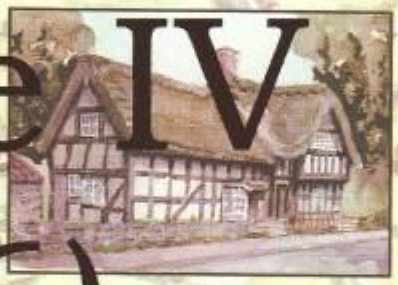
Living History

Yarpole Group Parish 2000



Volume IV (2006)




Living History.

NEWSLETTER MAY 2006

Many Happy Returns:

The first A.G.M. of the Yarpole Community Shop, held on Saturday 6th May, was extremely well attended; the Treasurer reported a financially successful first eight months; the future looks promising.

This edition, the eleventh, of the Newsletter has an ornithological flavour.

Different species of birds seen during late December / early January, at 2, Phillips Acre:
(a) in the garden;
BLUE TIT, COAL TIT, GREAT TIT, LONG-TAILED TIT, MARSH TIT, BULLFINCH, CHAFFINCH, GOLDFINCH, GREENFINCH, BLACKBIRD, BLACKCAP, DUNNOCK, GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER, MAGPIE, NUTHATCH, PIED WAGTAIL, ROBIN, ROOK, SPARROW, STARLING, TREECREEPER, WREN.
(b) from the garden/house;
BUZZARD, CANADA GOOSE, COLLARED DOVE, CROW, FIELDFARE, GULL, HERON, JACKDAW, KESTREL, PHEASANT, RAVEN, REDWING, SWAN, WOODPIGEON.

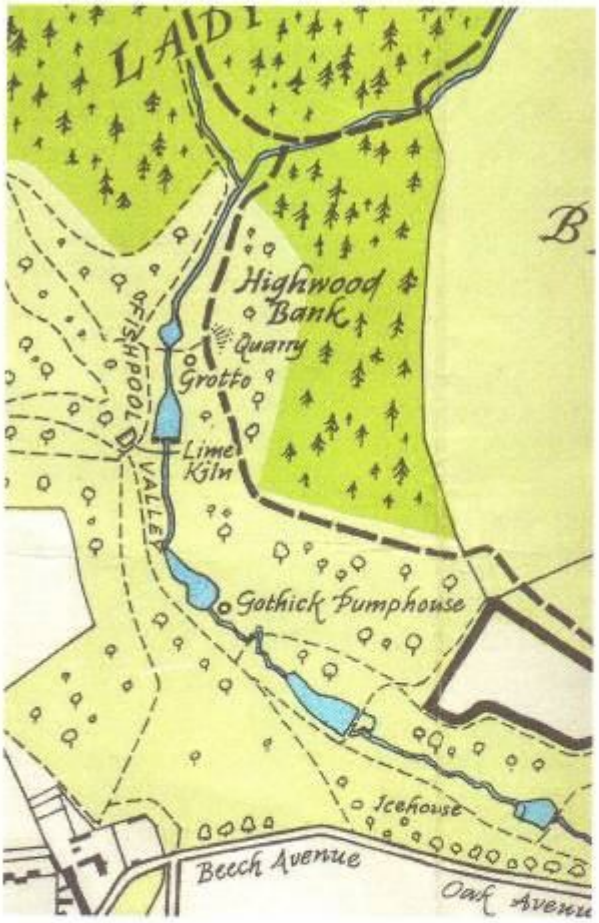
A flock of some fifty lapwings have been spotted in a field near Home Farm, Bircher – a very unusual sight these days! At one time, lapwings which are ground-nesting birds were a common sight on ploughed fields and were welcomed by farmers because they devour many pests, especially leatherjackets and wireworms. But the use of insecticides and farming machinery, which destroys nests, have had an adverse effect on their numbers.

During May, there have been three separate sightings of a red kite over Yarpole, which suggests that they are now nesting in the area.

And another two rarities,
thanks to Beryl and Guenther Petters;
on the left – the lesser spotted woodpecker;
and below the renowned 'white blackbird'.

One Article with this Issue will help you identify the butterflies in your garden and the other is a guided tour of the Fishpool Valley.

The Fishpool Valley has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Importance for its varied wetland and woodland habitats, secluded situation and rich birdlife.
We understand that there are proposals to 'restore' the Valley by clearing the self-set trees and shrubs, leaving the specimen trees on the slopes; however, this would alter the existing ecology in the valley and therefore English Heritage will have to be consulted.
How often have we passed the old pump house without actually going down to have a closer look and venturing round the back and down the old steps to look through the iron gate?
Nothing is known of how the Icehouse was managed — possibly research into the Croft Estate papers might reveal some clues.
And as to the Grotto – it's well worth looking out for! (for the Limekiln – see June 2005)



Apologies for the slightly late production of this issue due to a variety of causes: Normal service will now be resumed.

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 4th July, 8pm at The Bell.

Parish Nature:

Living History

Spring Butterflies of Yarpole:

The most common early butterflies are ORANGE TIP and BRIMSTONE (both Pieridae or Whites), and PEACOCK (nymphalidae vanessinae). Like all local butterflies, they thrive on many wildflowers and garden plants.
North Herefordshire is especially valuable, because of its abundance of wildflowers, hedgerows and wild places.

The BRIMSTONE (gomepteryx rhamni) male is bright yellow, whereas the female is white. So your early sightings of white butterflies are not necessarily Cabbage Whites or Small Whites, but lady brimstones.
They have a second hatching period in July/August. The adults prefer purple flowers for feeding – thistle, knapweed, scabious, bramble and clover.

The ORANGE TIP (anthocharis cardamines) male is the one with the orange tips to its wings. So again the small white butterflies you see at this time of year could be lady orange tips. Both sexes have green mottled under wings, which make them very well-camouflaged at rest.

The PEACOCK (inachis io) is seen everywhere. You may see a peacock at many times of year, but it is certainly one of the first.

Other butterflies that I have observed in Yarpole in recent springs are Small White, Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell, and Comma.

Compiled by John Gunson (2006).

Acknowledgements: British Butterflies (A Field Guide) by Robert Goodden, and
The British Butterfly Conservation Society Ltd. – www.butterfly-conservation.org

Brimstone - *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Resident; range expanding; has spread in recent years, mainly in northern England.
The sulphur-yellow uppersides of the wings of the male Brimstone make this species easy to identify in flight. There is a view that the word 'butterfly' originates from the yellow colour of male Brimstones. By contrast, the wings of the female are very pale green, almost white. When the butterflies roost among foliage, the angular shape and the strong veining of their wings closely resemble leaves.

Foodplants: -The larvae feed on leaves of Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), which occurs mainly on calcareous soils, and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), which is found on moist acid soils and wetlands.

Habitat: The Brimstone occurs in scrubby grassland, woodland (especially damp carr (boggy) woodland), hedgerows, and open ground wherever foodplants are available in sunny positions. The butterfly ranges widely and can often be seen flying along roadside verges and tracks with hedgerows.

Orange-tip - *Anthocharis cardamines*

Resident; Range expanding.
Orange-tips are seen commonly in early summer along hedgerows, road verges, and woodland edges. Males have vivid orange wing tips, whereas females have no orange coloration and are predominantly white on the uppersides. The mottled pattern of yellow and black scales on the underside hindwings provides excellent camouflage when they roost on flower heads such as those of Cow Parsley. The butterfly is widespread in Ireland and southern Britain and has spread north rapidly over the past 25 years, especially in Scotland.

Foodplants: Several crucifers are used, especially Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*) in damp meadows and Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) along road verges and ditches. Occasionally, it uses Hedge Mustard (*Sisymbrium officinale*), Winter-cress (*Barbarea vulgaris*), Turnip (*Brassica rapa*), Charlock (*Sinapis avensis*), Large Bitter-cress (*C. amara*), and Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*). In addition, it lays eggs on Honesty (*Lunaria annua*) and Dame's-violet (*Hesperis matronalis*) in gardens, but larval survival is thought to be poor on these plants.

Habitat: A wide range of damp grassy habitats is used, including meadows, grassy areas in woodland, road verges and waterside habitats such as ditches and the banks of rivers and canals. Northern and western populations seem to be associated mainly with wetter habitats and Cuckooflower is the usual foodplant.

The Peacock - *Inachis io*

The Peacock, one of our most familiar and attractive butterflies, is one of the 'signs of spring' included in the BBC *Springwatch* project. Peacocks hibernate through the winter and can be seen in the coldest winter months, although most individuals become active in late March and April. As well as being a harbinger of the coming spring, Peacock butterflies are interesting in many other ways. They are probably the longest-lived butterflies in Britain, with adults surviving from late July, well into the following spring, perhaps into June. Thus, contrary to popular belief that butterflies only live for a few days, some Peacocks may live to see their 11th month (albeit having spent five or six months of their adult lives asleep in hibernation).

The Peacock butterfly has fared well in recent years. Not only has it increased in distribution, pushing northwards in northern England and central Scotland, but populations have also increased significantly in size at sites monitored by butterfly transects. It is even emerging from hibernation earlier than it was 20 years ago. There is little shortage of food for the black, spiny Peacock caterpillars, which feed primarily on Common (stinging) Nettle, and it seems highly probable that the good fortunes of this butterfly are due to climate change.

Although a common visitor to garden buddleias, particularly in the autumn whilst building up fat reserves for hibernation, Peacocks are nomadic butterflies that range widely though the countryside. They often find their preferred breeding habitats (large nettle beds in sheltered but sunny situations) in the shelter of woodland clearings, rides and edges.

Life cycle and behaviour: Adults emerge from hibernation from March onwards with numbers peaking in late April. They quickly mate and females lay eggs. The resulting offspring emerge as butterflies from late July onwards (later in the north). A small second brood is possible in the south in very favourable years. This was seen in a few places in the hot summer of 2003, when Peacock caterpillars found during September hatched out in early October. Males feed and disperse in the mornings, then establish territories on the ground in the early afternoon. These territories are invariably in sunny spots in the corners of woodland or hedges and are vigorously defended against other males. When a female is encountered, the male will abandon his territory and give chase.

Name: The Peacock's name comes directly from that of its avian namesake, thanks to the similarity between the eye patterns on the bird's tails and those on the butterfly's wings. As long ago as the late 1600s, the butterfly was called the Peacock's Eye. Even the scientific name of the butterfly is derived from a Greek myth involving a Peacock bird.

The Fishpool Valley:

The steep-sided valley, which extends over 80 acres, was landscaped at the end of the 18th century when Croft Castle was in the ownership of Somerset Davies; it was laid out in the 'Picturesque' style in the manner of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, two renowned Herefordshire landscape gardeners who rebelled against the stereotyped landscapes of Capability Brown, preferring to reflect in their designs 'the bold roughness of nature' and 'all that the painter admires'.

The Grotto: Situated about 100 yards upstream from the lime-kiln, the stone grotto can not be seen from the main path but can be approached by an indistinct path on the right, slippery in places, across the dam to the uppermost pool (now silted up) and up the other side.

The grotto, built in the late 18th century with large chunks of limestone from a nearby quarry, consists of two apsidal chambers with corbelled stone roofs; the floor is of brick. The first chamber we come upon is the smaller of the two being some 6ft. wide, 3ft. deep and just over 6ft. in height, with a 21" square opening through the 3ft thick partition wall, (said to be a 'squint' towards the top end of the valley), into the main chamber which is circular in shape with a diameter of about 10ft. and a height of some 7½ft.

It is authoritatively described as a 'folly' but one could imagine the ladies stopping off here from their carriage ride for a picnic and enjoying what must have been a lovely view over the pools to open countryside, now obscured by self-set natural woodland.

The Pump House is a Grade II listed building; built sometime around 1900, its 'Gothick' architecture is an integral part of the 'Picturesque' landscape.

The all-iron water-wheel, which was rare until the mid 19th century and is therefore not the original wheel, is some 12ft in diameter; it would appear to be an 'overshot' wheel, i.e. the water, from the upper pool through the pipe which enters from the right, strikes the wheel at its top and filling the closely aligned 'buckets' drives the wheel by the weight of the water rather than by the force of the water as in an 'undershot' wheel.

The output of the wheel would have been limited, so did it serve any practical purpose? The story is that it actually provided the Castle's former water supply; but that will only be confirmed by an exploration of the plumbing.

The Icehouse:

The remains of the icehouse which would have served Croft Castle, can be identified – halfway down the middle path from the main drive – as a round brick-lined stone structure built close into the bank with a 'door opening' close to the path.

When it was functioning it would have been an ovoid chamber some 12ft in diameter, possibly 8-10ft tall; the doorway would have been small leading into an insulated passageway with more than one door.

The base is 'dished' and would have had a drain to allow the melt-water to escape. It is built into the north facing side of the slope and earth banks would have been built up around it to help insulate it. Its situation close to the path would allow easy access for the wagons bringing the ice up from the nearest pool which may have been constructed to provide a channel for free flow of the stream and a shallow lagoon for fast freezing; no doubt efforts would have been made to keep the 'lagoon' clean but the collected ice must have been hygienically suspect.

Until a contemporary account is found of how this icehouse was managed we must rely on evidence from elsewhere.

Inside it would have been built as a brick-lined capsule, concave at both the top and bottom with rounded walls. In deep winter it would have been lined with straw and then tightly packed with ice; all space not taken up by the ice would have been filled with the insulating straw.

On the principle that the snowman lasts longer than the snow on the ground around it, so ice compacted into a large mass with a relatively small surface area has a slow rate of melt-down which can be extended by the addition of salt and the protection of layers of insulation.

It would have been difficult to load the chamber using barrows through the narrow entrance passageway and top loading would not only have been easier - straight from the wagon, but much speedier and so one can visualise the walls extending up to say 10ft. thus providing a capacity of some 1,000 cu.ft; to be capped either with stone slabs, pierced by a chute and covered with earth, or a prefabricated thatched roof.

Icehouses varied widely in size; whilst the larger and architecturally more elaborate would have included chambers for the storage of food, the smaller, like this one, were simply an ice store to provide ice as a coolant during the subsequent summer months.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer (2006)