chimneys. Fireplaces, with chimneys, were added to many farmhouses, either being attached to the outside of the farmhouse, usually at the front to impress the neighbours, or going up through the centre of the house.

In the 19th century, with the advent of the train and the possibility of bringing in materials from elsewhere, farm buildings came to look more like those in other parts of the country and the distinctive nature of the Devon farmhouses was diminished.

Mr Coleman's talk was well received by all who attended and many people found particularly interesting the examples shown where modern fashion is re-exposing beams, rafters and internal panelling which, in many cases, have been covered over for many years.

Robin Holt

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OVA History Section

This section is slowly getting into its stride. We have identified a number of possible areas for research, but we are very short of members. If anyone is interested in doing some research into local history, please contact me, Alan Ford, on 01404-812375.

Litter Pick on the Otter Estuary

May I ask for OVA members' help with the Annual Litter Pick on the Otter Estuary. The date is **Saturday 5 March 2005** between 10 a.m. and 12 noon at Lime Kiln car park. The Coast and Countryside Office will provide black dustbins bags for us to use. Wear strong boots or shoes, and gloves to protect your hands. Please spare an hour to make the Estuary litter free. Please note that car-parking charges are in operation all year now and to date I have been unable to obtain any concessions from EDDC.

Dorothy Friend
Voluntary Warden

CLINTON DEVON – AN OVERVIEW

Clare James (Assistant Land Agent)

Clinton Devon Estates continue to have a stake in and manage much of the land and many of the residential and commercial properties within the local area. Our everyday work on the Estate impacts on the environment and landscape in which you live and work. As part of our objective to be more transparent in our communication with local people, we have been kindly given this space in the Newsletter to inform you of some of the forthcoming activities and work on the Estate.

The Estate takes the management of its environmental assets very seriously. A high-profile example is our management of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths (Woodbury and adjacent Commons). Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Commons are one of Britain's more important heathland sites. Their sensitive management by the Estate's Commons Wardens, Bungy Williams and Paul Swain, has created a habitat for 70 species of birds, 40 species of butterfly, 24 kinds of dragon- and damselfly and two of Devon's five colonies of the rare Southern Damselfly. A unique area to walk in, but please remember 'take only photographs and leave only footprints'. The Wardens are currently cutting the firebreaks and footpaths and continuing the annual clearance of scrub regeneration and bracken.

The Clinton Devon Estate's 6,000 acres of woodland are situated in East and North Devon, and comprise a

rich mixture of both commercial conifers and native broadleaved species. Our woodlands are genuinely multi-purpose, providing benefits for the environment, landscape and community as well as producing a sustainable supply of timber. The Estate woodland team is continuing the programme of timber extraction and thinning at Castle Plantation and around Blackhill Quarry. You may have noticed an increase in lorry and machinery traffic from these activities. The wood from the thinnings goes to Victoria Sawmills where it is processed into fencing and stakes in our North Devon branch.

Clinton Farms are the Estate's East Devon home farming operation, comprising 2,800 acres mainly in the Lower Otter Valley. It also farms our other Home Farm in Beer. Based on the principles of mixed farming, the unit has 400 dairy cows run in two herds, a 1300-flock of breeding ewes and the arable enterprise. After a wet August we are pleased that the harvest for another year is completed and the cultivations for next year's crops are now completed. The new dairy at Dalditch Farm is complete. George Perrott, the farm manager, reports that the time it takes to milk the 400 cows has been greatly reduced and allows our dairyman more time to look after the cows.

We hope that this article gives you an insight into the workings of the Estate. If there is a subject you would like us to cover in more detail in a subsequent issue of the Newsletter, please contact me, Clare James on 01395-443881. For further details of the Estate and our activities you can visit our web-site, www.clintondevon.com .

Water and Weir at Colaton Raleigh

Colaton Raleigh does not have a splendid village brook like those in East Budleigh and Otterton. But it does have water flowing in a narrow slot along the side of part of Church Road. A trickle only, but we like it. For some time, a month or so back, there has been no water in it. The head for the flow is provided by a weir in Mrs Baker's back garden. Chris Pound, the parish chairman, and I got her permission to inspect it.

The weir is a single baulk of timber. We found water flowing under it, round each end of it, even through it, but no water flowing over it. In spite of this, the water level was about halfway up the pipe that should carry the water to the brook; so there should have been water flowing through it. The parish council is against rodding it as that might break up the pipe. Chris found roots in the pipe so it may be hopelessly blocked. Maybe the water leaks out of breaks in the pipe before it reaches the brook. The pipe is too narrow and too long to be lined. Replacing it would be very expensive. I'm not sure where it runs but it must run under private property and then under the main road.

If this pipe is ever cleared we would have water in the brook in wet weather but, because the weir is not holding back much water, there would probably be none during droughts. I think we would have to put up with this. Replacing the weir would be a tricky job and costly. We did consider putting sand bags behind the weir but they could not be placed anywhere useful unless the silt behind the weir was first dug out, and there is always a danger that the weir might collapse completely. Perhaps the safest action with the weir is to leave it alone.

Since then there have been rainstorms. Ample water is flowing in our slot. Will it stay that way? It might only be surface water picked up where the pipe passes through a grid.

Alan Jones

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Blackdown Hills Church Trail

Are you an OVA member living in the Blackdown Hills? Or perhaps just interested in Devon churches?

Sally Clark is setting up a project that aims to shine a light on the many overlooked or forgotten churches - and their treasures - in the Blackdown Hills.

With the support of the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership this project could consist of art, photographs, stories and histories presented in the form of exhibitions, a small book, workshops, a website and organised trails.

Sally is forming a small group to put this project together. If you are interested in joining or if you have particular knowledge of your local church, please contact Sally on 01884-840301 as soon as possible.

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WALKS

Four Firs, East Devon Way, the Commons, 9 October

The weather forecast was pretty atrocious: high winds and heavy rain. Fortunately, it was wrong! Reasonable autumn weather greeted those who gathered in Four Firs Car Park: 24 members and prospective members, many more than expected.

In view of the chill in the wind, a brisk pace was set as we followed the East Devon Way northwards below the west side of Woodbury Castle where we emerged on to the road near the Woodbury Golf and Country Club. We then swung eastwards, with good views ahead to the Otter Estuary, Ollerton, Colaton Raleigh and Mutters Moor. With another change of direction we descended the wide path to one of the fords near Stowford where we had a short break.

The ascent back to the Yettington Road was rugged in places but once across and on to Bicton Common the going was fairly easy. At one point we crossed a very small watercourse which may well be one of the early sources of the Budleigh Brook which runs through East Budleigh Village.

Soon we were back on another part of the East Devon Way for the final yardage back to the cars at Four Firs. Having started this walk with 24 people we actually finished with 26 - it's the Devon air, would you believe!

Ken Watson

River and Coastal, 27 November

A dull morning but good for walking. Thirty of us set off from White Bridge along the west side of the river, over Clamour Bridge then along Colliver Lane and up the track and footpath to the coast. In spite of the dull weather we could still see Portland Head some 40 miles away.

We stopped at the derelict lookout building for refreshment before continuing along the coast path with the wonderful view of Budleigh Salterton getting nearer, then following the river back to White Bridge.

I was grateful for the help of our resident experts, Marion Nalder to identify the flora and fauna, and Barbara Watson and David Jannaway for their knowledge of the bird-life, although it seems that most of the birds were having a day off.

Only one muddy patch and the one steep climb on the coast path. We kept up a good steady pace and, as promised, were back at White Bridge on the dot at midday, with the GPS recording exactly 4.5 miles.

David Huggett

Looking at Fungi, 10 November

We walked in a line, about two dozen of us, across the recreation field at Newton Poppleford, wondering if there were any to be found. 'There will be lots of them, don't worry', I was assured. But fungi are funny things you never know when they will appear. They will be there one day and gone the next.

Steadily we moved forward and soon people were bending down gathering a specimen or two. By the end of the field my tray was brimming full of offerings. Scarlet, red, orange, yellow, brown, white, pink, grey and green! A magical collection of bright shining Waxcaps. These beautiful fungi were there in their hundreds; I needn't have worried. Seeing all these Waxcaps (Hygrocybes) together brought out the cameras. We had over a dozen different species, including the rare and remarkable one called the Pink Ballerina that Barbara Watson was quick to find.

Moving on toward the river and Harpford Church we warmed up, as we had been exposed to a cold north wind. In the mossy grass of the churchyard we found and admired lots more Waxcaps and strange orange and yellow Fairy Clubs and even weirder black Earth Tongues that looked like liquorice. The lane too had 'goodies' as the uncommon Ramaria Stricta grew on the bank like tufts of soft coral fingers, along with other clumps of toadstools. Down the lane and into the woods, muddy but more sheltered, we found many more different woodland species like Sulphur Tuft and Funnel Caps. Finally, along the old railway track we discovered - well, 'Are they pine-needles standing on end in the leafy earth?', enquired someone. For about 75 yards there were Clavariadelphus in their hundreds, indeed looking just like pine-needles! And cascading down the bank were dozens of white antler-like branching Clavulinas. We certainly found some strange-looking fungi that day, as well as those enchanting colourful Waxcaps.

Marion Nalder

It is most unusual for the Newsletter to carry two accounts of the same walk. But human OVA members were not the only participants in Marion's Fungi Walk and the second tale that follows is contributed by Benjamin Bowman, who has kindly provided a dog's eye view of the morning's activities.

Woofy tails - on Auntie Marion and the 'fun-guy'

My name is Benjamin, and along with my sister Grace (oh; and Mum and Dad) we went on a walk in early November with the OVA. It was led by our Auntie Marion, who knows a thing or three about 'much-rooms'. Mum told us we were going on a 'fun-guy' walk, so just before 10 we turned up at Newton Poppleford Sports Hall, and walked around this field with everyone staring at the ground, picking up odd-coloured bits and looking very happy.

Then we all packed round Auntie Marion to hear some 'majic' words, and set off over the fields. We looked really silly being carried over the mud (Mum is such a spoilsport). Everyone got nice and wet and smelly, except us, grrrr. Then, in the churchyard, everyone herded round Auntie Marion again, and she cast so many more majic spells that everyone was really, really happy. Well, almost everyone. Me and Gracie sat down looking beautiful, and sulked. I kept looking for the fun-guy, but the only one I could find was Uncle David, 'cause he kept telling Auntie Marion to 'get a move on'. I like him; all he wants to do is walk, same as me.

Hours and hours later, after looking at white bits in walls, playing 'dodge the cars' and foraging around some trees, Auntie Marion said yet more majic words. Uncle David muttered something into his beard about time and suddenly we were off!

Thank you, Auntie Marion, for whatever it was you did, because it made Mum and Dad happy. And thank you Uncle David my fun-guy, I like going for walks with you.

Benjamin Bowman

15 FEBRUARY, TUESDAY 7.30 p.m. TALK BY DR. T. HARRIS ON 'HISTORY OF THE SALT MARSHES AT OTTER ESTUARY'. NEWTON POPP. CHURCH HALL.

19 FEBRUARY, SATURDAY 10 a.m., PEAK HILL CAR PARK, G.R.109872. 5 MILES, 2½ HOURS, MODERATE. MUTTERS MOOR, BULVERTON HILL, WOODLAND AND HEATHLAND. CAN BE MUDDY. *Walk leader:* PATRICIA DORAN, 01395-445954.

2 MARCH, WEDNESDAY 10 a.m. HAYES LANE CAR PARK, EAST BUDLEIGH, G.R.065849. 9 MILES, ENERGETIC. RIVER OTTER, MUTTERS MOOR, LADRAM BAY, ONE STEEP HILL. BRING LUNCH. *Walk leader:* EDWARD DIX, 01395-442326.

12 MARCH, SATURDAY 10 a.m. FOXHOLES CAR PARK, EXMOUTH, G.R.021799. 4 MILES, 2 HOURS, EASY. EXMOUTH HISTORY TRAIL. EXPLORE THE SEAFRONT AND DOCK AREA, ALONG THE BLUE PLAQUE TRAIL. *Walk leader:* HAZEL HARLAND, 01395-445665.

22 MARCH, TUESDAY, 7.30 p.m. TALK BY MALCOLM HASTE ON 'URBAN ENVIRONMENT OF EXETER'. EAST BUDLEIGH VILLAGE HALL.

23 MARCH, WEDNESDAY 10 a.m. BRANSCOMBE CAR PARK, G.R.197887. 9 MILES, ALL DAY, ENERGETIC. INLAND ROUTE TO BEER, RETURN TO BRANSCOMBE VIA COASTAL PATH. PUB LUNCH OR PICNIC IN BEER. *Walk leader:* PETER HILLS, 01395-568576.

For walk on Sat. 9 April, please see membership card.

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(01395)

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The Association was founded in 1979, is registered with the Civic Trust and the Charity Commissioners and is a member of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. It is also affiliated to the CPRE. It cares for the environment and queries should be put to your Parish Rep.

With thanks to Jed Falby for the illustrations on pages 5 and 16. Contributions for the next issue should be received by 10 March.

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