

# THE YATELEY SOCIETY

Newsletter No. 28  
October 1986  
Editor: Jean Kerr (Yateley 872265)

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Dear Member:

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As you will see from this newsletter, the Society is, as ever, involved in many aspects of Yateley life, and there should be something to attract everyone in the coming season's programme.

Contributions for the next issue of the newsletter would be appreciated by Monday 1st December.

## FILM GROUP MEETING - Thursday 9th October

We are planning to make a video film introducing Yateley to the newcomer showing a cross section of architecture, history, natural history and common land in the area. We are hoping to show the resulting film at the AGM in January as an example of the role the group can play within the Society.

The first meeting, on Thursday 9th October, will be to discuss the structure and content of the film and plan the shooting sequence.

All members are welcome to take part.

## BRAMSHILL NEWTOWN AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN NE HAMPSHIRE

The Yateley Society intends to take an active part in opposing Consortium Development's exploitation of the Bramshill area. To plan our strategy and to be sure that we are in tune with members views, we are holding a meeting on ~~Thursday~~ Tuesday 25 November at 7.30 p.m. in Room C.1.1. at the Yateley Centre. I hope that as many members as possible will attend this meeting so that we can have the fullest possible exchange of ideas.

## A.G.M.

Please make a note in your diary of this important date when you will have a chance to hear reports from Group Leaders, ask questions and elect your new committee.

The Film Group hope to show the results of their work to date for your entertainment. Cheese and Wine will be served at the conclusion of the meeting. Further details to follow.

## CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING

A chance for all groups of the Society to get together to celebrate Christmas. We have prepared two competitions for your enjoyment, one a slide quiz to test your knowledge of Yateley and the other a challenge to identify members from pictures of them as babies. Food and drinks will be provided. Tickets will be on sale shortly at £1.50 each and should be bought in advance from the Harversons (tel. Yateley 876914). This price will include food and one glass of wine, and a bar will be available.



#### A NEW PROJECT

by Charles Craven

Since becoming Natural History group leader earlier on in the year, I have been looking at the work which has been carried out on Yateley Common by Society members in the past; both in terms of flora and fauna surveys and also in terms of practical conservation work.

I discussed this work with Peter Dinsdale, the Head Ranger, and concluded that such projects would have a better chance of success in the longer term if volunteer groups concentrated their resources on a specific site rather than to attempt to cover an entire area. From this the idea developed of "allocating" a block of Yateley Common to the Society and the Society then taking on responsibility for the conservation management of that one part of the Common.

Having agreed the idea in principle with Peter the next question was: which part of the Common? The site eventually chosen is the area of land, approximately half a mile by a third in size, to the west of Cricket Hill Lane between Handford Lane in the north and Vigo Lane in the south. This area of land has a varied range of habitats: heathland, grassland, oak and birch woodland and one or two marshy areas. The area is attractive with fine views across the Blackwater Valley and has the added advantage of being adjacent to the Royal Oak Valley. The site can also serve as the starting point for the Yateley Common flora and fauna survey which I would like to relaunch soon.

What's the next step? If you did not attend the Natural History Meeting on ~~September 18th~~ ~~18th~~ and would like to help, then please telephone me on 870379. Just five to ten people carrying out work on a regular basis can make a big impact on an area such as this.

#### SNAKE TALE

by Valerie Kerslake

I saw three snakes amongst the heather east of Wyndhams in a brief mild spell last March. One was a slim young adder, brilliantly patterned in black on cream, coiled in a heap on the moss and oblivious of observers. The others were grass snakes; the first wriggled away and vanished in a moment. The second struggled to do the same and was stretched out taut in its efforts, but a knot at the end of its tail was caught in a forked heather stalk. It was easy for two of us to untie the knot (David only read afterwards that grass snakes don't bite very often), and this snake too then slithered away under the heather.

On the following days we saw it twice near the same clump of heather. It was rather slow to take cover, and easy to identify by the slightly crimped, blackened end to its tail and a small scrape on its back. But on the fourth day it lay stiff and dead on its bed of moss. Had it damaged itself internally through straining to get free, or might it have become too weak to catch food? A week later the corpse had vanished.

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Since then a copy of Herpetofauna News has come my way, with an appeal by Dr. Paul Waring of Oxford for snake ticks and pentostomes (internal parasites). Too late for Knotty's, but if you think you might need it I can give you Dr. Waring's address for an information sheet. The Herps News (January 1986) reports on a grass snake survey started in 1985 as part of general work on conservation of commoner reptiles. Though they seem fairly plentiful around here, many grass snake habitats are being destroyed by drainage, building and so on. Gardens and



especially compost heaps are much favoured by grass snakes for laying their eggs (we had a brood on ours two or three years ago), so why not create a new compost heap specially for them? The grass snake population in one part of Wales was increased "by making large manure heaps and keeping bees, which dissuaded passers-by from disturbing the basking areas."

A NEW BOOK ON HEATHLANDS

Reviewed by Michael Holroyd

Heathlands, by Nigel Webb. Collins New Naturalist Series, 1986. Hardback £20, paperback £9.95.

This book would make a good Christmas present for anyone interested in Yateley Common. It describes the characteristic species which make up the flora and fauna of heathlands, and their particular requirements. In addition it explains how heathlands came into existence and how they have been maintained and used by man. Then it considers the recent takeover of heathland by birch scrub and bracken - the decline of the rabbit is considered to be an important cause - and suggests how the remaining heathland can be preserved. It brings together the results of a lot of recent research, and is altogether a most useful and interesting book.

UP THE ROYAL OAK VALLEY

by Valerie Kerslake

The walk up the Royal Oak Valley on 6th July was one of a series of Blackwater Valley walks, in this case led on behalf of The Yateley Society by Irene Draper who has spent a great deal of time observing and working there during the past few years. About 35 people came, though few YS members (anything to do with the barbecue the night before?).

Irene pointed out the oaks on the banks that were the old field boundaries of the damp 'meadow' in the lower section, where masses of orchids used to grow when it was regularly grazed. Willows and other scrub that gradually took over when grazing ceased in the early 1950s were cleared - rather drastically - by Hampshire County Council four years ago, but the scars are now healed and concealed by many grasses and flowers growing tall and lush in the moist environment. Roseby Willowherb which sprang up first on the disturbed ground has now been outnumbered by Great Hairy Willowherb ('codlings and cream'). Others we passed were Meadowsweet, once used for strewing on unfragrant floors and for flavouring drinks, Yellow and Purple Loosestrife (not related), and the graceful Marsh Thistle, often 7 or 8 feet high.

Further up, Irene explained the importance of brambles as shelter for birds and cover for small animals, and how nettles accommodated all sorts of creatures. Surprisingly, we did not find peacock butterfly caterpillars on them, but all hunted for snails and discovered both the pointed long snail (new to me), and the banded snail, brightly striped like a humbug. Irene has found plenty of the white-lipped variety of these in the valley but said she would love to see a brown-lipped one. Sure enough, a few minutes later a small child presented her with just that.

The absence of litter was remarkable, largely due to a boy from Yateley School who had been clearing it regularly during the summer term. Unhappily, many of the bird-boxes we nailed up earlier this year were also absent - some taken away altogether, others simply flung on the ground.



Irene is planning further walks with groups of children along the ROV, and it is to be hoped that one day such walkers will be able to follow the little winding stream through the wooded top section all the way to the edge of Yateley Common.

THE VIEW OVER YATELEY

by Michael Holroyd

The writer A.C. Benson was born at Wellington College in 1862 and lived there until he was 11. He often visited Yateley and retained happy memories of it all his life. In August 1902, when he was 40, he cycled westwards along the A30 up to Hartford Bridge Flats and made this entry in his diary (quoted in 'On the Edge of Paradise', by David Newsome):

I halted near the top, turned round - and then I caught my breath in earnest. There was Well. Coll., with its two flanking towers and the slender fleche - Edgbarrow and Ambarrow, Sandhurst Church, Broadmoor, a great red splash on the hill - Sandhurst Lodge and the Farm, past which we used to walk to Yateley - on the edge of the sloping wood above it that gave me my first sense of poetry - to look into the hot wood with its humming flies and wonder where it went to. There it all lay, in a kind of glory, with the sombre fir-clad hills all round - besprinkled, alas, with red gables of new houses - it gives me a strange yearning, a heart-hunger for I do not quite know what. ... I felt somehow as if all the old life was going on quietly there, and I with my holland-cased fishing rod trotting thro' the meadows to Yateley. The pool of the mill there, with the old wooden footbridge and the alders is as real to me as anything that I see - and yet when I went there the other day it was all gone.

Anyone hoping to see the same view from the A30 today will be disappointed. There are too many trees beside the road in most places to allow any view to the north at all. Even from a point at the edge of the Common beyond the trees it is difficult to pick out many of the landmarks which Benson saw in 1902. However, as the trees shed their leaves the visibility should improve, and it would be interesting to know what can be seen from where, with or without binoculars (surely Benson must have been using them?). There are other points from which similar views across the Blackwater may be obtained, for example near to Starveacre, south of the A30. And from a point on Monteagle Lane above the school playing fields Gordon Harland has succeeded in picking out most of the buildings which Benson saw, including the 'slender fleche' (spire) at Wellington College.

Footnote: See the walk on 30 November.

ADVERTISEMENT

Clearly no YS members are idle or bored, but if you find a neighbour or friend in this category, please suggest that they might join the Hawley Meals-on-Wheels team which badly needs driver reinforcements. They are required for two or three hours in the middle of the day, normally every fourth week. Ring Ann Duckett (871570) for more information.



ON YATELEY COMMON

by Valerie Kerslake

Chris Hall came over from Fleet to lead a flower walk on Yateley Common in July. He is particularly good with grasses, sedges and rushes, and named half a dozen of these confusing species before we had gone as many yards, helpfully indicating the characteristics that might impress them on our memories. We examined plants in very varied habitats without going very far from Vigo Lane, finishing up at the anti-gypsy embankments on which some intriguing newcomers have sprung up. One was the silvery, strongly aromatic *artemesia absinthium* (one of the plants called wormwood); another, henbane, whose creamy flowers with delicate dark veins and purple-black centres have the sinister beauty of a wicked stepmother. Henbane is quite uncommon nowadays; it is very poisonous and used to be grown in herb gardens for medicinal purposes. There was also a great deal of wild radish - as unlikely to provide a delicious salad as the wild carrot and tall, yellow parsnip growing freely nearby.

This time last year we were speculating on the chances of the Blackbushe part of Yateley Common becoming an SSSI like the area east of Cricket Hill Lane. It seemed that the great number of species established on its unusual mixture of chalk and acid soils, wet marsh, dry grassland, woodland and heath might make it eligible, but an officer of the NCC, while looking at the common recently with Chris, said that its very diversity made this unlikely since it is not a good representative example of any recognised habitat type or combination of types. Castle Bottom, however, north-west of the airfield, is regarded as a good bog and will very shortly be notified as an SSSI - in spite of BCA's earth-moving spectacular alongside.

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OUR CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES on the common this autumn will be on the stretch between Handford Lane and Vigo Lane, where we also hope to start on an ecological survey next year. (Charles Craven will be organizing both.) We shall meet near "Brackens", the last house in the row running south from Handford Lane and parallel with Cricket Hill Lane. Since people living there are used to the quiet life, we should try to park as discreetly as possible.

HISTORY MEETINGS

by Michael Holroyd

The dates of the history meetings this quarter do not follow the traditional pattern of Thursdays. The reason is that I am starting a three-year course in local history which unfortunately is held on Thursday evenings. Therefore either I must drop out from the Society's history meetings or we must change the day. It seems best to try the latter, at least in the short term, but it is clear that any alternative to Thursday is inconvenient or impossible for some members, (as indeed Thursday was). The only fair solution seems to be to vary the day from month to month, which is what I have done. Apologies to anyone who is inconvenienced. We can discuss the problem at our meetings and see if we can find a better solution.

Friday 10 October - The History of Sandhurst

Yateley has always had close links with Sandhurst. Mrs. K. Dancy, who has lived there for many years, is writing a book about the history of the parish, based partly on written records and partly on people's recollections. In this talk she will tell us something about the development of Sandhurst and its interesting buildings and characters.



Tuesday 11 November - Kneller's Cottages

This will be a talk given by Geoff Hoare about the old cottages in Plough Road, Yateley. It will be illustrated by slides showing the construction of the building which he was able to take during the recent renovations.

Wednesday 10 December - Local Family Histories

This meeting will consist of several contributions on family history with local connections. Jean McIlwaine will describe her recent discoveries about the Overs of Dogmersfield and their involvement with the Black Act in the 1720s. Michael Young will display a family tree going back many generations, and we shall hear about an ancestor of his who was involved in a murder trial. We will also discuss what we know about several interesting Yateley families such as the Boseleys, the Cobbetts, the Fitzroys, the Masons, and the Millses.

Tuesday 6 January - The History of Eversley

This will be an illustrated talk given by Mrs. S. Beer, who has been studying the history of Eversley from parish records and other sources for some years. Although Charles Kingsley will be mentioned, the main emphasis will be on some of the less familiar inhabitants of Eversley and its many interesting buildings.

WALKS

by Richard Johnston

Tony and Mary Hocking led a walk featuring the Basingstoke canal and Odiham Common on September 7th. This was a most enjoyable walk in very pleasant sunshine, partly along the canal bank and partly through fields and woods. Some of us even saw a deer in the woods.

On September 28th a "Fungi Hunt" will be led by our resident mycologist Mike Waterman on Yateley Common. I'm sure that under his skilful direction we will find some interesting specimens.

On November 2nd Richard Johnston will lead a walk round Odiham looking at the way in which old houses have been remodelled over the centuries to keep them in the current fashion, and showing the kinds of evidence which shows where this has occurred. Assemble in the square outside Odiham parish church at 2.30 pm (SU 740509)

On November 30th Gordon Harland will lead a walk on Yateley Common. The walk will try to see what changes there are in the view over Yateley from Hartfordbridge Flats described by A.C. Benson in 1902. Assemble at Heathlands cemetery on Yateley Common (SU 824597) at 2.30 pm.

I am always looking for willing volunteers to lead future walks, or at least to suggest possibilities. Most walks this year had a Natural History bias, but this only reflects the suggestions received. I'm sure there are other walks people would like to make.

NATURAL HISTORY EVENINGS

On Thursday, November 20th, Mr. Peter Waghorn from Wellington College will talk about the Natural History of S.W. Spain. In April he took a small party of 3 adults and a few boys to Spain's National Park; he will bring his own display boards of photographs of birds, animals, flowers etc. and will also show some slides of the countryside in general.



# THE YATELEY SOCIETY

## PROGRAMME OCTOBER 1986 - JANUARY 1987

### October

Thurs. 9	FILM GROUP See the newsletter	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
Fri. 10	THE HISTORY OF SANDHURST Talk by Mrs. K. Dancy ( <u>Note change of date</u> )	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
Sun. 12	CONSERVATION IN PRACTICE - clearing litter and raking up cut grass in the Royal Oak Valley	Old Welmore	2:30pm
Thurs.16	BRITISH MOTHS An illustrated talk by Bill Parker	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm

### November

Sun. 2	WALK - Architecture in Odiham The remodelling of old houses to keep up with fashion. Led by Richard Johnston	Odiham Square By the Church Map Ref. SU 740 509	2:30
Thurs. 25	***SPECIAL DISCUSSION*** - BRAMSHILL - A NEW TOWN? & OTHER DEVELOPMENT IN N.E. HANTS.	Y.C. C.1.1.	7:30pm
Sun. 9	CONSERVATION IN PRACTICE - clearing birches from heather. Meet near "The Brackens", along track parallel to Cricket Hill, South of Handford Lane.	Yateley Common Map Ref. SU 818 597	2:30pm
Tues. 11	KNELLER'S COTTAGES An illustrated talk by Geoff Hoare	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
Thurs.20	NATURAL HISTORY OF S.W. SPAIN - talk by Peter Waghorn of Wellington College	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
Sun. 30	WALK - Yateley Common. Changes in the view since the days of A.C. Benson Led by Gordon Harland	Heathlands Cemetery Map Ref. SU 824 597	2:30pm

### December

Sun. 7	CONSERVATION IN PRACTICE - clearing birches from heather. Meet near "The Brackens", along track parallel to Cricket Hill, South of Handford Lane	Yateley Common Map Ref. SU 818 597	2:15pm
✓ Wed. 10	LOCAL FAMILY HISTORIES Including contributions from Jean McIlwaine and Michael Young	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
✓ Fri. 12	***CHRISTMAS SOCIAL*** See the newsletter	Y.C. C.1.1.	7:30pm

### January 1987

Tues. 6	THE HISTORY OF EVERSLEY An illustrated talk by Mrs. S. Beer	Y.C. B.2.4.	7:30pm
Thurs.15	PUBLIC LECTURE - BATS IN BRITAIN (Including the Greywell Tunnel) A talk by Andrew Watson	Y.C. Main Hall	8:00pm
Thurs. 29	*** A.G.M. *** See the newsletter	Y.C. C.1.1.	8:00pm