

OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION



Spring 2024

Contents

Page

1.	Contents	
2.	Chairman's Update	Haylor Lass
3.	Thatch in Devon	Dee Woods
5.	Saving the iconic seafront phone box	Bob Wiltshire
6.	Observations of Beaver Behaviour	David R. White
8.	Fungi from the Otter Valley	Various
9.	The Sewage Sleuths	Geoff Porter
13.	Rainbows across the Otter Valley	Various
14.	Fairlynch Museum – Coffee Morning Talks	Phil Ashworth
15.	Stop Press – Members Summer Party	Bob Wiltshire
16.	Walks Programme	Jane Connick
18.	Bird Boxes for local schools	Chris Hodgson Geoff Porter
19.	Walk Reports	The Walks team
22.	Communication Update	Chris Boorman
23.	Churches in the Otter Valley	Dee Woods
27.	Otter Estuary News	Rick Lockwood
29.	Membership Fees - an Early Reminder	Martin Smith
29.	Save the date for our AGM	
30.	Otter Valley Association Contacts	

Our Cover Photo

A beautiful view across the Otter Valley showcasing a full rainbow.
Credit to Geoff Porter for this picture.

Chairman's update

Welcome to 2024 and the Spring Edition of the OVA Newsletter. I hope you will find within its pages plenty to interest and enthuse you to get out and enjoy our wonderful 'patch' as the weather gets warmer and the days lengthen.

Not surprisingly, following the wettest autumn season on record, quite a lot of the content has a watery theme – beavers, river quality, the opening of the Elizabeth bridge to reconnect the SW Coast Path over the new seawater channel at the lower Otter, and a report of sewage pollution. No apologies for the length of this sewage report; it's an important topic and the environmental members of our organisation are well on the trail.

There are also articles on a range of interesting subjects, and an extensive programme of walks, many of which are local and within the capabilities of an octogenarian like myself, and a number to extend interest into the wider Devon Countryside. Well done to the walks team.

One disappointment remains – the Blackhill quarry, on the Pebblebeds common land. A long story, but the quarry achieved original planning consent with the condition that the area was restored to heathland on cessation of quarrying. When quarrying finished several years ago, the company applied to extend the use of the processing plant, hardstanding areas and buildings to deal with the stone coming from a re-opened quarry at Venn Ottery. Despite lots of local opposition, including the OVA, sadly permission was granted.

Meanwhile the workshop, which was an important facility for maintaining the quarrying and processing machines, was hived off to a separate company, which now occupies some of the area in its own right. So, although the dug areas of the quarry have been landscaped and planted and are well on the way to becoming heath, the access, hardstanding and buildings remain as an industrial use in the centre of an area of special natural beauty. During the autumn, applications were made to install a large bank of batteries to smooth the electricity grid performance with renewable power generation and to de-register the area from being Common Land, in exchange for including several small areas of woodland.

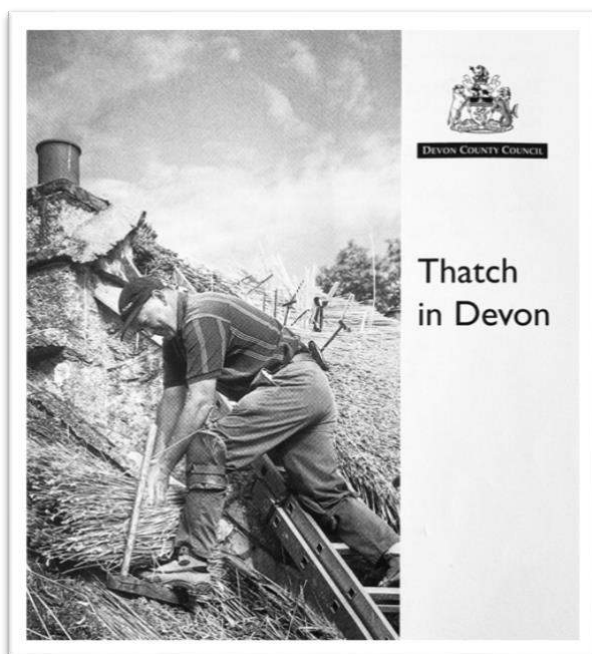
Despite being unhappy about this use of the area, the OVA have not lodged objections to these proposals, as being the 'least worst' options for what is now an established industrial site.

Haylor Lass

Thatch in Devon

Author: Dee Woods

Thatch is part of the identity and character of Devon. It has been used as a roofing material for over 600 years. There are more historic thatched properties in Devon than any other English county, and the rest of the world. Today the county probably has about 4000 thatched buildings, which is only a fraction of what once existed. Today they are mostly rural buildings, and in the past nearly all farm buildings would have been thatched. Most thatched buildings are historic listed buildings, and it is rare to find a new thatched house, although there is one in Otterton, next to the Old Vicarage on the corner of Ropers Lane. In fact, Otterton is a good place to see thatched buildings, as there are over thirty scattered around the village, and only three or four were built in the 20th century.



Thatching is a highly skilled job, as the material has to be laid so that the water runs off the roof quickly, and away from any 'leak' points such as junctions with chimney stacks or dormers. There is no need for guttering because of the projecting eaves. These roofs provide excellent insulation, keeping the house warm in winter and cool in summer.

As an organic material thatch decays over time as the stems of combed wheat reed or water reed degrade and rot back. The ridge of the roof is particularly vulnerable and needs replacing at least every 12 years. A roof can be

patched to prolong its life. Orientation and local conditions mean that one pitch of the roof may need attention before the other. That is why it is hard to predict how long a new thatched roof will last. With careful ridge maintenance, it can be anything from 20 to 30 years, depending on local conditions, as some areas of Devon are much wetter than others. Most Devon thatchers today rethatch by 'overcoating'. This technique preserves old layers of thatch and historically important parts of an old

roof. The thatcher lays combed reed in courses upwards from the eaves to the ridge, with the fixings of each course covered by the course above.

Ornaments on the ridge, such as pheasants, foxes or ducks, are a recent, 20th century trend, as none are noted on early photographs of Devon buildings. With greater emphasis on energy efficiency, it would be good to use thatch again for new buildings, as it fits into the local landscape. This has been done successfully in West Dorset. Of course, fire precautions are extremely important as there are about 12 serious thatch fires every year in Devon. Comprehensive advice can be obtained from the Devon Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Safety Officer.



Thatcher at work



New build thatch housing

For anyone who wants to find out more about this topic, there is a wealth of advice on all aspects of thatch on the Historic England website.

References

- Thatch in Devon - March 2003 Devon County Council.
- J Cox and J R L Thorp - Devon Thatch (Devon Books 2001)

Saving the iconic seafront phone box

Author: Bob Wiltshire, vice-chairman of Otter Valley Association

I'm delighted to report that the OVA has been informed by East Devon District Council and BT that the phone box on the beach front will remain and that BT will continue to provide a working phone.

On the 8th of August 2023, BT placed a notification inside the phone box, where it was not easily seen, advising that due to insufficient usage they were proposing removing the facility. The usual procedure is to inform the local planning authority,



in this case East Devon District Council, of their intent and after a period of three months if no objection is raised to remove the telephone equipment from the box which then becomes available for sale for £1. Purchaser collects !

When the OVA became aware of this proposal, we initiated an appeal for association members and the general public to contact the authority and raise an objection.

On Friday 5th of January, we were pleased to see a BT engineer repairing damage carried out by vandals and reinstalling the use of the phone. We contacted EDDC

who confirmed that the box had been reprieved. A further call to BT also confirmed the same. It seems that the change of heart was because EDDC had raised an objection on the grounds that it was in a seafront location and hence a safety facility.

We hope that objections raised by us all had some bearing on the decision that was made, and the OVA would like to thank everyone who did so. Also, to thank EDDC for their response about our iconic phone box which incidentally is listed as one of the heritage assets of Budleigh Salterton.

Observations of Beaver Behaviour

Author: David R. White, Naturalist

I have spent many hours down by the river Otter watching and waiting, very much hoping to gain various insights into our local beaver activities. Most of my interesting sightings occur close to dawn and dusk – which inevitably poses challenges for photographing at these times. Listed below are a selection of examples of their activities:

Beavers do spend time grooming their fur. During these times, spreading oil from their castoreum gland at the base of their tail to keep their fur waterproof. Both adults and juveniles will mutually groom. Sometimes, before mutual grooming starts, they appear to greet each other – which often includes touching noses! No doubt checking each other's odours to confirm family membership. It is heart-warming to witness their behaviour – particularly between Mum and small kit.



When the young beaver kits are seen in the water, I realised on these occasions that I had many more sightings of Otters than I would normally expect. Frequently when otters are fishing, they appear to “porpoise” under water on their own. Otters seen near young beaver kits were swimming in pairs, fast on the surface. They appeared



hyper-alert and obviously not fishing. I believe that they were opportunistically hunting, hoping to predate an unattended beaver kit. Such potential predation of their kits makes adults aggressively defend their kits – and it is why dog owners are asked to discourage their dogs from the river at these times.

One morning, at dawn, I watched a badger come down to the river to drink. It then moved off up a steep riverside bank, lost its footing and fell some 10 to 12 feet into the water below. On the way it hit and broke a dead branch. All this commotion immediately attracted the attention of the adult male beaver some 30 yards away. He very rapidly swam towards the badger and, without hesitation, attacked the badger. He inflicted a bite to its nose and possible a leg. The beaver then promptly realised that the badger posed no threat to him or his family and swam off. The confused badger swam around in several circles before it left the water and limped off.



Female beavers have four teats and usually give birth to between 2 and 4 kits. One year “pink tag” mum had 5 kits. The smallest was always last to feed and was very slow to gain weight. I guessed, within a couple of months, the largest and most confident litter kit was more than twice its size. This smallest kit did survive the winter, but as a much smaller animal than is usual. The

following spring Mum had 3 kits and I was astonished to see Mum allowing the smallest kit from the previous year to suckle with her new siblings.



One year, as summer progressed, we experienced an extended dry spell resulting in a significant drop in the water level in the river. Very early one morning I was watching at the entrance to the beavers' burrow – which is underwater. The adult female beaver was frequently diving in the riverbed and surfacing with a melon-sized lump of mud. Each time this was deposited on the river bank some distance away. I discussed this behaviour with a local expert – he was sure the beaver was increasing the depth of water to the burrow entrance. In effect, creating an underwater canal to allow underwater access during the lowered water levels. He also told me that if this action failed to achieve the desired result, it was very likely to trigger dam-building downstream from the burrow entrance, to achieve the same effect.

There is still much to learn about beavers, a keystone species; the impact they have on the area where they live, and how many species can benefit from their presence. Much more information is easily accessible on the internet.

PS: Did you know that several local groups / individuals offer evening walks to see our beavers during the late Spring and Summer period?

Fungi from the Otter Valley

A small selection of the types of Fungi found across the commons.



The Sewage Sleuths

This is a story of two people who've made a difference – Professor Peter Hammond and Ash Smith.

Author: Geoff Porter, OVA Environmental Committee

Last October, I took the opportunity to attend a talk entitled 'The River Sewage Pollution Scandal' given by the above gentlemen as a part of Sidmouth Science Festival. Over many years, the state of our rivers and streams has been gradually deteriorating at a pace that was easy to overlook. For those closely linked to our waterways, the decline in water quality, water plant and aquatic life was noticed but not understood.

In 2013, Peter and Ash became neighbours living alongside the river Windrush which runs through the Cotswolds before entering the Thames. The former was a retired professor specialising in machine learning and the latter a retired detective superintendent and keen angler. Ash watched fish numbers decline, the clear water had become opaque and aquatic plants slowly disappeared as algae took a hold. As both the Environment Agency and Ofwat were there to monitor the privatised water companies, where was the pollution coming from? In 2017, Hammond and Smith combined their professional skills to investigate; why was this happening?

Together, they persisted, making numerous freedom of information requests to their local water company regarding the releasing of untreated sewage into the Windrush over the previous 3 years. They began to piece together a picture that stank; they learnt that over that period there had been 240 recorded events. The impact of sewage in rivers is to flood them with nutrients, increasing algae which exhausts oxygen in the water and blocks out light, thus suffocating fish, insects and plants. Along with other neighbours, they set up Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, 'Wasp,' in 2018.

Hammond and Smith learnt how sewage works processed waste and found that surface water run off combined with sewage to go through that same system. This flow was supposedly being monitored every 15 minutes. Peter Hammonds analysis identified morning and evening peaks in waste produced as people showered, washed, flushed and did the dishes. When these peaks coincided with heavy rainfall, water treatment works could be overwhelmed. So, water companies were then faced with three options: - hold back the waste, forcing it to back up the system to drains and toilets, invest in increasing the capacity of their works or let sewage go into the river untreated.

Hammond and Smith discovered that raw sewage had indeed been entering the Windrush and that water companies were permitted to do so at times of exceptional rainfall. Legally, water companies had to inform the regulators of these events but hadn't been doing so. Furthermore, the data showed raw sewage had been discharged

into the Windrush at times when there hadn't been heavy rainfall. Regulators had either failed to recognise, or chosen to ignore this despite knowing that watercourses had been consistently deteriorating.

When Hammond and Smith faced the Government with this evidence, they blamed the Environment Agency, pointing out that, with 10,500 staff and a £1.6bn budget, there should be no excuses as to why these discharges hadn't been investigated and recorded. However, further investigation by Hammond and Smith found that the vast majority of that budget was allocated to flood defence work. The money ring-fenced for environmental protection had in fact been cut by 80% since 2010. At the same time, the annual enforcement budget had fallen from £11.6m to £7m. Consequently, the 800 prosecutions made in 2007-8 had fallen to 17 in 2020-21. Water companies knew that the E.A.'s testing capacity had been significantly reduced as had the risk of prosecution. Fewer prosecutions suggested that pollution was reducing due to water company improvements when in reality it was the result of many events not being investigated. For example, on the river Wye, 80 survey points had been reduced to 20. Whilst water testing legislation was in place, the Environment Agencies did not have the resources to investigate spillage incidents properly.

The duo then broadened their research and discovered that all water companies they gleaned data from were also making illegal discharges; many of these were not being investigated. This evidence was put to Ofwat without response, despite there now being irrefutable data available.

At the end of 2020, Parliament's Environment Audit Committee inquired into the state of English and Welsh rivers and Professor Hammond put their findings to an appalled committee. In July 2021, the Committee visited the Windrush to see for themselves. Prof. Hammond then also provided details on Mogden, the third largest sewage works in the UK, situated next to Twickenham Stadium. This showed that, in October, over a 2-day period, over 2 billion litres of raw sewage had been released into the Thames.

That November, Ofwat and the E.A. announced an investigation into English and Welsh water companies. Preliminary checks of millions of pieces of information provided by the companies suggested 'widespread and serious non-compliance.' Peter Hammond had already investigated these spillages and provided hard data. Both Ofwat and the E.A. were then bound to confirm that information. Following this, Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the E.A. stated that 'water company executives and investors' had been 'rewarded handsomely while the environment pays the price.'

Negligent storage of farm slurry, silage and fuel-oil spillage also degrades streams and rivers. It is alleged that in the Wye valley for example, excessive nutrients from the large quantities of manure produced by the intensive farming of chickens has

resulted in that rivers demise. It has also been suggested that even where farm pollution is detected, enforcement and penalties are not sufficient to be a deterrent. In 2021, the government provided funding for an additional 50 farm inspectors bringing the total to 80. As well as investigating pollution incidents, their role is to encourage farmers to adopt good practice.

Alongside the more visible sewage pollution, there are also antibiotic-resistant micro-organisms, micro-plastics and 'forever chemicals' such as polyfluoroalkyl substances entering our waterways. All the drugs and chemicals that we use go down the drainage system, out of sight and out of mind but are there never-the-less.

The Sidmouth audience who listened to Professor Hammond and Ash Smiths presentations might have attended in the hope that with so much information now in the public arena, government would have forced water companies to make rapid, significant improvements. Sadly, their presentations proved otherwise. In summary, their main points were:-

Ash Smith:-

- only serious pollution incidents are being prosecuted
- water companies have been reducing their investment in works
- companies are using off-shore banking
- companies are still permitted to release untreated sewage when works are inundated
- poorly maintained sewage pipes are resulting in sewage entering fields and brooks
- the claim by the E.A. that plant-life on the Windrush had improved related to plants on the banks not those in the water

Professor Hammond:- sewage-work regulations state that –

- out-spills should meet agreed chemical levels
- water companies should inform the E.A. of out-spill volumes every hour and day
- excess flow should be held in storm tanks and treated but, when these tanks are full, untreated sewage can be legally released
- whilst the times of discharges are recorded, volumes are not. Water companies claim they are not capable of recording discharge volumes
- where data identified that improvements were required, customers' bills would be increased to pay for them
- information on out-spills is often recorded between 07.00 and 14.00, the lowest, off-peak period
- huge amounts of micro-plastics and chemicals enter the system through sewage and then end up in the food chain

- when excessive water enters treatment works, it often passes sewage through the system too quickly to be properly treated
- SWW refused to provide all the information that should be publicly available

So, has anything changed?

In late October this year, following further investigations by Professor Hammond, Welsh Water - which is a not-for-profit company previously seen as abiding by regulations - admitted that they too had been spilling sewage from dozens of their treatment plants. In total, 11 Welsh rivers were exposed to 100,000 hours of illegal spills. Of those, four treatment works had discharged 419 million litres. Prof. Hammond's research showed that between 40 and 50 Welsh Water treatment plants had operated in breach of their permits. Nonetheless, several polluted Welsh beaches were still awarded Blue Flags. Natural Resources Wales which undertakes the same role as the Environment Agency, had allowed these discharges for up to 10 years.

Most recently, BBC Panorama on 4th December 2023 investigated north-west water companies, including United Utilities, along with the Environment Agency failing to monitor sewage discharges and regulation breaches. This failure included the E.A. who were agreeing to downgrade multiple pollution incidents to category 4, a point at which they did not require investigation and therefore recording. Of 931 reported pollution incidents, the E.A. had only attended 6. Illegal discharges included those into Lake Windermere.

United Utilities denied these BBC allegations despite the evidence. The company had previously been seen as a best performer, as was Welsh Water. The Company were awarded £5 million pounds last year for apparently reducing pollution incidents.

In conclusion, it would appear likely that all water companies are making illegal sewage discharges and that many polluting events are either not being recorded or under-recorded. This is partly if not wholly due to lack of investment in sewage works resulting in them being incapable of treating the volumes of sewage and storm water they receive. Water Companies continue to be self-regulating and Hammond and Smith suggest that companies 'manage' information about when, where and in what volumes they make sewage discharges and how polluting that might be.

Many Water Company investors are based abroad. Their priorities have been and seemingly continue to be making profit and rewarding executives rather than investing in infrastructure. Companies replenish their finances, including any fines, by passing on costs to customers who have no choice of provider.

Both Ofwat, the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales are failing to ensure that water companies are not polluting water courses.

Failing to update the capability of sewage works to not just manage sewage but micro-plastics and a plethora of chemicals is resulting in the slow death of our watercourses. The threats presented by the latter are still not fully understood. There does not appear to be the political will to urgently respond to this situation especially at a time of financial constraint.

We often feel that, as individuals, we are powerless to bring about change. However, Professor Hammond and Ash Smith are proof that the determination of two persistent amateurs has made a real difference. Other amateurs that have highlighted river pollution are passionate fishermen Feargal Sharkey and Paul Whitehouse. Both have campaigned to save our rivers. If you want to learn more, about Hammond and Smith, visit: www.windrushwasp.org

If you wish to support change, visit RIVERACTION environment charity at riveraction.com

Sources.

- The River Sewage Pollution Scandal presentation – Professor Peter Hammond and Ash Smith. Part of Sidmouth Science Festival. 14th October 2023.
- Men who revealed the slow, dirty death of English and Welsh rivers. Oliver Bullough. 4th August 2022.
- Welsh Water admits illegally spilling sewage article. Kerry Hebden.
- The Chemical Engineer. 23.10.2023
- BBC Panorama. The Water Pollution Cover-Up. 04.12.2023.

Rainbows over the Otter mouth



Credit: Chris Boorman



Credit: David R. White



Credit: David R. White

Fairlynch Museum - Coffee Morning Talks

Author: Phil Ashworth

The talk series organiser Phil Ashworth extends a warm welcome to OVA members and hopes to entice some of you along to the St Peter's Hall

The Fairlynch Museums Coffee morning talks started the year with a bang: David White gave a brilliant overview of the birdlife around the lower Otter nature reserve – to a packed house of about 140 people. So, looking ahead over the next few months, this is what the line-up looks like.



Credit: Roger Saunders

7th Feb. *Guilty as charged?*

Former High Court judge *Sir Richard Gibbs* provides an insight into the dilemmas faced by defence counsel in criminal cases. We only need to pick up the Radio Times (other listing publications are available) to know what a hold crime, the police and the law have over us all. Have you ever watched a popular series and wondered how accurate it all is? I'm sure the wheels of justice run a lot more carefully and cautiously than a 60-minute drama can allow. So, what really goes on in a real court, when real people and real lives are involved?

Wednesday 6th March 2024: Joyce Dennys by Sarah Bussey

Local author *Sarah Bussey* won much acclaim with her biography of Budleigh's own cartoonist, illustrator and painter and there are many stories still to tell. Joyce's life could almost be subtitled "From India to Budleigh Salterton" where her father had retired after military service in India. Joyce truly was multitalented and there's enough for everyone to choose their favourite aspect. Writer, caricaturist, painter, in fact she only took up oil painting when she was 70, With a unique style its fitting that ten of her paintings can be seen in the Fairlynch Museum.

Wednesday 3rd April 2024: Admiral Preedy and the Victorian Internet.

Trevor Waddington tells the story of the 11-year-old who joined the Navy in 1828 and rose and rose. He was made a Rear Admiral after his retirement and, in 1858, laid the first pioneering transatlantic cable linking Great Britain, Europe, and America. He died at his home in Budleigh Salterton on 30th May 1894. It's a fascinating story and Trevor, with a respected Naval background himself, has worked hard to research the life of a man who surely deserves to have his achievements in Victorian times thoroughly acknowledged in the era of X/Twitter or whatever it's being called this week!

All talks are at 10:30am for tea & coffee before starting at 11:00am. Everyone is welcome. £4 for Friends of the Fairlynch and £6 for non-members. A bargain!

Stop Press – Members Summer Party

Date: 8th of May 2024. 7.00pm - 9.30pm

Location: Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club.



This party will give you an opportunity to not only meet other members, but to hear from the Executive Committee about how our association is run and what we do. Also, hopefully to interest some of you into joining the committee to assist in the smooth running of the association.

The party starts at 7.00pm with a welcome drink and canapes. There will be a fully manned bar available throughout the evening, where further drinks may be purchased.

There is a large car park and should you wish, there are conveniently timed bus services from both the Sidmouth or Budleigh Salterton directions, with nearby bus stops. You can find these on-line at stagecoach.com.

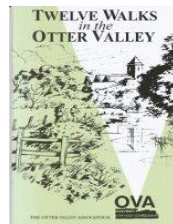
The cost of the event is £15 per head. Tickets will be available using 'Eventbrite' – see the link under “Events” on the OVA website, or from our Facebook group.

[Cut-off date for tickets is the 24th of April]

Walk Programme February - April

Author: Jane Connick & the walks team

We are delighted to offer a range of walks – short and long, flat and exciting for all to enjoy. Please join our experienced walk leaders for guided walks – taking in great scenery, interesting history and enjoyable company.



Come along and try one out, we always welcome new faces and you can find out where that footpath leads – you will not be disappointed.

'Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley' – walk 3

Tuesday 6 February – 10.00am – 7.5miles

Meet: East Budleigh Car Park (OS 115, SY 038 844)

East Budleigh, Shortwood Common, Ting Tong, West Down Beacon, Budleigh Salterton
A circular walk, mostly on good tracks, with short distances on quiet country lanes. The coast path should have lovely views from it on a clear day.

Walk Leaders: Iain Ure and Dee Woods 01395 568822 / 07597 921007

A Valley, Raleigh, Common, Ford and a Plantation

Tuesday 20 February – 10.00am – 7.5 miles. 4.5 hours.

Meet: Four Firs CP (OS 115, SY 032 864) EX9 7BR

Visting Uphams Plantation, Stoneyford, Hawkerland Valley, Colaton Raleigh Common and Woodbury Common. Stops for coffee and a picnic lunch.

Walk Leader: Sarah Westcott 0770 6078143

'Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley' – walk 4

PROVISIONAL Tuesday 27 February – 10.00am – 5 miles

Please check website for exact date nearer the time.

Meet: East Budleigh Car Park (OS 115, SY 038 844)

A varied walk including Hayes Wood, Shortwood Common, Dalditch and Squabmoor Reservoir.

Walk Leaders: Iain Ure and Dee Woods 01395 568822 / 07597 921007

'Turf, powder and minster'

Friday 1 March – 10.00am – 7 miles. 4.5 hours

Meet: Exminster Marshes and nature reserve CP (OS 110, SX 9538 8721)

A mostly flat and mud-free walk along the towpath of the Exeter Ship canal past the Turf Inn and then the embankment of the Exe estuary to Powderham. Turning inland the route returns on quiet lanes to Exminster. Optional lunch at the pub.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 0788 796280

'Westward Oh'

Saturday 9 March – 10.00am – 6 miles. 3 hours.

Meet: new car park, South Farm Road. EX9 7AZ (£ applies)

We will follow the South West footpath westwards to West Down Beacon (a bit of a climb). Returning via fields, forest and footpaths to the starting point.

Walk Leader: Steve Hagger 01395 442631 / 07901 517948

Castle and Commons

Week commencing 18 March – 10.00am – 5.5 miles. 3 hours.

PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE NEARER THE TIME FOR EXACT DATE

Meet: Four Firs car park, (just east of junction of B3179 and B3180)

(OS 115, 032 864) What3Words ooze.directive.overhear

A walk on Woodbury and Colaton Raleigh Commons and their fringes taking in Woodbury Castle, Stowford and Uphams Plantation.

There will be a coffee stop part way round (so bring a flask)

Walk Leader: Ross Hussey rdandamhussey22@gmail.com or 01395 227991.

Mobile for contact on the day only: 07902 255915

Budleigh to Sidmouth by the coast path

Tuesday 2 April – 10.00am – 7 miles. 3.5 hours

Meet: Lime Kiln CP, Budleigh Salterton (OS 115, SY 0732 8212) by the new Footbridge.

From Budleigh Salterton we follow the coast path all the way to Sidmouth and hope to get some wonderful views along the way. This walk is normally done in summer and the landscape will have a different feel to it in early April. There is only one stiff climb, but the path may be slippery in places at this time of year. We will break for coffee at Ladram Bay and finish up at the bus triangle in Sidmouth.

There will be time for relaxing or even shopping in Sidmouth before catching the hourly bus back to Budleigh Salterton.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 0788 7936280

Back in time for lunch at the beach

Thursday 18 April – 10.00am – 6.5 miles. 3 hours.

Meet: at the steps to the right of the entrance to Budleigh Salterton free car park opposite the town hall. (OS 115, SY 061 820). If the car park is full there are usually spaces available on Westfield Road which is opposite the town hall.

A circular walk via Dark Lane, Shortwood Common and East Budleigh. We should have some good views. There will be a coffee stop so bring a flask.

We have the option of stopping for lunch along the sea front or heading back to the start.

There may be some short, muddy sections, if wet.

Walk Leaders: Heather and Michael Fereday 01395 446796 / 07484 627312

Three Churches and there's Nobody In(n)

Wednesday 24 April– 10.00am – about 7.5 miles. 5 hours including stops.

Booking required (shorter variant available)

Meet: Christow Car Park (toilets available) (OS 110, SX 837 851) it takes about 45 minutes from East Budleigh. Please share cars if possible.

We will visit 3 wonderful medieval churches with a lot of original features and walk along quiet lanes and paths in peaceful countryside with great views on a clear day. We start at Christow, visit High Ashton and should be at Doddiscombsleigh by lunchtime – bring a picnic or try the Nobody Inn pub for lunch and/or drink. We then walk back to Christow with a couple of surprises on the way. If you prefer a shorter trip, then you can save 2.5 miles of walking by taking the bus from Doddiscombsleigh to Christow (Country Bus 360 at 13.51, arrives Christow 14.02)

Some steep hills!

Please book with the walk leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski – 01395 742942 / 07792 619748 or pandp@kurowski.me.uk

Bird Boxes for local schools

The OVA has agreed to supply nest boxes for tits, robins and house sparrows to Primary Schools in our area:

- St. Peters Budleigh
- East Budleigh
- Otterton

These are about to be ordered and should be in place within the next month to six weeks. We are also planning to supply bug-hotels and perhaps hedgehog "homes" to some of them later. If you know of a local school or community team who would like the same, please let us know.



Walks Report

Author: The Walks team

We ran a packed program of walks during the winter months:

- “Ghost Train” on Friday 6th October
- “Otter and Orchards” on Wednesday 18th October
- “Classic coastal path and Otter exploration” on Sunday 21st October
- “Here’s one for Eeyore” on Wednesday 1st November
- “Around the Commons” on Friday 3rd November
- “Sid Valley Ring West” on Friday 10th November
- “Walk 1: ‘Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley’” on Tuesday 14th November
- “Bird-watching walk around the Otter Estuary” on Tuesday 21st November
- “Woodbury and Woodbury Salterton” on Friday 1st December
- “Walk 12” from 12 Walks in the Otter Valley on Tuesday 12th December
- “Walk 2” from 12 Walks in the Otter Valley on Tuesday 19th December
- “A New Year walk” on Tuesday 2nd January
- “Walk 6” from 12 walks in the Otter Valley on 9th January
- “4 Plantations and an old rifle range” on Tuesday 16th January
- “Take the train for a walk from town to Topsham” on Tuesday 25th January

We are very lucky to have amazing walk leaders who are knowledgeable and can provide insights into the local terrain and history. Our walks operate with 10+ people per walk – although the bird watching walk around the Otter Estuary attracted nearly 45 walkers from across the region. Walkers join for a variety of reasons – to get out in the fresh air; to meet others and make friendships; to learn a little about the local history; to exercise as part of a regular exercise program.

Over the next two pages, please enjoy a variety of pictures from the walks we have been on. You can find individual walk reports on our website or our facebook group. There are simply too many to print here.

We would also be delighted if you could join us on any of our upcoming walks – you can find full details here in this newsletter, and on our facebook page, and the OVA website.





Communication

Author: Chris Boorman

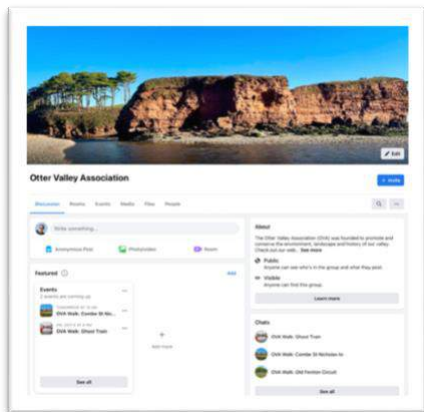
The OVA is now using a combination of printed newsletter, online websites, Facebook groups and Whatsapp to help ensure everyone knows what is going on.

Website:

Here we maintain all information and ensure that everything is available for you to view. As you can see from the screenshot, easy viewing of our walks program, searching of the OVAPedia and many other useful elements are available to view and use.



Facebook:



We are growing a dynamic and informative [facebook group](#) to help members share their own experiences and comment on articles. As of going to print, the facebook group now has over 500 members. We will provide updates to this whenever anything happens – but we encourage everyone to engage, add their own posts and comment on others. You can find this by searching for “Otter Valley Association” when inside Facebook.

If you are able to view it, you will find many updates from others – including pictures of wildlife and other interesting articles that are not printed in this newsletter.

Our walkers have also created a WhatsApp group to help coordinate and share information about their walks. So if you are interested in joining a walk, please ask the walk leader to add you to the Whatsapp group.

Churches in the Otter Valley

Author: Dee Woods

There are eleven churches in the Otter Valley, a Methodist Temple, and a number of deconsecrated chapels, no longer in use for public worship. This is a very brief summary, but each church deserves a detailed visit to look at the wealth of interesting historical features that these buildings hold.

All Saints Church, East Budleigh

There is no record of when the church was built, but it has Saxon origins, and worked Saxon stone was found embedded within the wall on the North side of the chancel in 1859. The current church mostly dates from the 12th and 15th centuries. It is a Grade 1 listed building with many fine features and carvings. The north and south aisles were added around 1420, with impressive Beer stone columns. The wagon ceiling with decorated bosses over the chancel and nave are very fine. At this time the inside would have been brightly painted with frescoes, looking very different from today. There are 63 remarkable medieval carved bench ends, believed to have been carved by local craftsmen of varying skills. The subjects represented include the arms of local families; various local trades and a great many have ornamental designs including mythical creatures and foliage. Of course Sir Walter Raleigh's family are closely associated with the church, as his father was a Church warden. The tomb of Johanne Raleigh is in the floor, close to the Raleigh pew, which is dated 1537. The churchyard had many beautiful trees, including ancient yew trees, and wins awards for the way it looks after its wildlife.



Saint Mary's Church, Bickton



The ruins of the former Early English church are adjacent to the present small church in a secluded spot surrounded by beech trees. All that now remains is a small tower and some graceful but ruined window tracery of 15th century origin. When the old church was demolished, Nicholas Pugin used it to design and construct a "Planned ruin" as a mausoleum at the south corner. This was for the tomb of the second Lord Rolle and a marble monument

of Dennis Rolle Esq. The remains of an ancient cross (1066) are just outside the door of the mausoleum.

The present church was built in 1850, having been commissioned by Louisa, Lady Rolle. The church was designed by Hayward of Exeter in the Decorated style. The foundation stone was laid on 27 September 1848.

The walls of the church are of cut limestone from Chudleigh, with Bath and Portland stone dressings. The tower comprises three stories, the top being a belfry. Around the parapet of the roof are carvings of fabulous beasts and caricatures of human faces. The dripstones of the porch and window arches are carved to represent Kings and Queens of England. The stones of the North Porch bear the likenesses of Lord and Lady Rolle (strangely with Oliver Cromwell on the side). Those on the South Porch depict Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

St Michael and All the Angels Otterton

It is likely that there was a Saxon church on this site but the first official record of a Priory is 1161. The Saxon church was rebuilt by the monks, with a detached tower. After the Dissolution (1539) the parish church was rebuilt with the tower at the eastern end of the nave.



In 1869 Lady Louisa Rolle decided that the church was not good enough for the village and paid for the building of a large new church, by Benjamin Ferrey. It only took one year to erect, but the old tower was kept, and the new church was built to the west of it, which is most unusual. The exterior walls were built of limestone from Berry Head, and are bluish-grey in colour, with Ham Hill stone dressings. Beer limestone is used for all the interior

walls. One of the few relics of the old church is the 15th century font. There is a good stained glass East window of the Crucifixion by Ward and Hughes. There are many fine listed chest tombs in the churchyard.

Churches in Budleigh Salterton

In 1812 Lord Rolle built a Chapel of Ease near the corner of Chapel Street with East Terrace. It remained in use until after the consecration of St Peter's Church in 1893, but was demolished in the 1900s.

The oldest church still standing is the Baptists Church at Little Knowle, which was built in 1844 by public subscription. It has a dignified pedimented front with black channelled corner pilasters and two emphatic rusticated doorways. It been beautifully restored.

The Methodist ‘Temple’ was erected in 1812 by a retired resident, Mr James Lackington. He moved to Budleigh from London, and was so struck by the “spiritual destitution of the place”. The original Temple was replaced in 1904-5 with money raised from public subscription.

St Peter

This was built in 1891-3 to replace the chapel of ease. It was designed by the Devon borne architect G H Fellowes Prynne and paid for by the Hon Mark Rolle. It is large and cruciform with a magnificent interior under a barrel



vault roof. Only the lower part of the intended North West tower and spire were completed. The exterior is of grey limestone with Doultton stone trim. The interior has clustered arcade piers of Doultton stone and marble. The pulpit is of sandstone with pierced panels of brass and iron, and was given by Lady Gertrude Rolle. The church was damaged in the Second World War by a German bomb, so the only stained glass of 1893 is in the baptistery.

St John the Baptist Colaton Raleigh



The church was built before 1226, originally of stone, probably from Beer. But it was largely rebuilt in 1875 by R Medley Fulford, who kept the 15th century West tower. It has retained the transitional arcade of circa 1200, between the nave and the north aisle, the piscine by the high altar and the 13th century transitional font with cable moulding. Stone from Ladram Bay was used in its construction.

St Lukes Church Newton Poppleford

The age of the church is not known, but there was an ancient chapel recorded in the hamlet in 1331, when the foundation and endowment of a chantry was licensed by Bishop Grandisson. The West tower is all that remains of the medieval church. The walls are of local Sandstone, with Beer stone used for the cut stones on the corners, window and gargoyles. A south aisle was added in 1826, as the population was growing fast. The Nave and Chancel were rebuilt in 1875 when a continuous roof was made. For most of its history the parish was linked with Aylesbeare, but in 1855 it became a separate parish church with a licenced curate. By 1863 it had its own incumbent, the Revd Samuel Henry Walker.



St Gregory's Church Harpford

The Church was restored in 1884 by Hayward and Son, and consists of a nave,



chancel and aisle with a very fine battlemented tower. The walls are of reddish rubble, with a variety of windows including some 13 century lancets. The North aisle has 14th century octagonal piers and simple chamfered arches. There are some fine stained glass windows. Augustus Toplady, who wrote 'Rock of Ages' was the incumbent in 1706. The churchyard cross was restored in his memory with an inscription.

St Gregory's Church Venn Ottery

The Saxon tower dates back to about 1095 and is the oldest part of the church, being mostly medieval with paired square-headed belfry windows. The church was destroyed by fire in the 18th century. The nave was rebuilt in 1882 by Packham and Croule of Exeter. New windows were inserted and new roofs built. There are some late medieval carved bench-ends with large foliage forms, and Victorian replacements by Hems to match.



Otter Estuary News

Author: Rick Lockwood, Ranger

It has been an exciting and eventful end to the year as the physical works of the restoration project came to a completion. The new footbridge was finally opened to the public on the 24th of November, allowing people access to all the footpaths around the reserve.

With the footprint of the reserve becoming tidal at the end of August the reserve has seen significant change with a natural die-off of vegetation and new areas of mudflats appearing – all good for shorebirds. There has been some natural deepening and widening of channels in the existing estuary associated with the greater volume of seawater entering the site on each tidal cycle.

Numbers of wildfowl increased steadily through the autumn and by December there were around 120 wigeon, 200 teal, and over 300 mallard on site, with smaller numbers of shelduck and a few brent goose by the months end.

It has been nice to see wading birds feeding on the newly created tidal areas with small flocks of redshank, dunlin, and ringed plover ever present. Avocet sightings seem to be increasing with a maximum of four birds at the beginning of January. Around 20 curlews are over-wintering and have been seen regularly in the wet fields in the north of the reserve.



Grey phalarope (credit David White)



Avocet (credit: David White)

Rarer visitors to the reserve this autumn included a grey phalarope on 31st October. This small charismatic wading bird breeds in the Arctic and spends its winters in tropical oceanic waters. They sometimes turn up inland, after storms as they are migrating south, and like this bird, can be very tame and approachable. A yellow-

OVA NEWS Spring 2024

browed warbler was seen amongst several overwintering chiffchaffs in the willows along the western footpath for a few days. This little gem, a favourite with birdwatchers, is a scarce autumn visitor to the UK as it breeds far away in the taiga forests of Siberia and mostly winters in south-east Asia.



Roosting Dunlin (credit David White)

Upcoming events

Join us in celebrating World Wetlands Day on Friday 2nd February between 1 - 4pm. Look out for our pop-up gazebo at Lime Kiln carpark and learn more about the fascinating lives of the wildfowl and wading birds that frequent the reserve.

If you are interested in volunteering on the reserve, we have several roles available. Please email the ranger at Rick.Lockwood@clintondevon.com for further details.

An Early Reminder

Author: Martin Smith, Treasurer

Thank you to all of our members who paid their membership fee this year and continue to support the OVA. This is a reminder to those who paid by cheque, or made online payments, to please pay your fee for the new membership year, beginning in April 2024.

You may recall that the OVA increased membership rates in April last year. The current rate is £10.00 for an individual and £15.00 for a household. Payments can be made online (details on our website under 'Join Us') or cheques can be sent to our usual address. If you make a payment online please use your last name and your membership number as the reference.

The OVA has decided, regretfully, that because of the costs involved members who did not arrange to pay the new fee during 2023 will no longer receive the newsletter from April 2024.

Annual General Meeting

Please mark your diary to attend our AGM which will be taking place on:

Tuesday 11 June at 7.30pm
at
The Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton.

We hope to follow the 'business' part of the meeting with a glass of something and an interesting talk on a local topic (as last year). We will provide more details in the early Summer edition of the Newsletter, on our website and in our Facebook group.

The Otter Valley Association

Trustees (and Executive Committee)

Haylor Lass	Chairman, Newton Poppleford	01395 568786
Bob Wiltshire	Vice-chair, Budleigh Salterton	01395 444395
Jane Kewley	Secretary	01395 445598
Martin Smith	Treasurer, Membership, Web	01395 442333
Chris Hodgson	Natural Environment	01404 815604
Geoff Porter	Natural Environment	01395 567055
Dee Woods	Built Environment, Otterton	01395 568822

Other Contacts

Jane Connick	Walks Organiser	01395 233614
David Daniel	History Advisor	01395 445960
Heather Fereday	Newsletter distribution	01395 446796
Chris Boorman	Newsletter Editor	07517 137050
Jon Roseway	Publications, Walks	01395 488739

Otter Valley Association

© 2023

www.ova.org.uk

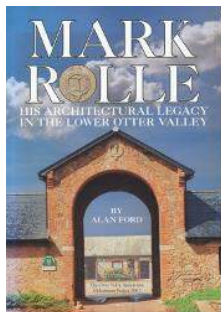
Reg Charity No. 278266

OVA PO BOX 70

Budleigh Salterton

EX9 6WN

OVA Publications



Mark Rolle

His Architectural Legacy in the Lower Otter Valley

Ever wondered about the many improved farm buildings and cottages in this area? This lavishly illustrated book gives a very readable overview of how a large landed estate was managed in the last 40 years of the 19th century.

£4.95 from Budleigh Salterton Information Centre

Or visit www.oval.org.uk



Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from Budleigh Salterton Information Centre

Or visit www.oval.org.uk



Leaflets

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley. They can usually be found in the Budleigh Salterton Information Centre and in other outlets around the valley.