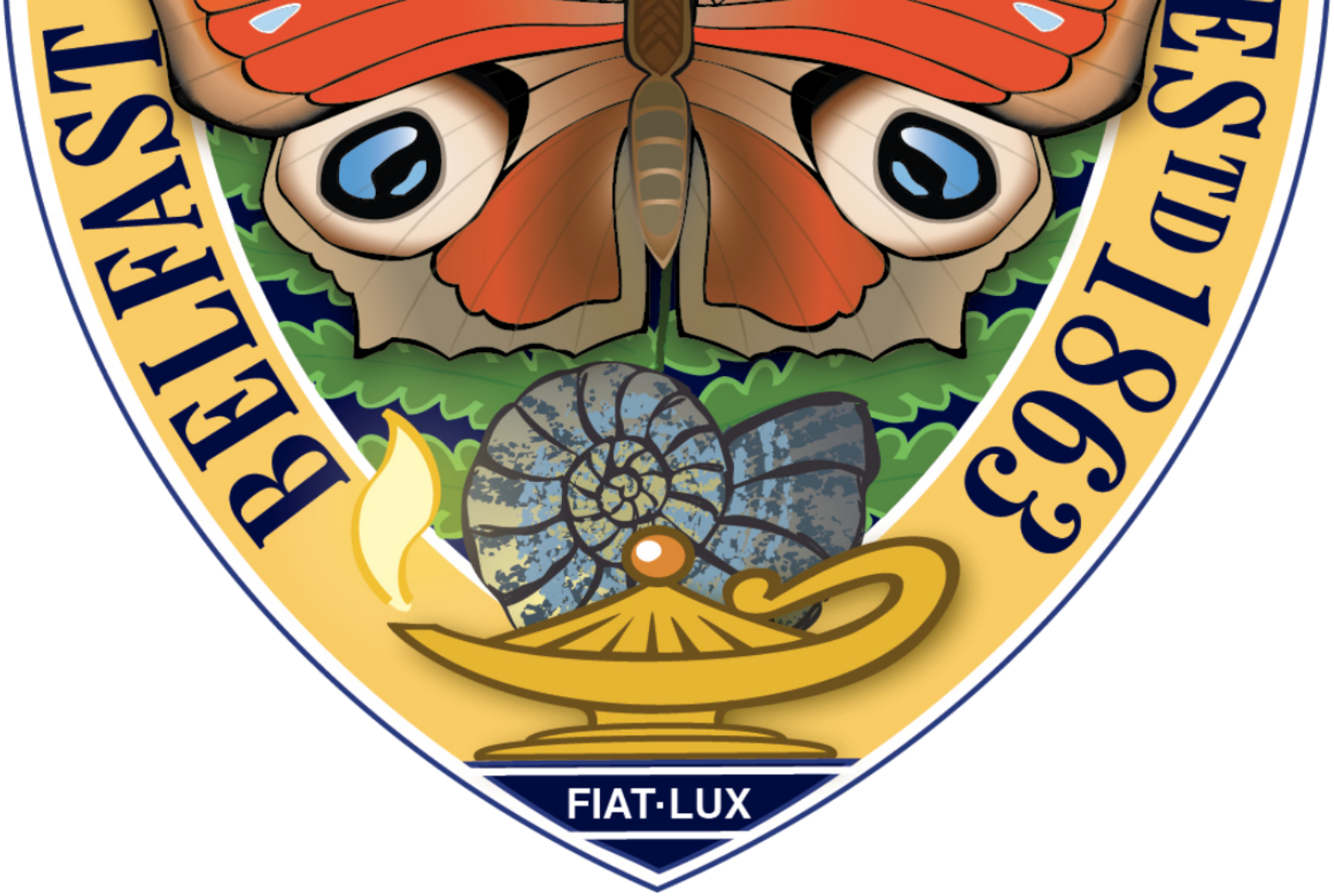
Belfast Naturalists'

Field Club

Field Reports

2014



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Coalpit Bay, Donaghadee

Leader - Bernard Anderson

30th April 2014

The Southern Uplands – Down - Longford Terrane is arguably the most distinctive of the suspect terranes which compose the British and Irish *Caledonides*. The terrane is dominated throughout by well bedded *greywackes*. These greywackes only rarely contain fossils but at some 30 localities in Ireland and at an even greater number in the *Southern Uplands of Scotland* the thick greywacke successions rest on a thin (<150m thick) succession of black shales and mudstones which are commonly rich in *graptolites*.

These graptolites were studied by an English schoolteacher, *Charles Lapworth*, working in the area of *Moffat* in the central part of the *Southern Uplands* in the middle years of the 19thcentury.

Lapworth's brilliant work ultimately allowed him to establish the *Ordovician System* and the graptolite zonation for much of both the Ordovician and Silurian Systems. Now, almost two centuries later, the graptolites of the Moffat Shales continue to be key to understanding the stratigraphy and structure of the Southern Uplands – Down - Longford Terrane.

Graptolite

Lapworth established a lithological and biostratigraphic succession common to a number of Southern Upland localities and particularly well exposed at *Dob's Linn* and at *Craigmichen Scar*.

He recognised five members in three formations straddling the Ordovician/Silurian systemic boundary.

1- **Upper Birkhill Shale** (Succeeded conformably by thick Gala Group greywacke)

2- **Lower Birkhill Shale**

3- **Upper Hartfell Shale** (commonly known as the "Barren Mudstones" because of its almost complete lack of graptolites)

4- **Lower Hartfell Shale** (Rather flaggy grey siltstones and black shales)

5- **Glenkiln Shale** (Contains thick cherty mudstones interbedded with grey-black shale.)

continued

Coalpit Bay, Donaghadee (contd)

Leader - Bernard Anderson

30th April 2014

For further detail and description see Chapter 4 of the *Regional Guide to the geology of Northern Ireland*.

All five of these members are well exposed at *Coalpit Bay,* one kilometre south of *Donaghadee*, where the total thickness of the *Moffat Shale Group*, much disturbed by folding and faulting, is about 110 metres and spans some 18 graptolite zones. Indeed Coalpit Bay offers easily the best and most complete exposure of the Moffat Shale in Ireland.

Charles Lapworth visited Coalpit Bay about 1875, apparently encouraged by *William Swanston*, then President of the *Belfast Naturalists' Field Club*. The two men published a 40-page joint paper "On the Silurian rocks of the CountyDown" in the Proceedings of the Field Club for 1877 and Lapworth honoured his host by giving one of the new graptolite species his name.

About 30 members of the BNFC and the *Belfast Geologists' Society* were present at Coalpit Bay on a cool, grey and ultimately wet Wednesday evening for this, the first meeting of the BNFC's summer excursion programme. All of the five Moffat Shale Group members listed above were demonstrated and examined and numerous graptolites were collected, despite the fact that the rocks of Coalpit Bay are dangerously slippery when wet.

As explained above the Moffat Shale Group outcrops in the Southern Uplands, Down and Armagh provide the vital clues to understanding the stratigraphy, age and tectonic structure of the Southern Uplands-Down-Longford Terrane. The recent *Tellus* survey with its airborne resistivity/ electomagnetics has traced the Moffat Shale across the two Northern Irish counties and facilitated the discovery of further outcrops.

Dr Bernard Anderson

Scarva, County Down
The Moffat Shale Outcrops

3rd May 2014

Leader - Dr Mark Cooper and Dr Gareth Barker

The Moffat Shale Group outcrops in the *Southern Uplands*, *Down* and *Armagh* provide the vital clues to understanding the stratigraphy, age and tectonic structure of the Southern Uplands-Down-Longford Terrane. The recent *Tellus* survey with its airborne resistivity/electomagnetics has traced the Moffat Shale across the two Northern Irish counties and facilitated the discovery of further outcrops.

Pyrite

On Saturday 3rd May about 20 members of the Club or/and the Society were present in more spring-like weather. The purpose of the excursion, led by *Dr Mark Cooper* and *Dr Gareth Barker*, of the GSNI and of the British Geological Survey, was to examine two groups of such outcrops, armed with the knowledge of seeing the stratigraphic divisions at Coalpit Bay.

We met at *Scarva* and the moved to a rock scarp on the west side of a low hill SE of *Shaneglish* where grey-black *graptolitic Lower Hartfell Shale* is stratigraphically overlain by grey-green and red-stained "Barren Mudstones" of the *Upper Hartfell*. This *Ordovician* sequence is repeated by faulting. The shales are remarkably rich in *pyrite* and, as at *Coalpit Bay*, include at least two *bentonite* beds.

In the afternoon we travelled to *Waringsford* and followed a gentle stream south from a road bridge at *Meadowvale* (Irish grid J226494).

On either bank of the stream beds of Gala Group greywackes dip steeply south but young or "face" northward. *Birkhill Shale* underlies the greywacke stratigraphically and yields numerous *Monograptus* and *Rastrite* specimens.

Bernard Anderson

Kilcoan Gardens

Leader - Cherry Townsend

10th May 2014

The Field Club always try not to arrange trips which clash with other events to avoid having to drive through heavy traffic. We can still get it wrong – an event down South when there was a cycle race going to Newry, and a trip to Derry by train which coincided with the Air Show at Portrush, are two memorable occasions! Unknown to us the date for this field trip was the same as the *Giro d'Italia!* The route closed roads all round the North of Ireland including the road to Larne which was the only access to the turn off for *Islandmagee*. Despite this a keen group of members set out early, picnicked at *Drains Bay* and so were able to arrive at Cherry's garden at the expected time. Thanks to mobile technology we were able to keep her up to date with our progress.

Carder Bee

Cherry Townsend took up gardening as a hobby about 12 years ago. This hobby soon turned into an obsession and a few years ago Cherry decided that she would like to be able to earn a living from her love of flowers and so *Kilcoan Gardens* was born. She was fortunate to have an extensive mature garden of 2 acres in situ which features a wide range of shrubs and perennials.

With plenty of material from which to propagate, the gardens soon started to bloom. A mild maritime climate on the peninsula of Islandmagee (but with plenty of wind!) means considerably less frost than inland, so flowers like dahlias continue for several weeks longer than in gardens further from the coast. The gardens are organically run and so are full of a diverse range of wildlife including many different birds and insects, with several wildflower meadows and a small pond.

Lady's Smock

Cherry took us on a tour of the garden which has beautiful views over *Larne Lough*. She pointed out the plants that were good for wildlife as we went along. The recently established cut flower field includes eight raised beds full of annuals and five large perennial beds all of which contain plants suitable for cut flower production. There are also several established perennial beds, a willow arch and a newly planted prairie border.

The weather was dull and showery but we still saw a Speckled Wood *(Pararge aegeria)* in flight and watched Carder *(Bombus pascuorum)*, Early *(Bombus pratorum)* and White-tailed *(Bombus lucorum)* bumblebees feeding in the flower rich areas. She left a field uncut and ungrazed to allow it form to a wildlife meadow and has been delighted to find *Yellow Rattle* has established itself naturally this year. It has become a favourite spot for hares and they are often seen there at dawn and dusk.

We finished the afternoon with a welcome afternoon tea in the barn with tasty home-made tray bakes.

Slievnacloy Nature Reserve

Botany and Zoology

17th May 2014

I had visited *Slievenacloy* on a lovely sunny March day with views to the *Mournes* and the *Sperrins* but it was hard to imagine that those brown rushy fields would become multi-coloured in a couple of months time. *Slievnacloy Nature Reserve* is a mosaic of different habitats - wet heathland, rush pasture and species-rich grassland with fen, bog and a stream system, so there is a great diversity of plants.

We saw at least 5 species of the Buttercup family - clumps of the bright yellow sepals of the petalless Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris),* the spear-shaped leaves of Spearwort *(Ranunculus flammula)* which grows in very wet places, Bulbous Buttercup with down-turned sepals *(Ranunculus bulbosus)* on limy ground, as well as Creeping Buttercup *(Ranunculus repens)* with furrowed stalks and the taller Meadow Buttercup *(Ranunculus acris)*.

Lousewort is a hemi-parasite, getting nutrition from the roots of other plants, so the bright pink–purple flowers of both *Pedicularis sylvatica* and *Pedicularis palustris* were conspicuous in the shorter grass. The bright blue flowers of Milkwort *(Polygala serpyllifolia)* formed a contrast. Nearby were patches of Bitter Vetchling *(Lathyrus linifolius)*. Linifolius means 'with flax-like leaves' so it is more akin to a pea than a vetch.

Orange Tip

The plentiful leaves of Devilsbit Scabious *(Succisa pratensis)* should indicate this as a site attractive to *Marsh Fritillaries*. Early Purple Orchids (*Orchis mascula)*, both purple and pink, were in full flower and the first Heath-spotted Orchids *(Dactlyorhiza maculata)* were appearing. Twayblades *(Neottia/Listera ovata)* were in leaf but we were too early for Butterfly Orchids *(Platanthera)*.

The lime-kiln provides a lime-rich habitat and the roof was almost covered with Adderstongues Ferns *(Ophioglossum vulgatum)* as well as the leaves of Mouse-ear Hawkweed *(Pilosella officinarum)* and Fairy Flax *(Linum catharticum)*.

After lunch we walked downhill past *The Ring*, a prime site for *Waxcaps* later in the year, and along the banks of the *Stoneyford River* where Water Avens *(Geum rivale)* and Lady's Mantle *(Alchemilla glabra)* were flourishing.

continued

Slievnacloy (contd)

Botany and Zoology

17th May 2014

Spotted Orchid

Adder's Tongue

Large White

This is a wonderful place which is worth visiting at different times of the year to see all its botanical specialities.

Margaret Marshall

We looked at two sedges and repeated the mantra all sedges have triangular stems but not all triangular stems are sedges.

In these examples the male flower was at the top of the stem with the female flowers below, male and female flowers being obviously different.

Glaucous Sedge *(Carex flacca)* is glaucous (blue/grey) beneath the leaves and the *utricles* or seeds look swollen. In the Common Sedge *(Carex nigra)* female spikelets blackish and quite compact.

We compared these to the aptly named Ribwort *(Plantago lanceolata)* which can look a bit sedge/rush-like when the anthers have dropped. However, this has a ribbed and not triangular stem.

The most obvious grasses were the silky, golden Sweet Vernal *(Anthoxanthum odoratum)*, one of the earliest grasses to flower, and Foxtail *(Alopecurus pratensis)* whose orange anthers made it look like a fox's brush.

The predominant rush was the smooth stemmed Soft Rush *(Juncus effusus)* and the smooth pith centre distinguished from the grasses and sedges. This plant is an indicator of waterlogged or poorly drained fields.

P.S. Fairy Flax *(Linum catharticum)* was growing happily in the centre of the laneway and in the car park!

Marion Allen

continued

Slievnacloy (contd)

Botany and Zoology

17th May 2014

The BNFC and BCNI ran a joint field trip to the *Slievenacloy Nature Reserve*.

Garden Tiger caterpillar

This was a chance for a number of members with different areas of expertise to share their knowledge. The day could be titled the 'Hairy Mary' outing as Garden Tiger caterpillars *(Arctia caja)*, were the stars of the day- crossing paths, climbing vegetation and curled up resting on leaves. A promise of adults to come!

The night before, eight moth traps were set out in a range of habitats around the Nature Reserve. At 8am on the day of the event, the traps were closed and brought to the central Farmhouse. There, along with the contents of Pamela Thomlinson's North Belfast trap, the moths were identified and recorded.

Hebrew Character *(Orthosia gothica)* was the most common with a total of 55 caught. Flame Carpet *(Xanthorhoe designata)* was also present in many traps with a total of 17 trapped. The Quarry trap had 8 Striped Twin-spot Carpet *(Nebula salicata)* - this is a habitat were they were found previously. Other species included Dark-barred twin-spot *(Xanthorhoe ferrugata)*, Herald *(Scoliopteryx libatrix)*, May Highflyer *(Hydriomena impluviata)*, Yellow-barred Brindle *(Acasis viretata)*, Least Black Arches *(Nola confusalis)*, Early Thorn *(Selenia dentaria)*, Scalloped Hazel *(Odontopera bidentata)*, Red Chestnut *(Cerastis rubricosa)* and a new record for the site Glaucous Shears *(Papestra biren)*.

Many thanks to all the BCNI members who set up traps and arrived early in the morning to open and identify the many species found. Several traps were kept and the moths were shown to everyone at lunchtime.

At 10.30 we were joined by more club members and started to explore a range of habitats.
Lunch in the sunshine at the Farmhouse picnic area provided an opportunity to view the moths trapped overnight.

From a cool 10° C and threatening rain start to the day, the weather improved to a warm 16° C stimulating the appearance of the unmistakeable male Orange tips *(Anthocharis cardamines)*. Further scrutiny was required to differentiate between the female Orange Tip and the ubiquitous dark veined, Green-veined White *(Pieris napi)*. A solitary Speckled Wood *(Pararge aegeria)* made an appearance, flittering along the hedgerows on the approach to the Farmhouse, whilst the undoubted favourite of the day was the c 20 *Garden tiger* larvae or which we recorded along the tracks and verges.

continued

Slievnacloy (contd)

Botany and Zoology

17th May 2014

Dipper

The afternoon session followed the waymarked *Stoneyford Walk*, from which there are unparalleled vistas out to the *Mournes* and across *Lough Neagh* towards the distant Sperrins. On the descent towards the *Stoneyford River* valley, the hedgerows along the track and the slopes of the adjacent fields. There was an opportunity to view more Garden tigers along the verges of the *Flowbog Road*, before entering Slievenacloy's southern area with its archaeological interest, *The Ring*. *Jim Bradley* outlined the differing theories as to its purpose, from prehistoric earthworks to a 17th century artillery fort.

The route dipped further to the level of the Stoneyford River, where the party followed the banks upstream through the rush pasture and species-rich grassland with Orange Tips and Green-veined Whites much in evidence. After crossing botanically rich stone and earth bank, field boundaries, the party completed the loop returning to finish the day at the car park

Common or Smooth Newt

Along the walk we saw common frogs *(Rana temporaria)*, a common newt *(Lissotriton vulgaris)*, carder bees *(Bombus Pascorum)*, a White-tailed Queen and worker *(Bombus Locurum)*. The birds seen and heard were Willow Warblers *(Phylloscopus trochilus)*, Chiff Chaff *(Phylloscopus collybita)*, Blackcap *(Sylvia atricapilla)*, Robin *(Erithacus rubecula)*, Hooded Crow *(Corvus cornix)* and in flight were Grey Heron *(Ardea cinerea)*, Swift *(Apus apus)*, Swallow *(Hirundo rustica)* and Skylark *(Alauda arvensis)*. We also saw Dipper stones in Stoneyford River.

A super day and we are keen to return again to Slievenacloy to explore the flora and fauna at other times of the year.

Hooded Crow

Lisnabreeny and Cregagh Glen

Botany leader - Craig Sommerville **27th May 2014**

Lisnabreeny lies on the south east border of the *City of Belfast*, an enchanting glen path begins at the very outward end of the *Cregagh Road* and follows the glen stream steadily rising uphill until it meets the *Manse Road*. Here the path goes beneath the road via a culvert, into what remains of the old *Lisnabreeny estate walled garden*. From there it carries on for another mile or so until it reaches a *Rath* at the top of Lisnabreeny hill, the highest point in the *Castlereagh hills*.

Nesca Robb, local writer and poet donated the house and 156 acres of land including farmland and most of Cregagh Glen to the *National Trust* in 1938, making it one of the earliest National Trust acquisitions in Northern Ireland.

Hawthorn

Field Club members gathered near the entrance on the A55 ring road on this fine spring evening and set off at a gentle pace in search of the various flora that that Lisnabreeny has to offer.

The group found a good variety of plants including Wood Avens *(Geum urbanum),* Enchanters Nightshade *(Circaea lutetiana)*, Sweet Woodruff *(Galium odoratum)* and Germander Speedwell *(Veronica chamaedrys)*.

Along the way Craig talked about recent work carried out by the National Trust such as the upgrade and improvement of paths, the replacement of bridges and the removal of *Leylandii* and replacement with native broadleaf trees in the old walled garden area.

The evening finished with a visit to the former *US military cemetery memorial* on the *Rocky Road*. In 1943 the National Trust donated a 10 acre field to the United States military for use as a graveyard. The Cemetery opened in December 1943 and by the end of the war 148 servicemen were buried there, most of them the victims of training accidents. In 1948 the cemetery was closed and the bodies moved to cemeteries in England and the United States.

In 2013, *Castlereagh Borough Council* and the *National Trust* embarked on a project to create a fitting memorial to the fallen who were once buried there. The existing original gates and walls were repaired and a simple Mourne granite stone was carved with the names of the servicemen. The garden area was created with two Cherry trees and white gravel paths to reflect the original cemetery.

Craig Somerville

Groomsport and Ballymacormick Point

Botany and Zoology

31st May 2014

Groomsport means "The port of the gloomy servant" but here was no gloom around on this lovely sunny afternoon, when members gathered at *Groomsport Harbour* to look at coastal plants. We first headed eastwards by the path to the beach. Four species of Plantain were examined- Greater Plantain *(Plantago major)* with broad leaves favours well-trodden paths, the taller Ribwort Plantain *(Plantago lanceolatus)* has lance-shaped ribbed leaves. The seaside plantains are Sea Plantain *(Plantago maritima)* with fleshy narrow leaves while Buckshorn Plantain *(Plantago coronopus)* has antler-shaped leaves. Coronopus means crow-foot so you can use either the English or the botanical name to help to identify it.

Dovesfoot Cranesbill *(Geranium molle)* was growing in grass while Shining Cranesbill *(Geranium lucidum)* with shiny leaves was managing to grow out of a wall. It used to be quite an uncommon plant in Northern Ireland but now seems to appear on waste sites everywhere and as a persistent weed in my garden. Pepper-tasting Yellow Stonecrop (Sedum acre) also grows on walls. On a sandy path by the beach a single plant of Sea Holly *(Eryngium maritimum)* was just surviving trampling by beach-goers. Arena means 'Sand' – arenas had sand-covered floors. Lyme Grass *(Leymus arenarius)*, Marram *(Ammophila arenarius)* and Sand Sedge *(Carex arenaria)* all have root systems that help bind the sand together. The winter storms had exposed some of the root systems but a clump of lilac-coloured Sea Rocket (*Cakile martima)* had survived.

Orange Tip

A rocky greywacke headland was a riot of colour- yellow Birdsfoot Trefoil *(Lotus corniculatus)*, pink Thrift *(Armeria maritima)*, white Sea Campion *(Silene uniflora)* and the last few flowers of blue Spring Squill *(Scilla verna)*. Refreshed by icecreams, we made our way past the harbour, where male and female Eiders *(Somateria mollissima)* were swimming together, and watched the Black-headed Gulls *(Chroicocephalus ridibundus)* and Arctic Terns *(Sterna paradisaea)* on *Cockle Island.* Arctic Terns spend our winter in the Antarctic and come here and as far as the Arctic to breed – a round trip of 70,000 km per year. In their 30 year life span they can cover 2 million kilometres of ocean travel although weighing only 100g. Small Tortoiseshell *(Aglais urticae)* and Peacock caterpillars *(Aglais io)* were identified on Nettle

continued

Groomsport and Ballymacormick (contd)

Botany and Zoology

31st May 2014

Small Tortoiseshell instars

plants and Green-veined white *(Pieris napi)* and Orange-tip *(Anthocharis cardamines)* butterflies were in flight. In wet areas were clumps of the poisonous Hemlock Water Dropwort *(Oenanthe crocata)*. The winter storms had washed uprooted plants onto beaches and there have been reports of dogs being poisoned by mistaking the roots for sticks.

The sea marsh area of Ballymacormick is a very different habitat from the sandy shore. The pink sepals of Sea Milkwort *(Glaux maritima)* and the pink petals of Lesser Sea-spurrey *(Spergularia marina)* were visible among the green of Sea Arrow-grass *(Triglochin maritima)* and Saltmarsh Grass *(Puccinellia)* - named after a nineteenth century Italian botanist.

Glasswort *(Salicornia europaea)* has fleshy leaves to cope with the saltiness; soda used to be extracted from it as from Kelp for use in glass-making. This had been listed on the programme as a botany excursion but as with most BNFC outings we shared our interests, so contributions from botanists, geologists, bird and butterfly experts added to the enjoyment of a very pleasant afternoon.

There was also the historical interest of the nineteenth century thatched fishermen's cottages at Cockle Row.

Margaret Marshall

Male and female Eider duck

Cockle Row, Groomsport, County Down.

Castle Espie

Botany and Zoology

14th June 2014

Castle Espie estate includes a wide variety of habitat, some native natural and some man-made natural. The Club had been asked to do a plant survey, which we carried out, seeing a good range of plants.

Dactylorhiza fuchsii

Dactylorhiza purpurella

Geranium dissectum

Meadow Brown

Banbridge Area Archaeology and History

17th June 2014

Leader: Claire Foley

Lisnagrade tri-valate rath

An enthusiastic group of members travelled in convoy from *Banbridge Parish Church* towards *Scarva* through a mid-summer drumlin countryside of high ditches and silage-cut fields.

The first stop was the remarkable *tri-vallate rath* (three banks and ditches) at *Lisnagade*. One of six raths in this townland dating to early medieval times (500-1100 AD). It has an interior of 50 metres diameter which would have had circular houses in its heyday. Members were impressed with the original entrance causeway and we imagined the probable timber gateways linking to one or more palisades defending the banks. A smaller earthwork to its north may have been a cattle compound.

Coolnacran Rath

This was undoubtedly the residence of an important family and a bronze 'feasting' cauldron, spear and arrowheads were found in cleaning out a ditch in 1832.

We then visited the only slightly smaller tri-vallate *Lisnavaragh* rath in the same townland. It is perched on a drumlin also with an original causewayed entrance and a crown of later beech trees. Next was the *Danes Cast*, a linear earthwork forming a boundary of some six miles in length in the later Iron Age (100 BC – AD 200). We approached it by Fir Tree Lane at Scarva where it is cut by a later road and the group had a shady walk along its deep ditch between scrub-covered banks.

The final visit was to *Coolnacran Rath* at *Loughbrickland*, a very fine example of a bi-vallate rath (two banks and ditches).

We were treated to a spectacular sunset as we headed home.

Rathlin Island

Leader Peter Millar

21st June 2014

Brockley

Rough-out axe head

Common Seal

After some negotiation, we were able to get on a bus which dropped us off at **Brockley**. This is a site famous for its Neolithic axe factory. The beautiful polished stone axeheads from here are very similar to those from Tievebulliagh near Cushendall and can really only be distinguished by chemical analysis. The farmer was kind enough to show us his small collection of "rough-outs".

We also examined the knoll behind the house which is the actual site of the factory. A sizeable hollow has been excavated in the side of this. We speculated that the very hard rock was extracted by building fires against the cliff and quenching it with water.

The rock is *Porcellanite* which was produced by an inter-basaltic laterite being heated by a dolerite plug which has penetrated it. The plug forms the knoll. The clay of the laterite has been naturally fired in a manner similar to a ceramic and this has produced a remarkably hard dark grey speckled rock. In contrast with Tievebulliagh, the laterite is not a mass of the Lower Interbasaltic Bed (now officially the Port-na-Spaniagh Member) which slumped into the plug, but is just one of the normal interbasaltic boles which happens to be exceptionally thick at this point, and also happens to be in contact with the plug. It is interesting that the Neolithic people were able to locate the only two occurrences of porcellanite in Antrim.

After leaving Brockley, we walked back to Church Bay. This was no hardship as the road is downhill (mostly!) and the weather was superb. We stopped at a viewpoint from where we had a fine view of Church Bay and the mainland. A buoy out in the bay marks the remains of H.M.S. Drake which was torpedoed in 1917. A recent book H.M.S. Drake - Rathlin Island Shipwreck by Ian Wilson gives a comprehensive account of the incident.

From here, we could see that the first part of the road to Rue Point is built on a ridge. This is a shingle ridge. The original Geological Survey opinion was that the sea broke across the low ground here, splitting Rathlin into two. Two shingle spits formed on either side of the gap and it is these which formed the ridge. A more recent paper by R. W. G. Carter suggests that it was actually an ancient storm beach. Shells from it have been dated at over 12,000 ybp.

We then had a very pleasant lunch in glorious sunshine at the small picnic site. From here the range of cliffs with the white chalk topped by the black basalt is striking. The clay-with-flints between the two is seldom seen: its position is marked by a grassy ledge.

In the afternoon we had planned to go to Rue Point but unfortunately no suitable transport materialised and so we decided to explore the vicinity of the Harbour.

continued

Rathlin Island (contd)

Leader Peter Millar **21st June 2014**

Passing the information office and going east towards Mill Bay we could see the Ulster White Limestone ("Chalk") exposed on the foreshore. As these Chalk beds have been identified as being very low in the succession this may imply that the underlying Lias is just below sea-level in the centre of the bay. There is also an area of the Chalk which shows very steep dips - unusual in Antrim.

Mill Bay

Here we spent some time watching seals which were lying on the reefs.

On the east side of Mill Bay the top of the Chalk dips to below sea-level and this brings in the Lower Basalt Formation. Along this coast raised-beach benches and cliffs are well developed in the basalts.

In many parts of the world basalts show typical stepped trap topography but oddly enough in Antrim this is not always seen. However Rathlin is an exception for this type of topography is very well developed all over the island.

Going a short way along the track towards Rue we stopped at Craigmacagan Lough, one of the many loughans which are such a feature of the southern peninsula of Rathlin. The stepped topography tends to encourage the development of such small lakes which pond against the scarps.

The highest part of the Rue peninsula is formed of basalts of the Causeway Tholeiite Member. On the mainland a thick Laterite, the Port-na-Spanaigh Member, separates the olivine-basalts of the Lower Basalt Formation from the Causeway Tholeiites. But curiously on Rathlin although there is indeed a thick laterite, there is an olivine-basalt flow above it. This is an anomaly which has puzzled geologists over the years.

We retraced our steps along the main road which runs along the crest of the ridge, noting chalk cobbles in excavations.

Hereabouts there were Bronze Age (?) cists. Incidentally a longship burial was allegedly excavated nearer the beach in but there is now no sign of the site. The small building at the corner where you turn down to the pub is the Rocket House which housed line-carrying rockets, intended to be fired out to any boats which had gone aground below the cliffs.

It was just a little unfortunate that we were unable to follow all our original plans, but this was still an enjoyable excursion on a beautiful day.

Peter Millar

North Mayo

Introduction

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Our long field trip was to an area not visited before by the BNFC; in fact it was a new venue for many participants. We were centred in the *Broadhaven Bay Hotel, Belmullet* where some members of the *Dublin Naturalists' Field Club* joined us. Because of the driving distance from Belfast and the problems associated with driving in convoy and parking on the narrow roads on the Mullet peninsula it was decided to use a small coach. We were very fortunate that the driver supplied by Chambers Coaches was not only first rate at his job but was very friendly and helpful.

On our journey to *Bemullet* we stopped for coffee and scones in the *Valley Hotel in Fivemiletown* and thus fortified we continued to our picnic lunch stop at *Glencar*. On our approach to this stop in "Yeats Country" I read Yeats' poem *Stolen Child* in which the waterfall at Glencar is featured. It was a warm sunny day and the ice cream van in the car park was a welcome attraction to members of the group. There was also time to walk up to the waterfall and admire the beautiful scenery of the area. Then it was back onto the coach for the next leg of our journey, which took us through *Sligo* town and along *Ballysadare Bay* to Mayo. There was a brief stop in *Crossmalina* and while some people took advantage of the pleasant riverside walk others found an ice cream shop. Ice cream was quickly becoming the motif of the trip.

After checking in to the hotel and having an evening meal we retired to the conference room, which had been set aside for our use. At this point we formally welcomed seven members of DNFC and the excursion booklet was distributed.

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Introduction and Itinerary

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Bernard Anderson then gave us an introduction to the geology of the region. As it was a warm, still evening a majority of members walked into the centre of Belmullet hoping that corncrakes might be heard in the surrounding fields. Although the notice board on the outskirts of the town declares that this is corncrake country we were too late in the season to hear their mating call.

Monday dawned bright and clear and the weather forecast promised a good day ahead for our zoological and botanical exploration of the Mullet peninsula.

Dave Suddaby, *Birdwatch Ireland* warden for the Mullet had set moth traps on Sunday night and he opened them with us on the northern shore of *Portnafrack Bay* and helped with identification. *Declan Doogue* (DNFC) and *Gerry Sharkey* (DNFC and BSBI vice county recorder for Mayo) led the botany sessions on the shore at *Portnafrack, Annagh Head* and *Fallmore*. We took advantage of the good weather to visit *Blacksod Bay* and Fallmore, which were originally on the itinerary for Wednesday morning. The short drive to Faulmore (Fallmore), where there are the remains of an early church dedicated to *St Deirbhle*, afforded lovely views of the islands to the west of the Mullet and also of *Achill*.

The good weather added greatly to the enjoyment of the day, which ended back in the hotel with a talk given by *Greta Byrne*, manager of the *Céide Fields Visitor Centre*.

Tuesday was devoted mostly to archaeology/history but with a bit of botany, geology and zoology thrown in for good measure. The glorious weather continued with the temperatures being even higher than the previous day. The morning was spent at the *Céide Fields* where Greta Byrne gave us a conducted tour of the site. After lunch she took us to *Rathlacken Court cairn* from where we travelled to *Killala* where the ice cream cones seemed to be a bigger attraction than the *Round Tower*. Despite the late return to the hotel leaving little time for preparation, our customary mini conversazione proved to be as varied and interesting as ever.

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Introduction and Itinerary

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Orache

Bog Pimpernel

Eyebright

Wednesday's weather turned out, as forecast, to be very different from the previous days so it was a cold damp visit to *Cross Lake* for a brief botany session before visiting *Aughleam Heritage Centre*. This small community run project had some interesting artifacts connected to life on the Mullet and the nearby islands. We were made very welcome and enjoyed tea and scones at this, our last stop in North Mayo. The advantage of the wet weather meant that there were no requests for ice cream stops en route home, although we did have a lunch break at the Clarion Hotel in Sligo before completing the journey.
I wish to thank the following people for sharing their expertise with us:

Bernard Anderson	BNFC
Greta Byrne	Céide Fields
Declan Doogue	DNFC
Gerry Sharkey	DNFC
Dave Suddaby	BirdWatch Ireland

I am indebted to *Margaret Marshall* who not only helped with the recce for this Field Trip but was also my chauffeur to and around Mayo at Easter time. Thanks to the members BNFC committee, especially the sectional secretaries, who supported me in the planning of the trip.

A special thanks goes to our Hon.Treasurer *Tony Thomlinson*.
Last but not least thanks to our driver *Francis* who by the end of the trip felt like a friend.

Joan Semple

Botany

The *Mullet peninsula* in hot sunshine is a most beautiful place with Mediterranean blue seas and views of off-shore islands and the mountains of Achill and Mayo.

Dublin and Belfast Field Naturalists gathered on Monday 30th June at *Portnafrack Bay* where we were fortunate to have the expertise of *Gerry Sharkey, BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland)* recorder for Co. Mayo, and *Declan Doogue of DNFC (Dublin Naturalists' Field Club)*. Gerry took us to the shore to demonstrate how sand dunes are formed. Sand is blown in by onshore breezes and when it meets some obstruction it begins to accumulate in small piles. On a wet and stormy day, Gerry had been driving along this shore to photograph sand being blown and had had to get a tractor to extricate his car from the beach! Nitrogen in blown sand, seaweed and shells provide enough nutrients for salt–tolerant plants like Orache (Atriplex) and Sand Couch-grass *(Elytrigia juncea)* to become established. Their stolons stabilise the sand and as the salt is leached out, sand further inshore is colonised by Marram Grass *(Ammophila arenaria)* whose rooting systems hold the entire dunes together.

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Botany and Zoology

29th June to 2nd July 2014

As in the *Outer Hebrides,* the strong Atlantic winds on the west coast of Ireland lead to the formation of *Machair* inland from the dunes where the soil is enriched by sea shells and leguminous plants. Here we identified Sea Holly *(Eryngium maritimum),* Kidney Vetch *(Anthyllis vulneraria)*, Lady's Bedstraw *(Galium verum)*, Sea Campion *(Silene uniflora)*, Sea Carrot *(Daucus carota)* and Birdsfoot Trefoil *(Lotus corniculatus)*.

When barley was no longer grown here, *Marram Grass* was cut for thatching and the dunes deteriorated until new Marram Grass was planted.

Our next stop was *Annagh Head* where the habitat is dominated by Sea Plantain *(Plantago maritima),* Buckshead Plantain *(Plantago coronopus)* and Thrift *(Armeria maritima)*. Declan speculated why the Eyebright *(Euphrasia)* had very small flowers whereas the other plants dwarfed in this windswept area still had normal-sized flowers. In damper areas were Bog Pimpernel *(Anagallis tenella)* and Marsh Pennywort *(Hydrocotyle vulgaris)*. Hydrocotyle means 'Watercup' so both names describe the leaves, penny-sized and cup-shaped.

After a picnic lunch, our bus took us to *Falmore* and the new sculptures of *Dervla's Twist* – will archaeologists in a few thousand years time wonder why second millennium people had resorted to building stone circles like their ancestors four thousand years previously? Gerry had bought us here to see the plentiful Bee Orchids *(Ophrys apifera)* growing in a newly-grassed area and spreading out onto the heathland.

He reckoned the seeds had come in with the stone quarried for the sculptures. Other orchids in the area were Lesser Butterfly Orchid *(Platanthera bifolia)* and Northern Marsh Orchid *(Dactylorhiza purpurella)*. He also identified a southern hemisphere plant - Buttonweed *(Cotula coronopifolia)*. Chilean *Gunnera* has become invasive in many places in the West of Ireland, apparently spread from a quarry in Co. Galway with stones used for roadworks.

Tuesday was an archaeology day but archaeological sites have interesting plants. *The Ceide Fields* are covered with blanket bog but we were intrigued to see lime-loving plants such as Fairy Flax (Linum catharticum) and Quaking Grass *(Briza media)* growing alongside the gravel path. An unusual plant was Yellow-eyed Grass (Sisyrinchium californicum) which is also naturalized near *Lough Cullin* in County Mayo. The related Blue-eyed Grass *(Sisyrinchium bermudiana)* is possibly native in Ireland. *Rathlackan Court Tomb* was the only place wet enough to have damp sphagnum moss with flowering Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia)*.

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Botany and Zoology

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Grass of Parnassus

On **Wednesday** the wind blew and rain began to fall to remind us why the blanket bog had developed over so much of NW Mayo burying the Ceide Fields. However we had an enjoyable final botanical walk on the shores of *Cross Lough*. Gerry identified Early Marsh Orchid *(Dactylorhiza incarnata ssp.incarnata)*, Northern Marsh Orchid *(Dactylorhiza purpurella)* and Hebridean Spotted Orchid *(Dactylorhiza fuchsii ssp hebridensis)*.

The beautiful white flowers of Grass of Parnassus (Parnassia *palustris)* were beginning to appear along with Brookweed *(Samolus valerandi)* which is in the Primrose family. Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis)* generally prefers limey ground. In the water was the lilac-flowered Lesser Water-plantain *(Baldellia ranunculoides)* named after an Italian nobleman.

Many aquatic plants have 3- petalled flowers, I wonder why.

The great pleasure to be gained from any Belfast Naturalists' Field Club excursion is from the combination of all the sections, so on this Long Field Trip we shared the enjoyment of looking together at plants, butterflies, moths, birds, rocks and ancient sites in a beautiful part of Ireland.

We thank our out-going Excursion Secretary, *Joan Semple,* for her enthusiasm and efficiency over many years.

North Mayo Complete Plant List

Portnafrack Bay - Beach

Atriplex - Orache
Elymus/Elytrigia Juncea -Sea Couch
Ammophila arenaria - Marram Grass

Machair

Bee Orchid

Eryngium maritimum - Sea Holly
Galium verum - Lady's Bedstraw
Daucus carota - Sea Carrot
Heracleum spondylium - Hogweed
Anthyllis vulneraria - Kidney Vetch
Potentilla anserina - Silverweed
Glaux maritima - Sea milkwort
Silene uniflora - Sea Campion
Lo*tus corniculatus* - Birdsfoot Trefoil
Honkenya peploides - Sea Sandwort
R*aphanus raphanistrum ssp.maritimum* - Sea Radish
Sinapis arvensis - Charlock
Agrostis stolonifera - Creeping Bent
Festuca rubra - Red fescue

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Complete plant list

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Annagh Head

Predominant habitat-

Plantago maritima - Sea Plantain
Plantago coronopus - Buckshead Plantain
Armeria maritima - Thrift
Euphrasia - Eyebright (small flowered)
Anagallis tenella - Bog Pimpernel
Erica tetralix - Cross-leaved Heath
Erica cinerea - Bell Heather
Glaux maritima - Sea Milkwort
Sagina nodosa - Knotted Pearlwort
Hydrocotyle vulgaris - Marsh Pennywort
Thymus polytrichus - Thyme
Potentilla erecta - Tormentil
Centaurium erythraea - Centaury
Cerastium fontanum - Mouse-eared Chickweed

Falmore – Dervla's Twist

Ophrys apifera - Bee Orchid
Platanthera bifolia - Lesser Butterfly Orchid
Dactylorhiza purpurella - Northern Marsh Orchid
Hypericum pulchrum - Slender St.john's Wort
Pedicularis sylvatica - Lousewort
Narthecium ossifragum - Bog Asphodel
Calluna vulgaris - Ling Heather
Salix repens - Creeping Willow
Leucanthemum vulgare - Dog Daisy
Cotula coronopifolia - Buttonweed,
Gunnera tinctoria - invasive Chilean plant

Ceide Fields

Dactylorhiza fuchsii - Common Spotted Orchid
Dactylorhiza maculata ssp. Ericetorum - Heath Spotted Orchid
Listera ovata - Twayblade
Epilobium brunnescens - New Zealand Willowherb
Sisyrinchium californicum - Yellow-eyed grass
Solidago virgaurea - Goldenrod
Linum catharticum - Fairy Flax
Briza media - Quaking Grass
N.B lime-loving plants growing on gravel paths

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Plant list and Geology

29th June to 2nd July 2014

Round leafed Sundew

Rathlacken

Drosera rotundifolia - Round-leaved Sundew, in flower

Cross Lough

Dactylorhiza incarnata ssp.incarnata - Early Marsh Orchid
Dactylorhiza fuchsii ssp.hebridensis - HebrideanSpottedOrchid
Dactylorhiza purpurella - Northern Marsh Orchid
Parnassia palustris - Grass of Parnassus
Sherardia arvensis - Field Madder
Samolus valerandi - Brookweed
Apium nodiflorum - Fool's Watercress
Baldellia ranunculoides - Lesser Water-plantain
Senecio aquaticus - Marsh Ragwort
Hydrocotyle vulgaris - Marsh Pennywort.

This is a list of the more interesting plants – I have not listed every buttercup or daisy and have not repeated plants that occurred in subsequent sites . I would welcome any additions /corrections from other members of the party.

Margaret Marshall

North Mayo Geology

County Mayo has some of the oldest rocks in Ireland. Remarkably the *Belmullet Peninsula* and the adjacent mainland offer excellent outcrops of three different gneiss formations: *The Mullet gneiss* crystallised some 1779 million years ago, *the Cross Point Gneiss* 1270 million years ago and the *Doolough Gneiss*, on the eastern shore of *Blacksod Bay,*1177 million years ago. (The Lewisian gneisses which occupy a significant area of NW Scotland and the Inner Hebrides go back to 3000 Ma - much, much older than any rock in Ireland.)

Our study area was on the north western corner of the county and our central base was the *Broadhaven hotel*. The geology of the area can be divided into three main regions with the oldest in the western corner and getting younger eastwards.

continued

North Mayo (contd)

Geology

29th June to 2nd July 2014

The oldest section is approximately 1000 million years old and is best seen at *Annagh Head and Cross Point* where there are huge block screes thrown up by the ferocious storms that can be generated crossing the full width of the Atlantic Ocean. As a result these rocks have been piled up above the present beach making them very accessible for the geologist, whereas eastward they are covered by thick peat. The gneisses have been recrystallised at very high temperatures and pressures at depths of at least 30 kilometres. This process causes their mineral content to alter and become aligned. This gives the rocks a striped appearance eg. pink and white and they are known as gneiss.

Moving eastwards these gneiss become a foundation for newer rocks, about 600 million years old, and they are varieties of schist and intrusions of *metadolerite*. These are best seen along the north coast, mainly in the form of impressive cliffs with stacks, caves and arches, products of severe marine erosion in a very exposed environment.

Finally, farther eastwards there is a plateau known as the *Céide Fields*, consisting of *Carboniferous sediments,* retaining their horizontal structure and which date from about 350 million years

All three sections have a peat covering which has been harvested extensively for fuel and horticulture.

James Rutherford

Lissan House

2nd August 2014

August 2nd 2014 saw thirty-four members of Belfast Naturalists' Field Club on a conducted tour of *Lissan House,* the historic home of the *Staples* family for over four hundred years.
The last of the family to live here was *Hazel Radcliffe Dolling*, daughter of *Sir Robert Staples 13th Baronet*. Hazel died in 2006. Many people were impressed by her passion for "This Golden Place" when she appeared on the BBC 2 *Restoration Programme of 2003* in which the house came second in the whole of the UK, a huge achievement.
A Charitable Trust of volunteers, set up before Hazel's death, run the property and are doing an excellent job in restoration without changing the character of this unique property.

A young Thomas Staples from near Bristol arrived in the small Drapers' Company village of *Moneymore* about 1615, no doubt hoping to make fame and fortune which he did in double quick time.
By marrying a rich heiress he purchased the lands at Lissan and many other townlands especially at *Unagh* where there were iron ore deposits. In 1628 King Charles 1st created him a Baronet.

Sir Thomas used the oak trees from his estate to smelt the ore in a furnace which was part of the house he built. Weapons and farm tools would have been forged.

The present house and 5 acre walled garden was mainly built by *Sir Thomas' third son Sir Robert*, during the 1640's. The nineteenth century additions were a magnificent ball room for entertaining built in 1830 by Sir Thomas, 9th Baronet and Catherine Lady Staples. The porte-cochère, the amazing staircase and the clock tower were added by *Sir Nathaniel, 10th Baronet* about 1870/1880.

Looking around the "Arts and Craft" style hall with its gargantuan staircase can be seen many family portraits, some painted by *Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples,* "the Barefoot Baronet". Apart from his eccentricity he was an exceptionally talented artist, a close friend of *King Edward 7th* and of the Café Royal set. His work included portraits of every important politician, actor, churchman, and monarch in England. Sir Ponsonby returned to live at Lissan in 1912.

The tour of the house includes the *Blue Drawing Room* with Catherine Lady Staples' portrait and its eerie effect on Sir Nathaniel's portrait!
The ballroom has strong connections with the house in *Merrion Square Dublin al*so owned by *Sir Thomas QC, 9th Baronet*, who was Queen's Advocate in Ireland.

continued

Lissan House (contd)

2nd August 2014

Next comes the library with the Staples family tree on which are some surprises not least of which are the Great Great Grandparents of Clive Staples Lewis.

On the second floor are bedrooms with dressing rooms adapted as kitchens in the 1940's by the estate manager *Harry Dolling* in an effort to make some income from letting apartments. The landing is supposed to be the walk of the ghost lady, but Hazel never saw her. Sir Ponsonby's room and the old bathroom are no longer graphically decorated since *Vera Lady Staples*, Hazel's mother, had Sir Ponsonsby's murals painted over.

Arts and Crafts style staircase

Hazel's life is featured on an information board, first in her WRNS uniform in WW2, then as Purser on the Cunard liners crossing the Atlantic and finally marrying Harry Dolling who was thirty years her senior.

Finally down the spiral wooden staircase in the clock tower and into the Victorian kitchen with its massive range, stone tiles, dresser and cold room.

So through the history of the Staples family with its family fall-outs over inheritance, daughters married into all the important families in Ireland and Baronets members of the old Irish House of Commons in Dublin, we have a microcosm of Irish social history. Very important also were all the local young men and women who worked the estate and kept the house running. Many were born in the estate cottages and often call at the house to tell their story. One man arrived with the first Thomas in 1615 and his family were the gardeners at Lissan until the 1970's.

We wish the Charitable Trust every success in their efforts to preserve this historic house as a part of our inheritance.

Patricia Rutherford

Legoneil Dams

Botany leader - Jim Bradley

5th August 2014

Ligoneil comes from the Irish *'Lag an Aoil'* meaning 'the Hollow of the Limestone' and has a mixed habitat of chalk grassland, mature woodland, rushy fields ,streams and hazel copses. *The Belfast Hills Partnership* and the *Ligoneil Improvement Association* have been working to restore the area around the old dams and mill races.

A group of twenty members arrived for this evening walk in a little known part of Belfast.

A large plant of Lesser Burdock *(Arctium minus)* with its bracts ending in stiff, hooked points was examined. Arctium in Greek means Bear, so the name comes from the resemblance to a bear's shaggy hair.

A Swiss engineer, *George de Mestral* invented *Velcro* in the 1940s after examining the burrs of *Burdock* stuck to his own clothes and his dog's fur after a hunting trip in the Alps.

Because of the area's association with linen mills, a large area has been sown with Flax *(Linum usitatissimum)* which will be a sea of bright blue when it flowers. Oxeye Daisy *(Leucanthemum vulgare)* and Devil's-bit Scabious *(Succisa pratensis)* plugs were planted to encourage the spread of wild-flower meadows. In wetter areas the predominant plant was Wild Angelica *(Angelica sylvestris)* with huge pinkish-white umbels, called Angelica because of its healing powers but many umbellifers are poisonous. Another wet grassland plant is Sneezewort *(Achillea ptarmica)* related to Yarrow *(Achillea millefolium)* but with larger ray-florets.

Wild Angelica

The old mill races and ditches were thick with Water-cress *(Nasturtium officinale/Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum)* - Nasturtium 'nose-twisting' because of its mustard-oil smell. The garden Nasturtium is actually a *Tropaeolum*, a tropical family. *Jim Bradley* showed us River Jelly Lichen *(Collema dichotemum)*, a rare amphibious fungus which grows in cool, clean siliceous streams and is an indication of the good water quality of the streams coming down from the Belfast Hills. The paths ended at a steep hazel-covered slope, another habitat worth-exploring.

Jim Bradley walked us round the lower *Mill Dam* where the local fishermen can fish for trout and we saw a Mallard family *(Anas platyrhynchoson)* the water. The upper Dam can be fished for pike.

continued

Legoneil Dams (contd)

Botany leader - Jim Bradley

5th August 2014

Jim Bradley at the high-backed chair

It was a lovely evening after a wet day and warm enough for us to see a couple Green-veined Whites *(Pieris rapae)* in flight. As Jim told us about the history of the area and the plans for its development as we walked round the Dam and up the paths passing the 'story telling' circle made of wood carvings.

A high-backed seat for the story teller and a ring of seats for the listeners, created a couple of years ago and still looking good with no graffiti.

We continued up to the woodland with swallows *(Hirundo rustica)* feeding on the wing and gold finch *(Carduelis carduelis)* with their delightful liquid twittering song and call.

There are good views from many of these green spaces in Belfast Hills and we had a clear view of the city as we walked down with a buzzard *(Buteo buteo)* flying high above us.

An area to watch as it develops into a natural environment for fauna, flora and the community working to maintain it.

Margaret Marshall and Pamela Thomlinson

Swallow

Goldfinch

Kearney, County Down

Leader - Graham Day

16th August 2014

Paper dubium

In 1836 the population of *Kearney* was 150, mostly farmers, farm-labourers, fishermen and fisherwomen; the population in the remote clachan declined until the *National Trust* acquired it in 1965.
The picturesque white houses and cottages are now rented out and there are over 3 miles of walks along the shore to *New Quay* and *Knockinelder Bay*. BNFC members eventually found their way to Kearney by various small roads south from *Cloughey* or east from *Portaferry*.

Graham Day, *BSBI recorder for Co. Down*, ably assisted by his wife, *Julia Nunn*, introduced us to this mixed habitat of coastal grassland, shingle inlets, sandy beaches and salt marsh. Plants were recorded in 1km squares.

Thrupenny bit with Thrift

In the morning we ambled at a botanical pace towards New Quay where the most conspicuous plant was the tall Corn Sowthistle *(Sonchus arvensis)* with its large glossy yellow flowers. Summer seaside plants like Sea Campion *(Silene uniflora)*, Lady's Bedstraw *(Galium verum)* and Thrift *(Armeria maritma)* were still in flower. Thrift was depicted on pre-1950 three-penny coins as thruppenny bits were then worth saving by the thrifty. However the plant's English name derives from 'thriving' as its leaves remain green. Common Knotgrass *(Polygonum aviculare)* was growing in grass by the path, but the botanists were excited to find large spreading plants of Ray's Knotgrass *(Polygonum oxyspermum)* on the sandy shore.

Ray's Knotgrass

Growing beside each other were 2 umbellifers with classical connections, Alexanders *(Smyrnium olusatrum),* a former pot-herb from the Mediterranean named after Alexander the Great, and the deadly poisonous Hemlock *(Conium maculatum)* with purple-spotted stems, which was used to execute Socrates.

After a picnic lunch, we walked southwards towards Knockinelder.

Oysterplant

The first excitement here was finding many plants of Yellow-horned Poppy *(Glaucium flavum)* with its long curving seed-pods. Poppy seeds can remain viable for many years and will start to flourish when disturbed as happened on the battlefields of Flanders. Graham reckoned that the disturbance of the shingle during the severe winter storms of 2013-4 will have caused many new Yellow-horned Poppy seeds to germinate. This plant is common in the Mediterranean and here it is at its most northerly Irish site. Nearby was Oysterplant *(Mertensia maritima)*, a coastal arctic plant at its most southerly site. With global-warming Oysterplant is retreating northwards so it was good to see it flourishing here in a patch larger than Bernard's dog which sat down in the middle while the photographers were busy. Oysterplant seeds can also remain dormant for years and are dispersed by sea water so the winter storms have also probably helped this rare plant to spread.

continued

Kearney, County Down (contd)

Leader - Graham Day

16th August 2014

Sea Kale

Sow Thistle

Several new plants were appearing in the same shingle area. Its English name derives from the leaves apparently tasting of oysters and it is at risk from chefs; the botanical name is from an 18th century German botanist, *Mertens*. So within a few yards of each other we had coastal plants, one common in southern Europe and one in the Arctic. Both plants had been recorded by *Templeton* in South Down in the early 1800s.

Nearby was another rare plant, Sea Kale *(Crambe maritima)*, a member of the cabbage-family, which can be eaten as a vegetable; its corky pods are also dispersed in sea water. When the BNFC was in Galloway in 2010, we had seen shingle shores with large colonies of Oysterplant and Sea Kale and wondered why they were rare just a few miles across the water.

As it was a cloudy day, the only butterflies seen were Red Admirals (*Vanessa atalanta)* and Green-veined Whites *(Pieris napi)*.

Graham and Julia were thanked for leading us on a most rewarding botanical walk in a lovely part of Co. Down.

Margaret Marshall

The Argory and a Quest for Stone

Presidential Leader - Marion Allen **6th September 2014**

Marion Allen took members to look at geology in an ornamental way, in the stone artifacts found at *The Argory*.

The Argory had several very fine inlaid tables and we examined the stones used for ornamentation. The ornamental stone theme continued in the afternoon.

Collon House and Hill of Slane

Leaders - Joan Semple and Claire Foley 23rd September 2014

We had a full coach for our excursion to *Collon House and the Hill of Slane*. Many members of the party expressed surprise when they realized they had often driven through Collon and had been unaware of *Collon House and garden*, which turned out to be a hidden treasure.

Collon House

Anthony Foster, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, built the house in 1740 in the Irish long house style. In 1780 he built a ballroom and later an extra storey was built above the ballroom and over the old house. The house was inherited by Anthony's son *John Foster* who was the *Speaker of the Irish House of Commons* up to its dissolution by the Act of Union in 1800. Speaker Foster's only surviving son *Col. Thomas Henry* married *Harriet Skiffington*, daughter of the *4th Earl of Masserene* who on the death of the 4th Earl in 1816 without male issue succeed in her own right as *Viscountess Massereene* and the title along with the substantial estate descended through her.

Around 1780 John built a lakeside garden folly near Collon, *Oriel Temple*, along with a grotto, a hermitage and a rustic "Cottage Ornée" and by 1812 had left Collon House and moved to Oriel Temple which had been greatly extended. Collon House was split in two after the death of John Foster and then after had chequered history.
In the 20th century it was owned by two elderly bachelors who caused it to suffer from benign neglect. The present owner has lovingly restored it to its former glory and it is now run as a boutique country house B&B.

We were given a conducted tour of the house and shown the many restoration projects carried out over the last couple of decades and were able to admire the beautifully decorated and furnished rooms. One such room was the dining room, which has been panelled to resemble *Handel's house in Spittlefields*. The gardens of Collon House have been restored with appropriate period planting.
The main entrance to the house overlooks a sunken box parterre with topiary and an intricate design layout. In the ornamental garden there is a box edged herbaceous border leading to a Greek style summer house.

We then crossed the road to visit the Church of Ireland parish church the building of which was funded by the Foster family and several tablet memorials to the Foster family can still be seen there.

continued

Collon House and Hill of Slane (contd)

Leaders - Joan Semple and Claire Foley 23rd September 2014

It was built to a design by *Daniel Augustine Beaufort* who was the rector of Collon between 1789 and 1821. The design was inspired by the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, and the seating, like King's and other Cambridge chapels, is arranged in collegiate style, with the pews arranged in rows facing each other. The church is no longer used as a regular place of worship but as it is a Grade A listed building the local people are trying to find ways of raising funds to maintain the fabric of the building.

Joan Semple

After lunch we went up to the *Hill of Slane* which has extensive views towards *Newgrange* and the Irish sea and the *Hill of Tara* where the high kings of Ireland lived. *Matthew Seaver* of the *Hill of Slane Archaeological Programme* gave us an extensive tour of the archaeological features and an erudite account of the history of the various phases of activity.

Hill of Slane

St Patrick is said to have lit the first Paschal fire here to be seen from pagan Tara but this is now challenged and the site may have been closer to *Trim*; the relics of *Bishop Erc*, who died in AD 513, may have been placed in a slab shrine which remains here as two gable-shaped stones in the graveyard (he may have been buried in nearby *Duleek)*; by AD 802 this place was one of three important legal centres in Ireland and a place of inauguration for local kings; various church officials are mentioned in Annals between AD 751 and AD 1002; it was raided by *Norsemen* in the early 9th century and in 948 they burnt a round tower here killing people in it and destroying relics.

continued

Collon House and Hill of Slane (contd)

Leaders - Joan Semple and Claire Foley **23rd September 2014**

It was raided by Irish kings in 1150 and 1161 and a king lived here in the later 12th century. Fragments of a high cross of probably 10th century date were found built into the ruins here (they are now in storage) and in 1028 a *Derteach* (oak house) is said to have collapsed and an oratory (small church) was also mentioned. The present ruined church is 15th/ 16th century in date but hints of an earlier church have been recognised in re-used stonework.

The *Fleming family* were given land here by the *Normans* and they built a motte *(an earthen castle mound)* 7.8m high surrounded by a rock-cut ditch - they also built the first *Slane Castle*. Matthew believes that the motte, in nearby woodland, may be built on an earlier, possibly *Neolithic burial mound* and the Archaeological Programme has been studying it with geophysics with a view to excavating in the future.

The Flemings founded a three-storey college in medieval times which was the parish administrative centre. We were shown a wicker-centred vault on the ground floor- a particularly Irish feature. In the later 15th century a *Chantry College* was attached. This is recorded as having four priests, four choirboys and four clerks. We were able to view their living quarters and work out the number of fireplaces - each priest had one. Some unusual carved stone is set into the walls reflecting the relative wealth of the college and its extensive connections as far away as Northern France.

Fuelled with information and plenty of visual clues to the importance of this site members retraced their steps downhill to the waiting bus.

Claire Foley

Fungus Foray - Dixon Park

Leader - Dr Alistair McCracken **27th September 2010**

Honey Fungus

Bootlaces

Mycena

KingAlfred's Cake

Seventeen members met at Dixon Park, with Dr Alistair McCracken as leader. Again this year, we were at the end of a prolonged dry spell, which did not bode well for finding mushrooms.

The outing began with a discussion of plant pathogens, stimulated by noticing a very brown Lawson Cypress. *Phytophthora lateralis* is the culprit in this case, but around a dozen new pathogens have been recognised in the Province in the past decade. *Phytophthora ramorum* is attacking Larch, as well as Rhododendron, and has led to extensive clearances in for example Rowallane and Belvoir in order to try to limit its spread. Ash Dieback, caused by *Chalara fraxinea (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus)* seems still to be confined to young, newly planted trees in the Province.

A long-dead trunk provided a good show of another much feared fungus, *Armillaria mellia* or Honey Fungus (left). The fruiting bodies were grouped around the base of the tree. We also saw the 'bootlaces' (rhizomorphs) by which it spreads.

Among the grass were a few *Mycena*, and also Small inkcaps, both difficult to identify as to exact species.

Moving into the woodland, fallen logs provided a number of bracket fungi. First was the Birch polypore, *Piptoporus betulinus*. The cut surface was apparently used in the past as a razor strop, to give the finest edge to razors. It is also credited with medicinal properties and was carried by "Ötzi the Iceman", the 5000 year old mummy found in1991 in the Ötztal mountains.

The second bracket seen was *Ganoderma applanata*, which is known as "Artists' conk". It has a clear white surface when young, which turns brown when scratched or rubbed, and has been used as an artists' medium.

Then "King Alfred's Cake" *Daldinia concentrica* and the Horse Hoof Fungus, *Fomes fomentarius* (Ötzi had some of this too).

There was fun with small puffballs, *Lycoperdon pyriforme,* and while Alistair informed that the name translates to the common name 'Wolf dung', Brian McElherron recalled that in his youth they were named 'Horse Farts'.

continued

Fungus Foray - Dixon Park (contd)

Leader - Dr Alistair McCracken **27th September 2010**

Puffball

Sycamore blackspot

Artists' Conk

Coral Spot

Earlier we had seen Sycamore blackspot *Rhytisma acerinum*, which is a good indicator of reasonably clean air. It is relatively sensitive to highlevels of sulphur dioxide.

We also saw the telia and uredinial stages of *Phragmidium violaceum* which causes rust of bramble. Rusts are bligate, host specific pathogens, often with complex life cycles with up to five different sporing stages often completed on two different hosts *Phragmidium violaceum* does not have an alternate host.
Fairies' bonnets *Coprinella disseminatus*, are here being photographed and their identity checked.

Finally, another plant pathogen, Coral spot, *Nectria cinnabarina*, on the bark of a fallen log, and pushing up menacingly through the fallen leaves the mummy-like, dead-black *Xyleria polymorpha*, or Dead Man's Fingers. An enjoyable day, and not a bad haul for the driest September in 50 years.

Liam McCaughey

Birch polypore

Fairies' bonnets

Dead man'sfingers