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Anon.

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The Woldingham Natural History Society 1907

One hundred years ago this year the Woldingham Natural History Society was formed. Maybe the founders were inspired by the fact that 1907 was that the 200th anniversary of Linnaeus' birth or that the locally influential Holmesdale Natural History Society was celebrating its 50th anniversary or perhaps just inspired by their natural surroundings. They were living at one of the highest points on the North Downs surrounded by downland and woodland.

Members of the Society identified hundreds of species of plants, birds, butterflies and moths and other organisms. The format of their Diaries is clear from the first page with long lists of insects: '...ladybirds, dungflies, gnats, tipula grubs and lacewings'. There is no room here to go into detail of their findings, but they are of interest when considering today's wildlife. Of butterflies, Dark Green Fritillaries recorded by them are no longer found locally, some such as the Small Blue and Chalkhill Blue exist in single small colonies. On the other hand, Commas and Brown Argus populations are expanding. Marbled Whites, Silver Washed Fritillaries and Purple Emperors not recorded then, are now present.

The Society identified over 350 species of plants. They found fly orchids on the scarp of the downs as Brewer had described. The Society listed nine species of orchid: *Orchis morio* not now found locally, *Ophrys insectifera* is rare, *Platanthera bifolia* decreasing, *Ophrys apifera* is quite widespread. Some that are plentiful now, such as *Listera ovata*, were not recorded. The Society kept detailed notes on the timing of bud break, flowering, fruit ripening and leaf fall - highly topical with today's interest in phenology.

They did not just make species lists. They discussed controversial events - the burning of grass on the hillsides - whether burning was a 'good thing' - for birds or for the vigour of plants. They recorded the grubbing up of coppice as houses were built. They were fascinated by variations in structural form and colour. From the outset they recorded pages and pages on the colour variants of plants. These variations were likely the stimulus for their intense interest in Darwin's views on natural history and evolution.

Surprisingly the Society was founded by six young people - the oldest a Ralph Saword was aged only seventeen in 1907. Not so surprisingly four years later, the Society was struggling '...the very few notes we have received does not augur very well for the future'. There were no further records. Individuals retained their interest in natural history. Years later Tertius Watson wrote on local butterflies.¹

Ralph Saword continued recording. Aged twenty, he met the 32-year old Arthur Beadell - a momentous experience for Beadell: '...[Ralph] began to teach me the nomenclature and identity of the greater part of my wild flowers... here was at last my life's opportunity. Daily I took him batches of different plants to name for me; he tabulated them carefully, using the London Catalogue of British Plants giving their generic and specific names...'²

Sadly the young men's shared passion for natural history was shortlived; Ralph died in World War I.

Five volumes of manuscripts, owned by the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society, are held at the Surrey History Centre at Woking.

June Wakefield

References

1. Watson, T. (1974). *Bourne Society Local History Records*, XIII, 18.
2. Beadell, A. (1932). *Nature Notes of Warlingham and Chelsham*, 4, Croydon: The Croydon Advertiser Ltd.

News and Notices

Subscriptions for 2008

Council has decided not to propose that changes be made to the subscriptions for 2008.

Croydon Society

Members of the now defunct Croydon Society who have taken up the offer of free membership for 2007/8 are welcomed. We hope that it proves worthwhile for them. The offer applies only to those not already members of CNHSS. About thirty have joined so far. When their subscriptions are due for 2009, it is likely that the complete membership application form will be sent to them so that the Gift Aid section can be completed.

The Croydon Society folded in July due to offices not being filled as officers resigned and were unable to find successors. The society's funds are to be distributed to other societies including our own, a donation which is very generous. Its former officers have been invited to write their society's history as an article for Proceedings so that it can accompany the talks given about Mary Sibthorp, the ecologist who lived in Croydon. Archives of the Croydon Society have been handed over to the Croydon Archives

Service but the CNHSS still holds archives concerning its origins as the Croydon Society was founded specifically as an amenity and pressure group separate from ourselves, its functions not being compatible with our constitution. There was therefore no question of a merger and there is no other society in Croydon which could take over all of the Croydon Society's roles. Certain functions are carried out by local residents' and neighbourhood associations, the Central Croydon Conservation Area Advisory Panel and the like.

Standing Orders and Reminders

Members who have not done so yet are encouraged to go to their bank and ask for a standing order form so that subscriptions can be paid automatically without reminders being sent out once or twice each year. In the spring about 150 reminders were sent out and in this mailing about fifty are being sent out. A few reminders were sent out unnecessarily in the spring as the acting membership secretary did not realise that subscriptions paid towards the end of 2006 were for 2007 and not belated subscriptions for 2006. He would like to thank George and Graham Collins for their help, George for completing and handing over Pam Collins' documentation and Graham for maintaining the electronic register of members and producing the addressed labels for the mailings.

Proceedings

There is no issue of Proceedings this year as no article is ready for publication. An issue is likely to be published next autumn.

British Association for Local History Award

Paul Sowan has won an award for an article published in the Bourne Society's Local History Record on the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. The award was presented to him at the Association's AGM in the summer.

Focus on Downland

In the Programme, your attention is drawn to the event on Saturday afternoon, November 24, which, at least for this year, replaces *Best of the Year*. The four speakers are Alec Baxter-Brown for the Downland Countryside Management Project, Andrew Scott for the City Commons, Malcolm Jennings on Dollypers' Hill Nature Reserve and the preservation of chalk downland and Peter Harp on the archaeology of the downs. As usual there will be tea and displays.

In a Workhouse

In the *Croydon Borough Guild of Help Magazine* in 1919 an article appeared written by a former business man who, following an infection to his ankles making him physically incapacitated, had been financially ruined and had to be entered into the workhouse in the place where he had last been a ratepayer. He was able to discharge himself on occasions when he found temporary employment but when his money ran out he had to re-enter the workhouse. As he was well known to the magazine editor, the workhouse may well be Croydon's. The article is too long to be reproduced in full and only extracts has been given.

I should like to tell what life in a Workhouse is like from the point of view of view of a man *inside*, whose previous life, of something more than half a century, was passed *outside*.

I was by the intervention of a friend, carried out of the lodging-house to which I had been reduced, driven in a cab to the local Infirmary, accepted as an in-patient until I was on recovery transferred to the "House," where after years I am writing these lines.

On the second and subsequent occasions of "coming" into the House as an inmate, the first step is to obtain from the Relieving Officer an order of admission to the Receiving Ward. This, in the present case, is a small but substantially built edifice with two rooms, to which the neophyte is confined until the doctor has seen him and passed him as being free from infectious disorder. Until this has been done the inmate retains his own clothing, in which costume he is forbidden to move about outside the Receiving Ward.

If the newcomer has wisely obtained admission at an early hour of the day, and the doctor should happen to call that morning, he is, as soon as the doctor has "passed" him, at once bathed, workhouse clothes supplied to him, and his work, usually wood-chopping, is decided upon. He is now a prisoner, forbidden to leave the Workhouse, except by permission or by taking his discharge. Should he do so without permission of the master, he may be, and usually is, traced and apprehended on a charge of stealing the clothes.

A Typical Day

At 5.45 a. m. in summer (April to September inclusive) or 6.45 in winter (October to March inclusive) the bell is rung for rising. The wise man will with all possible haste present himself at the row of bowls, supplied with hot, cold, and soft water and two different kinds of soap, where the ablutions of such of the inmates as wash themselves at all are performed. He will be wise to hasten, the reward of his punctuality being the luxury of a clean towel. A few minutes later, the methods of the average inmate will have covered the towel with dirty smears, the favourite method of cleansing the skin being to paddle the hands in water, smear them over the face, and rub off the moistened dirt with the towel; such proceedings as the removal of the coat and waistcoat, and the opening and throwing back of the collar of the shirt, are confined to the very small minority of perhaps four persons beside myself. It is only fair to add that later in the day, when work is over a larger proportion of the inmates will wash themselves better.

Before breakfast, prayers are read in the large hall, the congregation (the adult portion of the inmates) repeating the Lord's Prayer and responses. Breakfast consists of a hunch of bread, half-an-ounce of margarine, and a pint of tea, all of reasonably of good quality, and the inmate is allowed to supplement this by such small delicacies as he may purchase or receive from friends. Half-an-hour is the nominal allowance of time for the meal, but before that time has elapsed, the "wardsman," part of whose duty is to wash the drinking-mugs, knives, and spoons, has cleansed such of the articles are done with, and is waiting with some impatience for those whose advancing years or lack of teeth make them slow in completing their meal.

After the morning's work at wood-chopping, the hour of noon brings the welcome variety of dinner. This, the most important meal of the day, varies from pea-soup to boiled beef. The meal is satisfying to a man of moderate appetite, but the absence of green vegetables is a serious defect. The management is not altogether to blame. Green vegetables are produced largely in the garden, and the inmates have been offered the option of greens as a relief to...

The Eternal Potato

A majority of them were against the alteration, believing the potato to be a more satisfying food than the green vegetable, and, except for parsnips occasionally, the potato has remained the only accompaniment to the meat dinner. Ranging from Sunday forward through the week, the dinner is alternatively beef, hash, beef, mutton, pea-soup, meat-pie, and Irish stew... Of course, the officer

superintending the kitchen is a qualified person, but the pauper labour on which she has to depend for assistance is unskilled, and the class from which it is drawn is not easily taught... One word here on the question of the unpaid official may not be out of place. "Man, drest in a little brie authority," is apt, when he is selected from the rank and file of the inmates, to overrate his own importance, and to ascribe to himself an imagined superiority over the class from which he was promoted... This self-importance extends to all the sub-officials to whom the posts of wardsman, gatekeeper, kitchen-hand, and cleaner are given, and to whom the only reward for their long hours of work is the enjoyment of their authority and a small allowance of tobacco.

When it is borne in mind that no distinction is made between the allowance for a young man of 21 and an old one of 70 to 80 beyond a lunch of 4oz of bread and 1 1/2oz of cheese to some of the inmates without reference, apparently, to the age or class of labour performed, it will be seen that some intelligent discretion should be exercised.

Authority is almost entirely vested in the local Boards of Guardians, called "Guardians of the Poor," but better described as ...

"Guardians of the Ratepayers"

selected more on the grounds of their local influence than their fitness for office, and the result is that their selection of officials is in turn largely governed by their personal liking for the candidate... [W]ith regard to the complaints of individual paupers it is a convenient formula to refer the complaint [made to the Local Government Board in London] to refer the complaint back to the Guardians without making any local enquiry into the matter... A system which permits no distinction between the college graduate or other professional man and the illiterate wrongdoer who is only on the Workhouse when he is out of gaol, makes the prospect of indoor relief one to be shuddered at by men of every class.

Ornithology group

It is pleasing to report that the group outing to Pagham Nature Reserve on Saturday 28th April was exceptional in as much as we saw or heard 67 species (68 if you count feral pigeon).

Listed below are the birds heard or seen, (h) means heard only:

Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little egret, Heron, Mute Swan, Shelduck, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Honey buzzard, Buzzard, Kestrel, Pheasant, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Ringed plover, Grey plover, Lapwing, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed godwit, Bar-tailed godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank, Common sandpiper, Turnstone, Artic skua (dark phase), Black-headed gull, Herring gull, Great black-backed gull, Sandwich tern, Woodpigeon, Turtle dove, Cuckoo, Swift, Green woodpecker (h), Skylark, Sand martin, Swallow, Meadow pipit, Pied wagtail, Wren (h), Dunnock, Robin, Wheatear, Blackbird, Song thrush, Cetti's warbler (h), Sedge warbler (h), Reed warbler (h), Dartford warbler (h), Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiff-chaff (h), Willow warbler (h), Spotted flycatcher, Long-tailed tit, Blue tit, Great tit, Magpie, Rook, Carrion crow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet.

The two most unusual birds were honey buzzard and artic skua dark phase, from which you will gather that a light phase also exists.

Mavis Barber
