Living History

Yarpole Group Parish

2000

Volume I

(2003)

Introduction: *A Living History.*

The LIVING HISTORY Group came into being following the production of the Millennium Map booklet. A group of us decided to start a number of follow on projects, which were stimulated by the original work. The projects cover the whole parish - Bicton, Bircher, Bircher Common, Croft, Lucton and Yarpole.

We are interested in the history and environment of the parish and have already worked on some aspects of the **history** of the area and on a number of **nature surveys** - badgers, butterflies, birds, and wild hedgerow flowers. We have started investigating the **stories from the War Memorials**, with the names from the Bircher one (at the bottom of Welshman's Lane). We are also hoping to follow up stories from the parish records. We have started to conduct interviews with the oldest residents, and record their accounts on tape.

One of our major projects is tracking down, **copying and recording old photographs** of the parish - people, places, and activities. We are also taking our own "after" photographs of what the places and/or buildings look like now. We have a photo CD of some 70 pictures.

We would like to investigate the background to the oldest buildings in the parish and are keen to write-up a definitive history of St. Leonard's Church and the Bell Tower. We have kept in touch with the archaeological projects at Croft Castle, and intend to follow up next summer's dig.

As a FRIEND of the *Living History* Group you will receive the bimonthly **NEWSLETTER**, which will keep you up-to-date on our current projects, possible future projects, the build-up of the photograph archive/library, nature jottings, and anything else that's relevant to ***the Living History*** of the Parish.

There is plenty to do, and we would be delighted to have your support: So come and join us: We usually meet in the Bell, as a group about every 6-8 weeks. If you would like to join in, or have ideas for future projects, or photographs you would be willing to lend us for recording, or want to know what we know about your bit of the parish, please contact one of us - Ron Shaw (nature projects), Ian Mortimer (reports of projects), Graham Brookes (photographs), Greg Clare or Norman Taylor (War Memorial stories) - we would be delighted to hear from you.

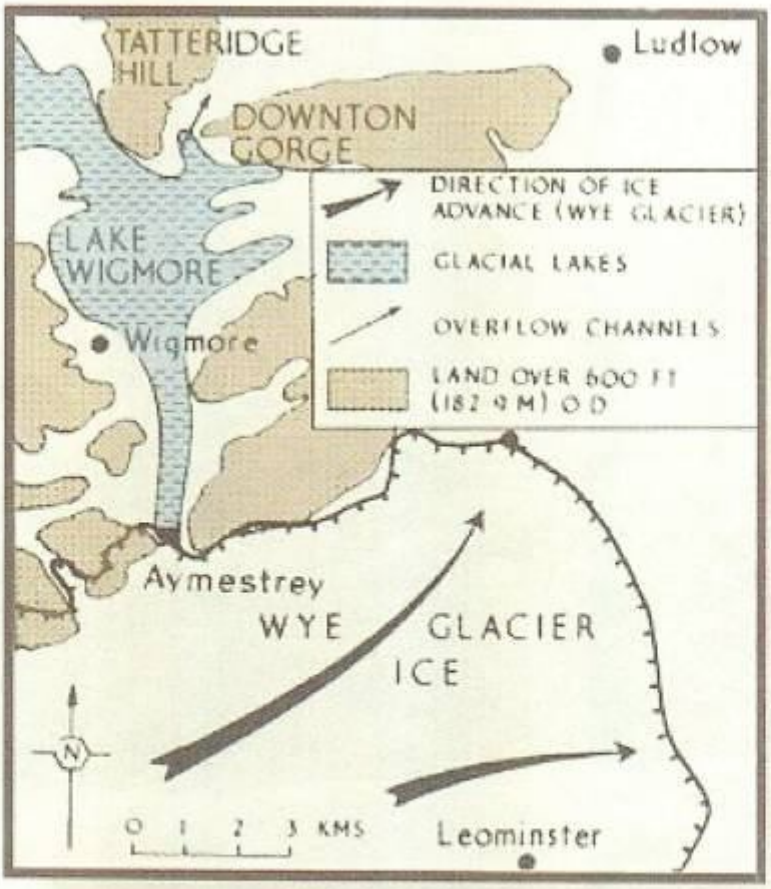
John Gunson, October 2003

Our Parish: *A Living History:*

The Landscape.

In geological terms the present landscape of our Parish is a fairly modern phenomenon, shaped within the last **30,000** years, reflecting the action of the last Ice Age (now known as the "last glaciation"), on a much older land-form, the underlying geology of our Parish being on the southern slopes of an out-crop of Silurian limestone and shale, created some **450** million years ago, rising above the red-brown sandstone that is reflected in the colour of the fields.

20,000 years ago, Herefordshire lay under a sheet of ice **300** metres thick, being the 'Wye Valley Glacier', which had moved from the southwest up to the Shropshire border. It plugged the gap in the hills at Aymestrey thus blocking the original course of the upper reaches of the river Teme and as temperatures rose, so the ice began to melt causing a huge lake to build up, the 'Wigmore Lake'. The ice continued to melt and so the level of the lake continued to rise, until it broke through at Downton Gorge, creating a new course for the river Teme. Meanwhile, the Wye Valley Glacier had moved eastwards across the Orleton Plain and, in laying down debris from its melting front edge (terminal moraine), again blocked the path of the river Teme which, having drained South Shropshire, had previously flowed south from Ludlow through Orleton, draining the North Herefordshire plain, to join the Wye. This blockage created another large lake, the 'Woofferton Lake', and again the river Teme was diverted, now eastwards to drain into the river Severn.



MAP ADAPTED AND REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM DR. PETER CROSS

12,000 years ago or thereabouts marked the end of this last glaciation and, as the Wye Valley Glacier retreated, so a landscape of bare hills and glacial moraine was revealed and, where the river drainage had been interrupted, wide areas of low-lying ground were left as marshlands.

In time, vegetation followed in its natural cyclical pattern and over the subsequent centuries first scrub then birch forest and, as the climate warmed, oak and elm became established. With the broad-leaved forest animals returned, animals such as red deer, wild oxen and wild boar which in turn attracted the hunter-gatherers. Archaeological evidence would suggest that there was not much permanent settlement in this area, - - - - until the Celts came.

The landscape as we see it today is the result of at least **2,500** years of continuous habitation, undulating, gently sloping south-eastwards from the heights of Croft Ambrey, at about 1000 feet (300 metres), down to Yarpole, nestling at about 300 feet (100 metres) above sea level.

Church and chapel, tower and castle, manor house and cottage, road and track, trade and industry, each with their own history, have all left their individual marks, but it is the farms and agriculture that have created the fields and hedges amidst the woodland landscape that we enjoy today.

How would you describe it ?

Today's landscape, what does it mean to you ?

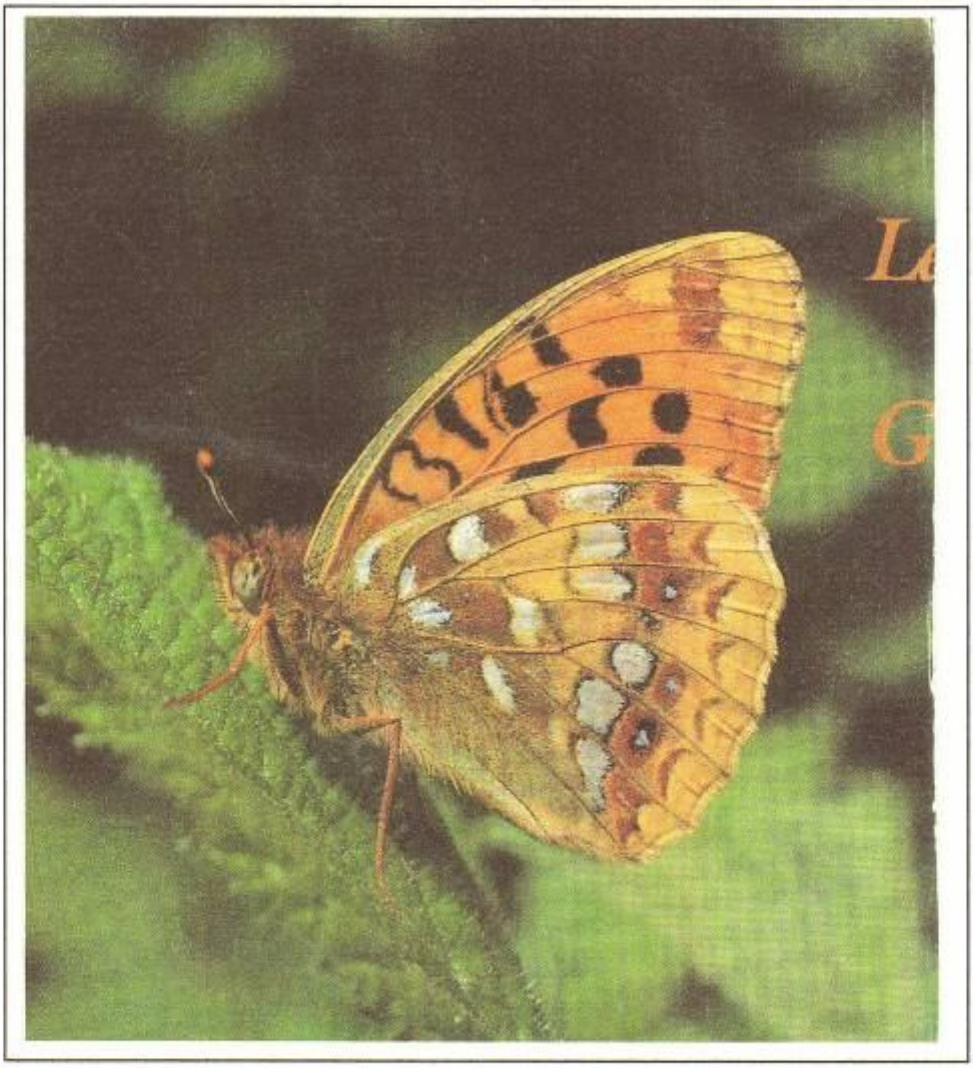
Contributions, marked 'Landscape', to *The Living History* Post Box, c/o Duncan, at the Post Office.

Compiled by Ray Cracknell and Ian Mortimer who are indebted to Dr. Peter Cross, of Bircher Common, for interpreting the complicated geomorphology of the area. (JUNE 2003)

Parish Nature: 1 *A Living History:*

The High Brown Fritillary:

Probably very few Parish residents are aware that we have on our doorstep (Bircher Common), one of the rarest native butterflies, the High Brown Fritillary, sadly in severe decline since the 1950's. Conservation volunteers are working to save the species from complete extinction. Every year since 1993 during the flight period from the middle of June to the beginning of August my wife and I have done a weekly count of the HBF on a 1 mile transect walk and the annual sightings have declined from a high of 179 in 1995 to 6 in 2000 and only 3 in 2001 when access to the common was restricted, due to Foot&Mouth Disease, during the early part of the flight period. ***A very serious situation indeed!*** Similar declines in numbers have also been observed on the Malvern Hills, the nearest of approximately 50 breeding sites in England.



The HBF's life cycle spans 1 year. It over winters as eggs laid singly on dead bracken. The bracken creates a microclimate several deg C higher than the surrounding grassy vegetation allowing the larvae to develop quickly in the otherwise cool spring weather, feeding on Dog Violets. The larvae pupate close to the ground under dead bracken or leaves until they emerge as butterflies from mid-June onwards. The large powerful butterflies can be seen flying swiftly over the tops of bracken or feeding on thistles and bramble flowers.

Bircher Common is a bracken-dominated habitat with a long established grazing system. Sheep, cattle and ponies break up the dead bracken litter and create a mosaic of grass and bracken where Dog Violets can flourish. It is thought that due to reduced grazing over the years the layer of dead bracken litter has been allowed to build up, suppressing the growth of Dog Violets - the food plant of the High Brown Fritillary. One way to encourage the growth of the violets is to reduce the dense layer of bracken litter, and every spring a band of Butterfly Conservation volunteers under the guidance of National Trust staff, have been raking up the dead bracken. Last year a "bracken breaker", a tractor driven flail has also been tried after encouraging results elsewhere.

We can now only watch and hope that some of these measures meet with some success and this beautiful butterfly can be preserved for future generations to enjoy!

Compiled by Guenter Petters.

(JUNE 2003)

Parish Nature: 2

A Living History:

Badgers:

There are badgers in most of the country, and Herefordshire has its share. Setts are usually in woodland, sometimes in fields and include sleeping chambers where there is regularly changed bedding. Earthworms are the badger's main food, supplemented by cereals, beetles, and fruit in autumn and some mammals, particularly young rabbits dug out from their burrows. Badgers will also dig out and eat the contents of wasp and bee nests.

Badgers mate any time between February and October. However implantation of the fertilised egg is delayed until December and cubs are born from mid-January to mid-March, usually two or three in a litter.

The badger emerges cautiously from its sett, sniffing for danger, soon after dusk. Their eyesight is poor so they depend on their excellent senses of smell and hearing. The ideal time to go badger watching is from April to June when you may be fortunate enough to see the cubs playing. However great patience is needed and the ability to keep still and quiet in one place for perhaps an hour. One should wear dark clothing, and be prepared to accept a few midge bites. Face the sett so that the wind is blowing towards you, if they get the slightest smell of a human, they disappear down a hole at once and don't reappear until much later.

Badgers in Croft Wood.

Once out of the hole and unaware of your presence, they groom one another and usually have a good scratch, sniffing the air occasionally for danger. The young love to play and there is often a lot of chasing and yelping going on. Usually there are only two, but I have seen as many as five young, although I suspect they were the offspring of two mothers. Some cubs stay with the family group, others leave to find new territories and may move long distances to do so. These are often the ones that get killed on the roads. Most of the cubs that leave do not go until their first winter, but some go in late summer when only a few months old.

Badgers do not hibernate but from mid-December to mid-February activity is reduced and they live mainly off their fat.

Compiled by Beryl Petters.
(JUNE 2003)

Contributions marked 'Badgers' to *The Living History* Box, c/o Duncan, Post Office.