

**Chorlton and Sale Water Park****Peter and Diana White****4th January**

The previously wet and windy weather had fortunately settled down into a good bright frosty day for our walk. 11 members and 3 visitors set off, a good turn out.

Chorlton Water Park had its usual collection of hungry Canada geese, swans, coot, moorhens pochard and mallard. Along the river about halfway between the 2 bridges we saw 2 goosanders and a goldeneye.

We took our lunch in the warmth of the Sale visitors centre, courtesy of our friends the wardens, and Audrey kept the festive spirit going by handing round some excellent chocolates.

Setting off again we saw several great crested grebe on the lake, half a dozen heron from the bird hide, and over 2 dozen teal on a pool a little further along; the latter were splendid in the sunshine, showing their bright and intricately patterned plumage very well.

Other birds seen were several goldcrest, goldfinch, a group of redwing and a jay.

Various fungi were spotted along the paths, some of them not in very good condition, but our experts identified winter funnel cap, *gymnopilus penetrans* and *coprinus micaceus*.

We arrived back at the car park at dusk, one of our visitors joined on the spot and another joined later.

**Clifton Country Park****Audrey Locksley 15<sup>th</sup> February**

The day was sunny and not too cold for the time of year. Ten members and 4 visitors followed the tracks through woods to the old Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal. Plants, mosses and birds were recorded, and looking for a lunch spot, the perfect accommodation turned up. This was a boat-shaped\* stone structure with stone shelf all the way round and everyone was able to sit in comfort in the sun, but out of the breeze.

The old mine- workings of the Wet Earth Colliery were viewed before going to the Visitor Centre, where a party of children were making bird-boxes. Afterwards, we walked round Clifton Marina, which was formed after extraction of gravel for the M62 construction.

\* Inspired by the local industrial history 'Dig' (part of the Irwell Valley Sculpture Trail), it refers to the starvation boats used to ferry materials from the wet earth colliery at Clifton to Salford Quays. The boats were called 'starvationers' because of their narrowness, needed to navigate the canals.

Remains of these boats can still be seen in the dried up canals in the park. Industrial archaeology, burial ships, underground rivers, crop marks and iron-age hill forts inform the artist's work. Dig is also used as a seating, eating and performance area.

(taken from a web site of the IVST)

**Red House Farm Paths****Margaret McCormick****29<sup>th</sup> March**

There was an excellent turnout, and the weather was fine as we walked the permissive paths around Red House Farm, Dunham. Whilst flowers were in short supply we had good views of

Yellowhammer and Lapwings in the fields. The way took us back to the farm, until recently a mixed farm, but now mainly arable, with some land leased to sheep grazing in the winter. Farm quotas, milk marketing regulations, and poor returns on produce, has meant that until recently a mixed farm, it is now mainly arable but has diversified into tourism, and developed an excellent farm shop, a tearoom, and in the summer months, a Maize Maze. We enjoyed an excellent lunch of home-cooked fare, and were personally looked after by Alan Clare, farmer turned gourmet chef! After lunch we drove the short distance to Brookheyes Covert, a C.W.T. SSSI. We hoped to spot the Little Owls, but were unlucky, though we did hear the Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming. Again, though early for flora, there was a good display of Marsh Marigold, Lesser Celandine and Wood Anemones, and a good patch of Town-Hall Clock.

### **Alkington Woods**

**Ron and Maureen Davies**

**19th April**

We met at 11 a.m. in the car park at Rhodes Lodges on Manchester Old Road on a very cold day and needed scarves, hats and gloves! Nevertheless, the 10 members all had an enjoyable day. We saw great crested grebe, coot and swans on the lodges, and chiffchaff, willow warblers, swallows, sand martins, long-tailed tits and wrens were very much in evidence during the day. Flowers seen were butterburr, forget-me-nots, Jack by the hedge, violets, ribwort plantain, ladies smock and pink purslane; wall rue fern, and wood millet grass (*Milium Effusum*) where Audrey Franks first spotted it years ago in Kitchen Wood near Middleton. Along the River Irk's banks we noted Whitebeam, Wych Elm and Cherry Laurel trees; on a dead tree trunk was *Trametes versicolor*.

On crossing the River Irk we continued on the right bank towards Middleton, passing the McBride's chemical factory and turned right and up into Kitchen Wood and came eventually to Alkington Hall. The first hall was built in 1627 and was rebuilt in 1735; it belonged to the Lever family and was sold to the Lees brothers of Oldham in 1845 for £57,550. In 1942 Middleton Council bought it at auction for the paltry sum of £2,900; they tried to use it for functions and dances but eventually turned it into its present flats.

In 1771 the Lever family founded a museum in the Hall and opened it to the public, but it became so popular that admittance had to be refused after 2 p.m. Two years later a notice was published saying that they were tired of the insolence of the common people and were refusing admittance to the lower classes, except when they came with a ticket from a gentleman or lady of their acquaintance! The Lever's also had a zoo there. Eventually, because of the high costs of maintenance, the zoo was disbanded, and the museum contents were removed to Leicester House in London. This information has previously been included in the Annual Report, but we were asked to repeat it by the members on this ramble.

Turning left by a bird sanctuary and through Alkington Woods we had great amusement watching a family of very young squirrels playing in the trees; down to Belstead Brook and along to a large fishing lodge we turned right and retraced our steps along the riverside to Lever Bridge which had an inscription on one of its stones, which we had not noticed before, which said that Darcy Lever had enlarged this bridge in 1735. We were glad to reach the cars at 3.15 p.m. and get out of the cold winds.

### **Clitheroe**

**Christine Walsh**

**10<sup>th</sup> May**

It was a fine sunny day with a cold wind when 8 members gathered at the Edisford Bridge car park. We went through the riverside picnic area and then back to the road, two members eagerly recording

additional species for this square. The next section of path, through the sports complex area, was rather uninteresting, but we were soon on a very pleasant track past the allotments and stables, with a woodpecker drumming in the woods on the far side of the river. The field path then leads along the riverside, where a Goosander was seen, and we had our lunch in the sunshine overlooking the weir and Waddow Hall.

It was interesting to see typical limestone species including Goldilocks Buttercup, Sanicle and Lords and Ladies, as well as Bluebell, Barren strawberry, Primrose, Violet and Betony (leaves). After crossing another road the next section provided Toothwort and White Butterbur, which had been in flower earlier in the year when we pioneered the walk. The bubbling spring call of the Curlew was heard from the meadows by the river, and Lapwing were displaying overhead.

We had another rest at Cross Hill Quarry, where we saw Twayblade and Cowslips, and then continued to Bradford Bridge to cross the river. A nice clump of Dusky Cranesbill was in bloom by the river, but was thought to be a garden escape. There were large clumps of Ivy-leaved Toadflax growing on the bridge, including a white variety, which we hadn't seen before. The return route was through field paths, round the back of Waddow Hall and along a minor road back to the car park.

**Blackmoor, Astley**

**Dave Earl**

**31st May**

Our meeting was devoted to recording extra vascular plants within SD60V. Beginning at North Lane, the party walked to Gin Pit, recording many extra species, notably garden outcasts opposite the houses, such as columbine, perennial cornflower, woodruff, shining cranes-bill, soapwort, butterfly stonecrop and alpine currant. There was also some tree and shrub planting, including that of grey alder, bird cherry and cherry plum. Ditches and wet field corners provided common water plantain, yellow loosestrife, winter cress and celery-leaved buttercup. Plants of teasel were found by industrial units.

After lunch at Gin Pit, we moved on along Meanley Road to meet up with the courses of the former railway lines to the north. Although the area was once colliery spoil, most of the land had been reclaimed for pasture; nevertheless a few pockets of colonised artificial habitat remained, where oval, false fox and glaucous sedges, hybrid reedmace, southern marsh orchids and mouse-ear hawkweed were found. A more unexpected find was cross-wort, which is a very rare plant in Greater Manchester.

The old railways produced only a few extra species, and were extensively planted with trees and shrubs, including the 'corporation blackthorn'. These plants are considered, at present, to be a planted variant of blackthorn that differs from the native shrubs of country hedgerows, however the possibility that the plants are derived from hybrid origin involving crossing with variants of the domestic plum should not be ruled out.

Towards the end of the walk, we pondered over a non-flowering garden escape, growing associated with dotted loosestrife along Ley Road. A return visit to collect a flowering specimen, showed that this was, as predicted, the rough-stemmed goldenrod *Solidago rugosa*, which appears to be a first record for vice county 59. This was a suitable end to our excursion, emphasising the importance of visiting under recorded areas. Note that the total number of vascular plant species recorded for SD60V increased from approximately 110 to 262 species.

**Culcheth****Priscilla Tolfree****14th June**

5 People met for this recording walk. I was very grateful for the help received, as it is often hazardous to venture into unfriendly areas inhabited by unfriendly farmers! Imagine our surprise when we were positively welcomed by a charming farmer's wife, who was interested in what we were doing. We were shown round her garden, full of interesting plants, as well as recording weeds. We ate our lunch by her pond, and were then directed to her daughter's adjoining farm for further good finds, as well as a tour round her water lily beds, which she was growing commercially. We were able to add over 100 species to two tetrads and to have a most enjoyable day into the bargain. The fascinating mossland area is sadly being encroached upon and drained, and large areas of grass are appearing, presumably to be sold as turf for lawns. Gone are plants such as sundew, bog asphodel, and bog rosemary, so it was heartening to be welcomed by sympathetic and interested people.

**Simister****Dave Earl****21st June**

Another excursion to gather extra records for the forthcoming Flora of South Lancashire. On route to Egypt Lane from Simister, new finds included field forget-me-not and dewberry for SD81H, and pignut, marsh yellow-cress, goatsbeard, recently planted field maple and a broad leaved Whitebeam *Sorbus croceocarpa*, for the main tetrad to be studied, SD81I.

Along Egypt Lane species included marsh woundwort, annual pearlwort, and wall speedwell. At the site of a former garden, a relic fragrant rose with small flowers was thought to be derived from a cross between sweet briar and the many flowered rose.

A tricky walk along the path bordering the M66 followed, providing Danish scurvy grass and the frequently sown variety of birds-foot trefoil var. *sativus*.

At Unsworth village, we found yellow corydalis, *Adria* bellflower, Welsh poppy, woodruff, and heartsease established. Common spotted orchids were seen on the banks of the M66. To the east, Criffe Lane provided a good few native species, including greater stitchwort, lady's mantle and heath bedstraw, whilst upright bur-reed was seen along the brook side. An exotic species encountered was meadow-foam *Limnanthes douglasii*. This species can colonise bare ground and persist for a few years, before being out competed by more vigorous plants.

From Brick House, it was clear that following our extensive walk tetrad SD80I had been relatively well recorded, for only a few extra species such as ox-eye daisy and water mint were found about Unsworth Moss, bringing the tetrad total to 226 species, an acceptable level for general recording within vice county 59.

**River Beale & Rochdale Canal****Audrey Locksley****5<sup>th</sup> July**

The first part of this walk was through a lot of wasteland, but flowers were abundant as often on "brown field" sites. Marsh ragwort, tormentil, black medick, and melilot, made yellow splashes, and a few spotted orchids, opium poppies, and a large bush of *spirea*, added the colour pink. The deeper purple of marsh thistle was scattered among the grasses. A rare find was crowberry, though it was not in flower, and a lark sang away, taking it easy perched on a dead branch.

At Belfield we had our lunch at a high point overlooking the River Beale, which is culverted under the canal and railway, which we had crossed. The river meanders here, and another ox-bow lake is in formation. Along a path by the railway, yellow rattle and some bladder campion was seen, which later we saw in great profusion when the railway bank could be seen from the canal.

The other side of Clegg Lane is a large stretch of wasteland - being used for re-cycling of road and building material- but there was a very varied flora. In some murky-looking water, along came a duck with seven tiny ducklings, and in the reeds and willows was the continuous churr-churr of the reed warbler, quite at home despite what looks like rubbish to us. Finally the eight of us walked back along the canal. It was a little warmer than our cold start to the day, but there was no sun as promised in the forecast.

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**Visit to Sean Hawkin's Meadow**

**Liz Blackman CWT**

**23<sup>rd</sup> July**

In July, in a joint walk with North group of the C.W.T. we visited the Sean Hawkin's meadow reserve in Millington. It was a showery evening to start with, in contrast to the previous prolonged dry and often hot weather. We approached the reserve from the east, this being the shortest walk in along one of the four public footpaths, which lead to it.

On arriving at this small reserve, alongside a field of barley, we walked across the narrow northern end to the two grassy areas. These had not yet received their annual cut and so the long grass made the wet conditions very noticeable! However, Lesser Stitchwort was still in bloom there, with its tiny white stars among the grasses. We then made our way past encroaching tree branches through an almost secret entrance to the wetland area, passing on the left the six to eight foot deep bank above the meandering Agden Brook, which was running very low. A lone brown bird, a female blackbird, was disturbed, and flew away across the stream to the trees beyond.

Despite the previous dryness, the springs feeding the wetland were undiminished, giving a satisfying squelch underfoot. Some Ragged Robin, much Meadowsweet, Bistort and what, after later researching, turned out to be Fool's Watercress, were all in evidence. The Marsh Thistles were past their best, but Rosebay Willow herb was in all its glory on the higher western slopes, and we found a great clump of Lady Fern near the brook.

The wet conditions made us loath to explore the reserve further and John, one of the group and a Lymm resident, who knew the area well, suggested, as the weather brightened, that we walk from the site along the valley meadows below Millington Hall farm, and so we did, finding a clump of *Psathyrella* fungi by an old log near where the horses grazed. We were then rewarded by the clouds breaking apart, and a lovely evening light illuminating our way back to the road.

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**Moore Nature Reserve**

**Margaret McCormick**

**16<sup>th</sup> August**

This was a very small turn-out (five only, maybe holidays elsewhere got in the way). So, on a reasonably good day, and at a very interesting site, both botanically and otherwise, we had an enjoyable exploration of the old Sankey canal, now disused (except by us as a lunch venue), then on to the impressive bird hide that looks across to the eastern reed-bed in the hope of sighting the illusive bittern reputed to be there, but it remained just that, illusive! Lots of dragonflies and a good sighting of long-tailed tits. Can't remember what flora we had (short-term memory loss kicking in!) but Audrey was looking at mosses, but a pleasant and relaxing day all round, in fact so relaxing I forgot to make a species list, sorry.

Eleven members gathered in the water authority car park on a not very promising day. The keen recorders among us had a list of 'wanted' species and *Potentilla Reptans* was ticked off in the car park. A very pleasant pond near the information office (closed) has Yellow Fringed Water-lily, as well as other more common waterside species.

We walked along the side of the reservoir, where we saw Great Crested Grebe with a couple of youngsters and an unusual umbellifer, which was identified as Coriander. Two benches served as our picnic place and nearby Swine-cress was added to our recording list. Also a large patch of Common Hemp Nettle was found by John to have both *Galeopsis tetrahit* and *Galeopsis bifida* present, although the flowers were mostly past their best.

After lunch we traversed the Nature Reserve, where a Heron was sitting high in a tree, (they always look out of place there) and followed the path up a wooded valley alongside the River Douglas. The stubble fields above the woods were too good an opportunity to miss for two members, who defected to do a study of the mosses present. The rain was now in earnest, and we had a very wet walk down the lane and onto the canal. A canal bridge was found to have lots of Black Spleenwort and the Grid Ref was recorded.

Re-entering the woods, the rain still pouring down, there was a short hiccup as the modified route was reconnoitred, but we found the way and the river was re-crossed to return to the reservoirs. Now, at last, the sun came out as we followed the lakeside path to the Information Board, which gives some historical detail about the building of the reservoirs and the culverting of the River Douglas. Large beds of Amphibious Bistort were growing along the reservoir dam, where Mallard foraged among the leaves, and so back to the starting point.

**Anglezarke Reservoir****Tom Waghorn****20<sup>th</sup> September**

Anglezarke Reservoir, northwest of Bolton, was built in 1857 as one of a chain of reservoirs in the Rivington area. The name dates from around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when invading Vikings settled in Lancashire, and come from the Old Norse meaning Olaf's hill farm. It was one of the earliest reservoirs and is still one of the largest in the West Pennine Moors Area. The stone facing for the dam came from Anglezarke Quarry, and its flags also paved some of the streets of Manchester.

Ten of us set out from Anglezarke picnic site to enjoy a pleasant easy circuit of four or five miles. Our route took us below the quarry and around a delightful wooded headland. Today the beeches and oaks, planted to stabilise the ground more than a century ago, are splendidly mature. Rowans, alders, hollies and birches, planted later, added to the show.

We picnicked around sandstone boulders, overlooking the water, watching Mallard, Coots and Great-crested Grebes, and hearing the scolding 'teuk-teuk-teuk' cry of a Redshank.

Flowers were well past their best, but the long, dry summer had lowered the water levels to give us an unexpected bonus. Flourishing just above the water line were the tiny whitish-pink flowers of Mudwort (*Limosella aquatica*). These lovers of wet mud were surprisingly plentiful for a plant, which is usually regarded as uncommon.

Most colourful fungi in the woods were the familiar red Fly Agaric (*Amanita Muscaria*); some outstanding specimens brought one of our photographers into action.

These reservoirs are always worth a visit at any time of the year. The northern reaches of Anglezarke are particularly good for waterfowl in the winter.

**Woolston Eyes**

**Audrey Locksley**

**1<sup>st</sup> November**

This is an area full of obvious history, the change in transport over centuries. From the coast, the River Mersey was navigable as far as Warrington and Runcorn, but to get to Manchester, the loops and bends were shortened by 'cuts'. In 1730, a navigation bill was put to parliament, and in 1734 The Mersey and Irwell Navigation Company had craft going through locks to Quay Street in Manchester. The Bridgewater Canal competition led to deepening of the channel and locks and only in 1820 was the major Woolston cut made along with one north of Lymm.

The railway was the next to increase competition, and by the 1870s the two canal companies merged. From 1871 proposals were made for a deeper wider canal to bring larger boats to Manchester but it took three attempts between 1883 and 1885 to get a Parliamentary Bill passed. The 'Snowdrop', the first trip from Princes Dock in Liverpool to Pomona No.4 Dock, took 8 hours, and the Manchester Ship Canal was officially opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1894.

We started our sunny day at the end of Weir Lane close by the east end of the former Woolston Cut, now completely filled with reedmace and vegetation. The Mersey is crossed by a footbridge, with the weir on the right. The path goes uphill between Eyes 2 and 3, both formed from silt from the Ship Canal, and reaches the bank of the canal. (Eye No.1 is the other side of the Thelwall Viaduct – M6.) Heavy-duty fencing now prevents any access round No2, and No3 can only be reached by a locked footbridge. However the bird watchers found waterfowl to identify from the margins, and the botanists and mycologists were happy with a path through the woods at the edge of No.3. Fly agarics were at their red-and-white-spots best, and *hypericum* and centaury must be worth seeing in the summer.

After lunch seated on mossy tussocks (*Polytrichum juniperinum*), the five members continued towards Latchford along the main path of the Ship Canal. Keen-eyed Morris spotted a notice about a ferry, and the ferryman on the other side spotted us. He came over, and we clambered into his boat, and the crossing cost us 55p. Not each, all together! The road went through the old village of Statham, and after a mile we reached the Latchford lock. In the distance the high latticework of girders, railway bridge Warrington to Crewe, could be seen. The high-level bridge and inclines had to be constructed when the Ship canal was made; the railway was there first.

The lock area has seen better days, but we were able to cross and start back along the canal. A board claimed that a very large rough grassland was a nature reserve, but it was surrounded by new barb-tipped steel fencing, and our engineer explained the use of special nuts that bolt it together. Then we saw a keep-off sign saying Dangerous Chemicals, and also noticed that by walking by the side of the fence a good way, you could get on to the land. The next area of high ground is No 4 eye, accessible but we left that to explore another time. Some gadwall were seen on the canal as we made our way back to the start with lovely autumn colours to admire in the sinking sun.