

# Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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## Big Butterfly Count

It's that time of year again. The Big Butterfly Count is a UK-wide survey aimed at helping to assess the health of our environment simply by counting the amount and type of butterflies (and some day-flying moths) we see. This year the Big Butterfly Count runs from the 16th July to the 8th August. Counting butterflies is necessary, because not only are they beautiful creatures to be around, but they are also extremely important. They are a vital part of the ecosystem as both pollinators and components of the food chain. However, they are under threat. Numbers of butterflies and moths in the UK have decreased significantly since the 1970s. This is a warning that cannot be ignored.

Check out the [Bigbutterflycount](http://Bigbutterflycount) website to get involved with this year's count.

Michael C

## Radio Lancashire

During the 1970's and 80.s, I would listen a lot to Radio Lancashire or Radio Blackburn as it was originally known. In recent years it seems to have lost some of its local interest programmes. I enjoyed Sunday mornings the best, with a half hour programme on such items as rambles in Lancashire, featuring local naturalist Ron Freethy, a local radio presenter (whose name I cannot remember) and Cyril Spiby from the Ramblers Association who led the walks. Cyril would describe the walks with the presenter recording as they ambled along, and Ron would talk about what natural history they were observing along the route. He talked knowledgeably about the birds, flowers and butterflies with wonderful descriptions. There was one series that followed various local rivers from source to sea.

One local history series began with the Norman conquest and looked at the local halls and the vast estates which were set up by the Norman victors as they began to divide England amongst themselves. It brought home to the listener the fact that these vast tracts of land, which are still subject to local disputes between the landowner and the Ramblers Association, are still held by the descendants of these Norman lords.

Tony C

## Days to Celebrate

We seem to have a day for everything these days. Were you aware that in July we had the National BBQ Week, which ran from the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> July? The weather wasn't really suited for a BBQ in our own gardens, and I do hope you remembered not to take disposable BBQs into the countryside.

The Festival of British Architecture, fell on July 11 - July 18, so this was the time to explore the local archaeology of your area.

And if it rains continually due to St Swithin you can just stay indoors and watch the summer Olympics on the telly. Don't forget to celebrate Harry Potter's birthday on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July.

On 25<sup>th</sup> July and into August you can enjoy National Preserving Week. A whole week designed to get people preserving their own food. Encouraging those that have the skills to take some time to help those that don't.

This year it is all about jam making and you still have time to get involve by going on a Bilberry Hunt. These tiny fruits are also known as blueberry and whinberry are an edible berries to be found on heathland and moorland. Collecting them used to be a common pastime in many parts of Lancashire, turning fingers, lips and tongues a deep purple. They can be made into jam or lightly stewed with a little sugar and added to natural yoghurt, cream, or ice cream. If you collect enough, you can make use of them as a filling for pies, tarts and crumbles.

Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) has been used for nearly 1,000 years in traditional European medicine. Bilberries are used for treatment of disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and diabetes.



Barbara S

## Dragonflies

According to Country Walking magazine July is a good month to....

see a dragonfly



and here are a couple of poems.

### The Dragonfly

by Eleanor Farjeon

When the heat of the summer  
made drowsy the land

A dragonfly came  
and sat on my hand.

With its blue jointed body  
And wings like spun glass

It lit on my fingers  
As if they were glass.

Contribution by Jane C

### The Dragonfly

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Today I saw the dragonfly  
Come from the wells where he did lie.

An inner impulse rent the veil  
Of his old husk: from head to tail

Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.  
He dried his wings: like gauze they grew.

Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew  
A living flash of light he flew.

Contribution by Pesto Cenorr

## Ogham and the Lunar Tree Calendar – Part 5 The Holly

From the 8<sup>th</sup> July to the 4<sup>th</sup> August we celebrate the Holly Tree. Its Ogham letter is T and it is the ruler of the 8<sup>th</sup> Lunar month. Holly is associated with the Festival of Lammas (Lughnasadh). The Holly is all about protection, luck and psychic enchantment (dreams).

***'Of all the trees that are in the wood, The Holly bears the crown.'***

Holly trees do not display red berries until they are mature and are around forty years old. The tiny four-petalled white flowers arrive much earlier.

In medieval times the holly was grown as a free-standing tall tree. Today, however, it is mainly an understory shrub making a good barrier and contrasting with other low growing and immature trees in the woodland understory layer because of its smooth, greyish bark and dark green smooth leaves.

Other common species in this layer are crab apple, wild cherry, rowan or field maple. In a hedgerow mix you will find other trees that include low-growing plants and shrubs like the holly that reach up to about 5m in height, such as hazel, hawthorn or blackthorn.

Holly is used as a decorative wood, for small bowls etc, chess pieces, expensively engraved cues for billiards and ritual knife or whip handles (bringing protection). It is a beautiful wood and is hard, heavy, smooth and extremely pale. To keep its ivory colour, it should be rubbed with lemon juice before oiling. The gentle undulating shapes can make exceptional wands!

Holly berries are poisonous to humans, even quite a small quantity can make an adult ill - and ingesting any number over twenty could be fatal! Keep Yule decorations well away from young children!

The Holly is also poisonous to dogs. When English holly is ingested, it can result in severe gastrointestinal upset (e.g., vomiting, diarrhoea) thanks to the spiny leaves and the potentially toxic substances.

Some winter birds make them a mainstay of their diets when they can find them in the cold weather, so we'd best leave the berries for them!

In the ancient Celtic traditions, it's the Legend of the Oak King and the Holly King which sets their place in the Ogham Tree Calendar and why the holly is celebrated in August. Basically, the Oak King and the Holly King fought twice, and the Oak King won winter in the first fight and the Holly won summer in the second battle. (A very edited version!)

The tiny white flowers of holly, which bloom in May, were once thought to have the power to turn water to ice if sprinkled onto its surface.

- For Lammas (1st August) use the green summer berries of holly in any ritual to ask for the protection of the crops in early harvest - or in any creative project.
- Plant a holly tree near the house as protection against sorcerers.
- Make a wand from holly to guard against mischievous spirits.
- Place seven holly leaves, wrapped in a white cloth and knotted seven times under your pillow to assist in the dreaming of psychic dreams.
- Throw a sprig of holly after a run-away animal and it will come back of its own accord.
- A branch of holly with berries, brought into the house for Yuletide decoration will bring luck in proportion to the number of berries. However, for each berry that browns and falls from the stem before the Eve of the New year, a tiny share of the newly given luck will be lost.



Jean G

## Foot and Mouth Disaster

This year 2021 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foot and mouth outbreak that was to devastate our farming industry. Massive restrictions were enforced to prevent the spread of this virulent disease. Foot and mouth is a highly infectious disease mainly affecting sheep and cattle. For a period of 7½ months during that year, access to the countryside was severely restricted to walkers, climbers, and mountain bikers in an effort to control the epizootic. In the first few months all access to public rights of way across farmland was banned completely.

The first reported case was recorded on 19th February in Essex but owing to modern farming practices in which livestock was widely transported, it quickly spread all over the country. The consensus today is that the virus came from infected meat used to feed swill to pigs at a farm in Haddon-on-the-Wall.

As soon as the potential scale of the epidemic was realised the government imposed what seemed to be draconian measures in an effort to bring it under control. Once a case was identified not only was the infected animal slaughtered but the whole herd/flock was killed with it. In addition, in a controversial policy known as “contiguous culling” all livestock within a 3 kilometre radius of the infected farm would be slaughtered too. The official view was that the risk of spreading the disease was not worth taking. (Imagine a policy of contiguous culling applied to the coronavirus outbreak!) The animals were killed on the site and then disposed of either by cremation or buried in quicklime. One of the worst affected areas was here in the North West of England and I well remember seeing distant columns of smoke rising from the funeral pyres of sheep and cattle. By the end of the outbreak, it is estimated that 6 million animals were killed in a epizootic of over 2,000 cases.



The cost was enormous not just in monetary terms but to the well-being of the farmers directly affected. For many the management of a dairy herd or flock of sheep represented not just a life's work but the endeavour of several generations and to see it go up in smoke was deeply wounding and suffered in social isolation.



Against this devastating catastrophe, the inconvenience of countryside users like myself paled into insignificance, but I remember it as a deeply frustrating time. The Spring Vale Rambling Class curtailed all its walking activities and only when restriction began to lift did we organised a series of walks along local canal towpaths, along the sands at Formby and trips to walk on the promenade at St Annes and Blackpool all these were within striking distance of Darwen. This gave our walking programme some level of continuity. Similar to last years curtailed walking syllabus due to the Corona Virus, we repeated our scheduled programme the following year. The main thing to remember is that the countryside will still be there when all the restrictions are lifted.



**Eleanor**



## The Sense of Sound- Reserves

This is the fifth in my series of articles based on typical walks undertaken by the Spring Vale Rambling Class where bird song is the key to open your sense of hearing. A ramble where you could see or hear this group of birds would be based around the RSPB Leighton Moss Nature reserve which could be incorporated in a walk starting from Silverdale, going through Hagg Wood and across the Silverdale Golf Course. The walk then takes you between the two large reed beds of the reserve before heading up to Leighton Hall with a return journey via Jenny Brown's point and onto Silverdale with its wading birds but that is another story!

### Mute Swan

As you walk between the reed beds a gap in the fencing allows you to spot the Mute Swan. Everyone would expect that this bird carrying such a name as this would be a graceful water bird and that its connection to royalty would give it a regal presence but no. This bird would even give a chattering parrot a run for its money in the noise level stakes. It grumbles and groans and chunters under its breathe like any old pantomime dame! If you try to pass too close to this bird her constant hissing is an extremely audible presence within the world of birdsong. The most memorable sound coming from this bird happens when her young brood are starting to experiment with their newly found confidence and just when they are changing from cygnets into swans, although they still carry elements of their fluffy childhood. If you listen carefully, you can still make out their squeaky voices just like week old puppies!



### Bittern

In this area it would be normal to walk in silence with very few sounds to distract you as you take in everything that nature is throwing at you. You are now deep in the reedbed area far beyond the safe spots designated for ownership by Coots and Moorhens and then you hear him. A creature part myth and part Heron.

He is rarely seen but people wildly talk of his existence in hushed tones. It's as if they are scared that the slightest movement ten miles away would make him move deeper into the reedbed. The male is renowned each spring to slowly making his way through a clearing to the water's edge to release his deep guttural sonic "boom" which can be heard for up to a mile around the countryside. He achieves this by gulping in air and filling his neck like a pair of tweed bellows. He makes an almost bark like utterance releasing a sound in the hope of getting the attention of a lady bittern. It will take many, many attempts by the male to attract this young lady to respond as she is just that. A lady.



### Marsh Harrier

With a wingspan of 1.2m the Marsh Harrier is one of our rare breeds. Nesting in the reed beds on the RSPB reserve at Leighton Moss, it feeds on frogs, small mammals, and birds such as coots and moorhens. They are resplendent in their colour with the females being chocolate brown with a golden yellow neck and crown while males being brown with a gingery belly, pale head and neck and grey wings with black tips. A sight that will emblazon itself on your memory will be the male bird displaying his courtship dance, wheeling around at incredible heights, diving towards the ground and tumbling all the way. When the female joins him, they lock talons in mid-air. All this is accompanied by the male uttering the sad and loud high pitch squeak of *Kiiuu* with the female responding with the *iiuu*.

All so interesting, I really must come back here to spend a lot more time just to stop, watch and listen.



### Maggie A

## Plane Crash on Burns Fell

On our walk up Burns Fell on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July we passed the memorial stone to a crashed American Airforce plane. This aircraft was a "war-weary" B-24 bomber carrying the name "COME ALONG BOYS" belonging to the 714th Squadron of the 448th Bombardment Group, US 8th AAF.



The aircraft took off from its Norfolk base on the afternoon of Tuesday 2nd January 1945 in poor weather conditions. It was returning to the Warton airfield, Lancashire. On board, in addition to a crew of five, was an additional relief crew, who were to fly a new aircraft back to the base together with nine servicemen bound for leave in Blackpool.

The pilot, 1st Lt. Holt, was in fact the pilot for this relief crew, but he had requested to fly the outward journey in place of 2nd Lt. Crandell. As the aircraft flew northwards, they began to encounter low cloud.

The pilot reported that visibility was down from the 6 miles at the start of the flight to only 1 to 2 miles as they reached Lancashire, they were also experiencing navigational instrument difficulties. The subsequent crash investigation report states that the pilot had descended from 3500 feet to around 1000 feet after spotting some breaks in the clouds.

The pilot remained flying contact and clearing all obstructions, though with the cloud forcing them lower and lower, but he was apparently not unduly worried as the latest navigational fix had placed them in a valley. This was an error for they were 20 mile off course heading towards the Bowland Fells.

The cloud suddenly closed in completely, causing him to go onto instrument flying and at the same time immediately commence to climb to a safer altitude. It was too late for any correction.

The aircraft struck the summit ridge of Burn Fell in the Trough of Bowland at approx. 14:45, tearing the fuselage apart as the bomber skidded across the moor, slewing around and fortunately throwing many of the occupants clear. The stricken plane erupted into flames as the fuel tanks ignited. Despite their injuries those that were able, quickly vacated the shattered bomber.



Two members of the crew returned into the burning aircraft and freed two further survivors who were trapped by debris and they also ensured no one else was left inside. As the dazed airmen took stock of the situation, they soon realised that by some miracle 15 of their number had in fact survived.

The memorial records the names of all the men who were killed on that fateful day.



**Michael C**