

# *Living History.*

*NEWSLETTER March 2011.*

## **Nature Notes**

The long cold winter has had an effect on flowering times. Snowdrops flowers were up to a month late in appearing while primroses and daffodils were three weeks later than usual.

There have been several sightings of buzzards and sparrow hawks in the parish while missel thrushes and moorhens have also been seen. Female blackcaps were seen in Green Lane.

## **Yarpole Spring Festival**

The Living History Group will be mounting a display in the Bell Tower of the Community Building as part of the above festival during 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2011.

## **Articles**

The following articles accompany this edition of the *Newsletter*:  
*Date of the Church of St Leonard, Yarpole* by Ian Mortimer  
*The Demise of the High Brown Fritillary on Bircher Common* by Beryl Petters and Matthew Oates  
*Lordship of the Manor* by Ian Mortimer

We always welcome proposals for future articles. Please contact the *Newsletter* editor - John Turrell on 01568 780677 if you would like to discuss possible articles or if you have contributions for the Newsletter.

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## **Subscriptions**

Subscriptions for 2011 are now **overdue**. They can be paid to Audrey Bott either by leaving them at the shop addressed to her or sending them to Audrey at Horizons, Green Lane, Yarpole (tel:01568780489) Cheques should be made out to "Living History" for £6.50.

## **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held in the Committee room of the Village Hall on **Date to be announced later**.

## The Church of St. Leonard:

## *Living History*

### 14<sup>th</sup> Century - *but when exactly?* :

A survey, carried out in 1933 by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (now integrated into English Heritage), identified the significant architectural features of the church, and came to the conclusion that St. Leonard's had been built "early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century".

Now, some 75 years later, we have two pieces of non-architectural evidence which corroborates this conclusion.

The first piece of supportive evidence arises from the dendrochronological survey of the bell tower, carried out in 2002 (ARCUS Project Report 5740].

From the dendrochronological evidence we now know that the four main corner timbers of the bell tower, were felled in the winter of 1195/6 and we believe that the tower which would have been built to complement the pre-existing church, then stood, for over 100 years, as a free-standing wooden structure.

Then, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the tops of the main timbers were extended by 2.1m (7') by scarf jointing with timbers with felling dates - 1322-1366, which form the upper stage of the tower. These are framed together and would probably have supported a medieval bell frame. At the same time the stone skirt wall, which forms a square

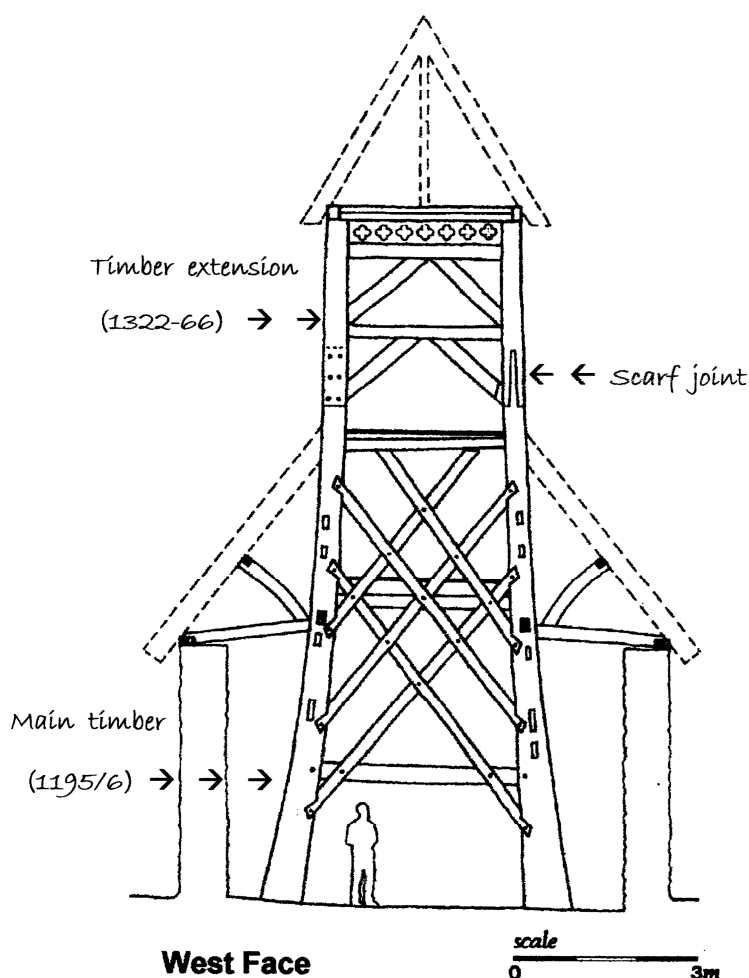
protective enclosure, was built using material which had been reclaimed from the old Saxon church which would have been demolished when the present church was built. This points to the present church not being built before 1322.

The second piece of supportive evidence can be found in a manuscript history of Herefordshire written in 1675 by Thomas Blount; in his account of Yarpole, Blount writes *“In one of the Windows, (of St. Leonard’s Church), the Armes of Mortimer are yet remanyng”*.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the responsibility for the provision of a church lay with the Lord of the Manor and we now know that a branch of the Mortimer family held Yarpole between 1211 and 1335.

We can therefore deduce that the Church of St. Leonard was built between 1322 and 1335.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer.



**West Face**

*The original 12th century structure was 9.2m (30ft) high to the top of the main posts, but was extended in the mid-14th century by 2.1m (7ft) and a new bell frame constructed. The present bell frame, originally for four bells, is probably of late 16th century date.*

Measured and drawn September 2001. N and M Baines

## Parish Nature:

## Living History:

### The Demise of the High Brown Fritillary on Bircher Common:

After days of cloud and rain, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 dawned bright and sunny without a cloud in the sky. This was the day when Beryl and Guenter Petters were to lead a walk on Bircher Common to look for Fritillaries, High Browns in particular.

There were about 20 people in the group, including ten from the Suffolk Branch of the Butterfly Conservation Society; they set off without much hope, as so far that year only one High Brown had been seen, taking nectar from some thistles, and although Tortoiseshells, Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were seen, no Fritillaries were found; and so the group returned to the patch of thistles where a High Brown had been seen five days earlier and after waiting and searching for some time, a fritillary was spotted which turned out to be a High Brown.

Right is a photograph of that single High Brown, taken by Jim Foster of the Suffolk Group.

[Editor's note: In 2003 we published the following article compiled by Guenter Petters which succinctly explained the 'eco-sensitive' life-cycle of the High Brown and the threat it was under.]



“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. Dead bracken litter 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 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!”

A factor which is not stressed in Guenter’s article and which is now thought to be of importance to the survival of the High Brown was the traditional system (now abandoned) of cutting and removing the bracken from the Common for animal bedding; thus avoiding the accumulation of bracken litter which would otherwise build up to preclude the simple vernal ground flora so characteristic of the bracken slopes.

Beryl continues her annual surveillance but, sad to say, since 2001, not one High Brown has been seen on Bircher Common.

Postscript: Although habitat management for a butterfly often works there is a poor track record of it working for High Brown Fritillary, especially in bracken habitats. Also, the NT and local volunteers tried very hard to keep the butterfly on Bircher Common. Moreover, the vegetation monitoring that Butterfly Conservation conducted suggests that the SW corner of Bircher remained in suitable condition throughout the decline period. It may be that the High Brown Fritillary needs to occur within clusters of colonies over large areas of landscape and cannot be conserved merely within a few acres, as we tried to do at Bircher. In effect, it may be that Bircher is actually too small a site for this large mobile butterfly. Also, the decline took place during some very poor summers, when precipitous weather events kept occurring as the butterflies were emerging - although a butterfly population should be able to survive some nasty weather, being hit year after year at precisely the wrong time tends to be fatal.

Compiled from records and reports supplied by Beryl Petters and the postscript was written by Matthew Oates, Nature Conservation Adviser at The National Trust.(2011).

### Lordship of the Manor:

The present-day Yarpole Group Parish is a grouping of four ancient Manors – Croft, Lucton and the Greater and Lesser Manors of Yarpole. The term, ‘manor’, existed before 1066, being an estate held under hereditary ownership, in the gift of the King, comprising of an area of one or more villages. The Lord of the Manor exercised his own jurisdiction within his Manor but had certain responsibilities which included the provision of a church within the Manor. Manors were not part of the local government system of the time but, each having its own church, were identified as ‘parishes’ within the Diocese.

The history of the Lordship of the Manor of Croft is relatively straightforward – from Bernard de Croft, at the time of the Domesday Survey (1086), to the present Bernard, Third Lord Croft, and, apart from the period from 1746 to 1923 when the Croft Estate was not in the hands of the Croft family, has extended over 750 years; this is well documented in *“The Crofts of Croft Castle”* by O.G.S. Croft (1949) and the complete family tree is displayed on the landing outside the Ambassador’s Room in the Castle. It is of interest to note that, when the Croft Castle Estate was acquired by the National Trust in 1956, the Title ‘Lordship of the Manor’ was not included in the conveyance of the property.

The Manor of Lucton seems to have been ‘missed’ by the Commissioners of the Domesday Survey, so we do not have a 1086 base line. However we know that the Manor of Lucton was held by the Wigmore family from an early date and there is some evidence to suggest that originally the Manor had been held by the de Lucton family and that an heiress of that family married into the Wigmore family. The Wigmore family continued to hold the Manor of Lucton until the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when, for financial reasons, the Lucton Estate had to be sold. The purchaser was a Mr. John Hoper of Sonning, Berkshire, who bequeathed the Estate to his cousin, Richard Hoper, who later sold it to Richard Knight of Downton, the very same Richard Knight who bought the Croft Estate in 1746. *The history of the Lordship of the Manor of Lucton is discussed in very much more detail in ‘A History of Lucton’ by Richard and Catherine Botzum.*

The Lesser Manor of Yarpole which was featured in a previous Article, ‘*A Domesday Anomaly*’ (June 2006), was originally included in the Ecclesiastical Manor of Leominster and was granted, after the dissolution of the monasteries, by Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) to the Croft family.

The history of the Lordship of the Greater Manor of Yarpole is the most complicated – moving, through marriage, from family to family. A condensed version of the history is set out overleaf.

Close study of the history of the lordships of these four ancient manors identifies the two most significant factors which affect their survival - the perpetuation of a male line of inheritance and financial prudence.

## **The Lordship of the Greater Manor of Yarpole - a concise history.**

**1066:** **Richard SCROPE**, who also held Richards Castle, was one of the Norman knights who had been invited, before 1066, and granted lands by Edward, 'The Confessor', in the Welsh Marches to establish a defensive line of castles against the Welsh.

**1086:** **Robert GERNON** - under the 'over-lordship' of Richard Scrope.

**1108:** **Hugh fitz OSBERN** (in spite of the change in the surname) was the son of Richard Scrope and inherited Richards Castle and the 'over-lordship' of the Manor of Yarpole. He married Eustacia de Say and was succeeded by his elder son.

**1175:** **Osbern fitz HUGH** (another change in the surname) reclaimed direct Lordship of the Manor of Yarpole. He died in 1186 and was succeeded by his younger brother.

**1186:** **Hugh de SAY I**, who had taken his mother's surname, was succeeded by his son.

**1190:** **Hugh de SAY II** was succeeded by his only daughter and sole heiress.

**1197:** **Margaret de SAY**, in 1211, married Robert de Mortimer, younger son of Hugh de Mortimer of Wigmore, who then assumed the title.

**1211:** **Robert de MORTIMER I** who was succeeded by his son.

**1259:** **Hugh de MORTIMER I** who was succeeded by his son.

**1274:** **Robert de MORTIMER II** who was succeeded by his son.

**1287:** **Hugh de MORTIMER II** who had two daughters, Joan and Margaret; as joint heiresses, the estate was divided and Margaret retained Yarpole.

**1304:** **Margaret de MORTIMER**, in 1335, married Geoffrey Cornewalle of Berrington.

**1335:** **Richard de CORNWALL** who was succeeded by his son.

**1344:** **Geoffrey de CORNWALL** who was succeeded by his son.

**1365:** **Bryan de CORNEWALL** who was succeeded by his son.

**(Unknown):** **Richard de CORNWALL** who was succeeded by his son.

**1443:** **Edmond de CORNEWALL** who was succeeded by his only daughter and sole heiress.

**1452:** **Eleanor de CORNEWALL**, who had married **Sir Richard CROFT** in 1445 and so the Lordship of the Greater Manor of Yarpole was attached to that of Croft.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer (2010)