

Helping to support and protect the lower Otter valley

OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION



Summer 2024

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Our Cover Photo

A beautiful view across the Otter Valley at sunrise. Credit to Roger Carter for this picture.

Chairman's update

Author: Haylor Lass

A wet and muddy, but eventful first quarter of 2024. With my chairman's hat I have been to the official celebration of the Otter Estuary becoming a National Nature reserve, with talks from the Minister and head of English Nature (and a walk round the reserve). Then another gathering at the Holt of all those involved to mark the completion of the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP). Lovely singing of a new Song of the Otter by pupils from the local primary schools, and a short new video of the project. More speeches, but fortunately no politicians, and a welcome presentation to the EA's Mike Williams, who had devoted a quarter of his professional career to the project and without whom it may never have come to such a successful conclusion.

The OVA was saddened by the news of the death of the late Lord Clinton and offer condolences to the family. Full tributes in the Local and National Press, but I would like to pay tribute to his steering of CDE towards environmentally friendly estate management, the creation of the Pebblebed Heaths Trust and unflinching support of the LORP scheme. His son and successor as Lord Clinton has been an OVA member for 30 years, so we have high hopes of the Estate continuing to care for our environment.

The OVA has supplied bird-boxes to local primary schools and has more in the 'production' line. The state of the rivers has hit the national headlines - we are actively involved in water quality monitoring and joining with others (eg Devon Wildlife Trust, West Country Rivers Trust, River Otter Fisheries Trust) to promote long-term solutions.

After half a year's average rainfall in the first three months, Spring has arrived in the valley, with snowdrops, celandines, primroses, and violets carpeting the verges, the trees and hedges greening up and the 'foreign' invaders of camelias, magnolias and rhododendrons colouring our gardens. What better time to look forward and get out and about?

So read on – we have a full programme of guided Walks for the next three months, a Members Party and an Annual General Meeting coming up soon, and continuing interest in the history (Blue Plaques) and environment (particularly river quality). And we would dearly love more 'active members' to join us.

Members Summer Party

Date: 8th of May 2024. 7.00pm - 9.30pm
Location: Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club.



We are looking forward to meeting everyone who has signed-up to join the summer party.

The party starts at 7.00pm with a welcome drink and canapes. There will be a fully manned bar available throughout the evening, where further drinks may be purchased.

As a reminder - there is a large car park and should you wish , there are conveniently timed bus services from both the Sidmouth or Budleigh Salterton directions, with nearby bus stops. You can find these on-line at stagecoach.com.

Membership Fees

Author: Martin Smith, Treasurer

Thank you to all of our members who paid their membership fee on time this year and continue to support the OVA.

We wanted to remind members that those who have not paid, or not paid in full, will not be receiving this, or future, newsletters. Membership is only £10 (individual) and £15 (joint).

Annual General Meeting

**NOTICE is hereby given that the 45th Annual General Meeting of the
Otter Valley Association will be held
at 7.30pm on Tuesday 11th June 2024
at the Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton**

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the Previous AGM held on 12th June 2023
3. Matters Arising
4. The Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 24.
5. Appointment of the Independent Examiner
6. Election of Trustees as Officers
7. Election of other Trustees
8. Any Other Business
9. Proposed Date of next AGM - to be confirmed.

Nominations are invited for Trustees to join the Executive Committee in accordance with the Constitution and should be submitted to the Secretary, Otter Valley Association, PO Box 70 Budleigh Salterton EX9 6WN, to be received not less than 14 days prior to the AGM.

The draft Minutes of the AGM held on 12th June 2023, together with the Trustees Annual Report and Accounts will be available on the OVA website prior to the meeting or on written request to the Secretary.

We are delighted that Sam Bridgewater, CDE's Environmental Director, will give a presentation at the AGM on their Landscape Recovery Project "From Heaths to Sea". This is a significant project that links the fields, hedgerows, farm management, etc., from Pebblebed Heaths to the Otter Estuary National Nature Reserve. We hope that many of you will be able to join us to hear this update.

Communication

Author: Chris Boorman

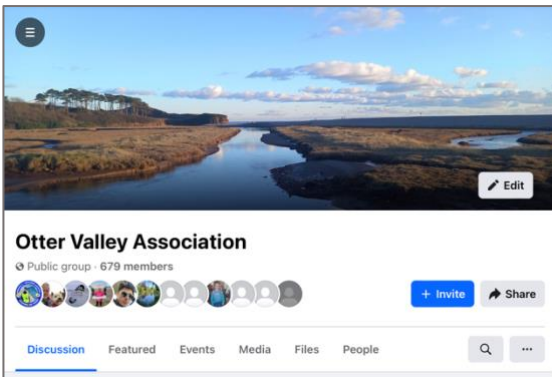
The OVA is now using a combination of printed newsletter, online websites, Facebook groups and WhatsApp to help ensure everyone knows what is going on.

Website:

Here we maintain all information and ensure that everything is available for you to view. As you can see from the screenshot, easy viewing of our walks program, searching of history (including OVApedia) and many other useful elements are available to view and use. Checkout the new “Blue Plaque” map under “History”!



Facebook:



We continue to grow a dynamic and informative [Facebook group](#) to help members share their own experiences and comment on articles. As of going to print, the facebook group now has over 675 members. We will provide updates to this whenever anything happens – but we encourage everyone to engage, add their own posts

and comment on others. You can find this by searching for “Otter Valley Association” when inside Facebook.

If you are able to view it, you will find many updates from others – including pictures of wildlife and other interesting articles that are not printed in this newsletter.

Our walkers have also created a WhatsApp group to help coordinate and share information about their walks. So if you are interested in joining a walk, please ask the walk leader to add you to the WhatsApp group.

Walk Programme May - July

Author: Jane Connick & the walks team

Welcome to our walk programme for May, June and July. There truly is something for everyone in this programme – even if you do not consider yourself to be a walker!

I am delighted that Geoff Porter, who represents the Natural Environment for the OVA, has kindly organised a walk to try and spot the elusive Silver-studded blue butterfly and we have two dates available to try and catch good weather. Bookings are required for this walk as we need to limit numbers and amend dates if needed.

We have built a varied programme of walks including Dartmoor and West Dorset. Following the success of the Sid Valley Ring, Paul and Penny have offered a new route along St Boniface Way. We also have Lyme Regis to Seaton via a different route than the coast path - plus lots of interesting local walks makes for variety and hopefully appeals to a wide range of the membership.

Please join us for one or more, we are always pleased to see you.

Thursday 2 May – 10.00am – 5.9 miles – approx. 3 hours. *'Bluebells (hopefully) and magnificent views of West Dorset and the coast'*

Meet: Woolton Hill Forestry car park (OS116, SY 355 968)
what3words ///training/knees/presenter

Take the B3165 Crewkerne road off the A35 at Hunters Lodge. Travel for at least 2 miles then turn right at Portobello X (two white gates/fences just after turning) then you are on the right road for the car park. The walk is around Chaperhayes, Wootton Fitzpaine, Coney's Castle, Fishpond Bottom, Wootton Hill. Bring a flask as there will be a coffee stop

Walk Leaders: Paul and Fran Dike 07977 057546 0129720695

Wednesday 22 May – 2.15pm – 1.5 hours. **Booking required** *'Topsham Guided Walking Tour'*

Meet: Darts Farm CP 1.45pm. Tour starts Holman Way CP at 2.15pm

A walking tour led by a volunteer from Topsham town museum taking in the key historical sites in the town.

A donation of £3 per person is requested and we will finish the tour at Topsham Museum where you can visit or indulge in a cream tea in the lovely garden.

Booking required to enable the Museum to have sufficient tour guides available.

Walk Leader: Jane Connick

To book: please email: walks@ova.org.uk

Week commencing 26 May – 10.00am – 5.5 miles. 3 hours (check nearer time for exact date). ‘Otter and Coast’

Meet: The Green, Fore Street, Otterton. Parking in nearby roads (OS115, SY 081 852) what3words ///ranted.fork.prune

The classic route via Stantyway Farm, Brandy Head, the White Bridge and the Otter, but not necessarily in that order. The river section is flat, whilst the coast path is a bit hilly but not too steep. We will pause on the coastal section for coffee, so bring a flask.

Walk Leader: Ross Hussey: rdandamhussey22@gmail.com or 01395 227991.
Mobile for contact on the day only: 07902 255915

**Tuesday 4 June – 10.00am - 5 miles – 3 hours.
‘Knapp Copse Circular’**

Meet: Knapp Copse car park (OS 115, SY155 957)

A hilly 5 mile walk on an undulating route largely following the Roncombe Stream. There will be a coffee stop part way round so bring a drink and snack with you.

Walk Leader: Ted Swan 01395 904471 / 07848 852643

**Thursday 20 June – 10.30am – 8 miles. 5 hours. *Booking required.*
‘Mini 10 tors’**

Meet: Haytor, second CP on right about 1 mile after the Visitor Centre. (OS SX 7481 7615) what3words ///munch.thighs.sweep

A shorter and less demanding route than the infamous ‘challenge’ hike. A circular walk to Hound Tor and back to Haytor taking in eight other named tors on the way. Mostly on tracks and paths across moorland with no steep climbs but plenty of short ups and downs. Bring a picnic lunch.

Booking required. Contact the walk leader if you wish to car share.

Walk Leader: Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 07887 936280

**Monday 24 June – 10.00 am. Limited group size *Booking required*
‘Silver-studded Monday 24 June – 10.00 am.**

The main aim of the walk is to try and spot silver-studded blues. They are most likely to be on the wing from mid-June to mid-July. They are a small butterfly only found on a limited number of sites across England. They have a complex life cycle and are easily missed, especially the females which are brown and tend to be static, waiting for males to find them.

They are fairly frail flyers and don't like windy days. We would hope to see several other heathland butterflies as well.

The walk will be led by Lesley Kerry who recently retired from monitoring the silver-studded blue for The Pebblebed Heaths. She was co-ordinating volunteers and has been reviewing habitats and collecting information on silver-studded blues for many years before retiring from the role. Lesley will be assisted by Geoff Porter who is the Natural Environment representative for the OVA.

We aim to repeat the walk on Tuesday 9 July and both dates are weather dependant.

The size of the group will be limited and we will maintain a ‘reserve’ list.

To book: please email: walks@ova.org.uk indicating which date you prefer, bookings open Monday 27 May for both dates and parking information will be given when a booking is confirmed.

Wednesday 26 June – approx. 5 miles
'St Boniface Way' – Stage One – approximately 5 miles.

The St Boniface Way is a new Pilgrimage Route running from CREDITON Parish Church to Exeter Cathedral, taking in various villages and their interesting churches en-route. We will walk along the Exe at times and through woods and meadows which should be full of wild flowers.
To make it easy to do the walk using public transport (there are frequent buses between Exeter and CREDITON which stop at Newton St Cyres) the walk will be split into 2 sections.
Stage One is from CREDITON to Newton St Cyres and is around 5 miles.
Stage Two from Newton St Cyres to Exeter Cathedral is around 8 miles.
There are some hills and some road walking, especially in Stage Two, but it is mostly easy walking.
Please see the website for more information nearer the time on accurate distances and more information on timing, start point, parking, buses and refreshment points.
You do not, of course, need to do both sections.
Walk Leaders: Penny and Paul Kurowski 01395 742942 / 07792 619748

Friday 5 July – approx. 8 miles
'St Boniface Way' – Stage Two – around 8 miles.

Stage Two from Newton St Cyres to Exeter Cathedral is around 8 miles.

Full details see 26 June walk above

Saturday 6 July – 10.00 am – 6 miles – approx. 3 hours
'Raleigh Round'

Meet: The Holt car park (Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club) East Budleigh Road. (OS 115, SY 070 831)
A walk of 6 miles taking about 3 hours. Visiting Walt's statue, the Raleigh family church East Budleigh, the family home at Hayes Barton and maybe the site of his first bicycle shop!
Expect mud after rainfall. Refreshments available at cricket club on return.
Walk Leader: Steve Hagger 01395 442631 / 07868 889260

Tuesday 9 July – 10.00 am - limited group size. **Booking required**
'Silver-studded blue butterflies'

See Monday 24 June for details

The date is weather dependant.

The size of the group will be limited and we will maintain a 'reserve' list.

To book: please email: walks@ova.org.uk indicating which date you prefer, **bookings open Monday 27 May for both dates.**

Monday 15 July – 9 miles. Bus 378 departs 10.00am
'Lyme Regis to Seaton via the inside passage'

Meet: 378 bus stop at Sea Front Gardens, Seaton
We will catch the 10.00am bus from Seaton to Lyme Regis and then follow the river to Uplyme and past the old railway viaduct coming back to Seaton via the golf course. Lanes and tracks. A lovely walk with great views and less arduous than the Undercliffs.
Bring a picnic.
Walk Leader: Carolyn Cox 07775 930004

Update on Built Environment

Author: Dee Woods, OVA Built Environment Committee

The Executive Committee has considered and commented on a number of planning applications within the Otter Valley over the past year.

Where applications are considered to be harmful and detrimental, and not in accordance with Local and Neighbourhood planning policies, objections have been sent to the District Council.

For instance there have been several applications for large new replacement houses, e.g. at Frogmore Road, East Budleigh and at Kersbrook Lane, Kersbrook. There have also been a number of planning applications for housing development in Newton Poppleford, but outside the Built Up Area Boundary of the Village, and therefore, harmful to the character and appearance of the East Devon National Landscape. (AONB now renamed)

In Budleigh some current applications are of interest. New toilets are to be built to replace those at Salting Hill, in line with East Devon District Council's agreed investment in new infrastructure in the area. Also, at the Longboat Café, there is a proposal to build a side extension with retractable sides and roof. This is to replace the 'temporary' side extension, which was built without planning permission, and is subject to an Enforcement Notice requiring its removal.

In Otterton, the long running application for an MOT service station at Rydon Orchard, seems to have drawn to a close. The proposal was refused in 2023, but was then subject of appeal. This appeal has now been withdrawn.

Trees – needing more in 24 !

Author: Chris Hodgson, OVA Natural Environment Committee

Because of climate change, we are being asked “to plant a tree”. The reason for this is that trees are excellent storers of carbon dioxide which they turn into the basic structure of the tree. They also live a long time and therefore lock the carbon up for an extended period. But the question arises as to which species of tree would be most beneficial ecologically. In other words, which tree should we plant?

The architecture of trees (their shape, size, structure etc) is much more complex than that of other kinds of plants and this means that there are many more niches for insects and other organisms such as fungi and lichens to occupy. Even in winter, the surface area of a tree is about four times that of the soil beneath. In addition, because they are so long lived, they allow many insects and other organisms to have multiple generations on a single plant and also provide excellent hibernation sites for over wintering. Even when dead, the rotting wood can last for years, again providing many opportunities for animals and plants that live on such material. The quality of the various parts of a tree varies (leaves, young wood, old wood), also varies, allowing for specialization. All of these factors affect the species richness of their inhabitants.

However, not all tree species are equally important ecologically. The trees that have the greatest biodiversity in the UK are those that are intrinsically adapted to thriving in sunlight rather than dense woodland. A survey on insect species richness on different species of native trees (by Prof. Sir Thomas Southwood and colleagues in the 1960s) found that oak, willow and hawthorn had the greatest number of insect species, followed by blackthorn. It is noticeable that all of these species are broadleaved trees adapted to open areas and that none are evergreen. It is thought that historically even the oak thrived best in open woodland rather than the dense stands we mainly see today. Other tree species which had high insect diversity were poplars, alder, apple and elm – again, all deciduous broadleaved species. Tree species which have been introduced recently (geologically speaking) to the UK, such as sweet chestnut and sycamore, all have much poorer insect populations.

It would seem, therefore, that indigenous, broadleaved trees are best adapted to our climate and provide the greatest ecological diversity. SO – if you are thinking of planting a tree – or, even better, several trees – then perhaps you should also think about their wider impact on the environment as well.

Pheasants & their Male Behaviour

Author: David R. White, Naturalist

I suspect that probably 99.9% of the pheasants you might see are incubator hatched, & in their early life, reared in a high stocking density environment with a plentiful supply of foods & an absence of predators. This is very different from when living in the wild. During spring, the cock pheasants who have survived the winter shooting season become territorial. When equally matched cock birds encounter each other there can be frequent fights over nearby hens. On the other hand, fighting among hen pheasants is extremely rare. When I saw this I was intrigued.



The intensive rearing of these chicks gives them no opportunity to learn any skills from their parents. I suspect this is likely to result in many of their subsequent breeding attempts to fail, particularly due to predation of their eggs or young chicks. Its not uncommon to find predated pheasant egg-shells. Gulls or corvids the likely culprits.

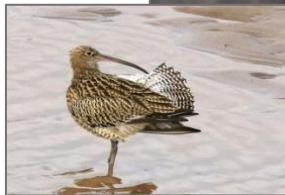
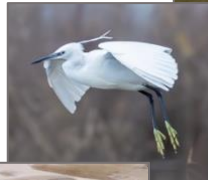


One year, a pair of pheasants did successfully rear 4 of their chicks in the Lower Otter Valley. There proved to be three hens & a cock bird. It was among these young hens that I saw the fighting. The confident dominant hen was always prepared to aggressively fight among her siblings for the best of the available foods. This could be normal behaviour for wild bred birds. This behaviour is probably absent in captive reared birds due to plentiful food supplies available during their early life.



Birdlife from the Otter Valley

A small selection of the bird-life found across the commons.



Credit: David R. White & Chris Boorman

News: Otter Estuary Nature Reserve

Author: Rick Lockwood, Ranger

It's been a busy period down on the estuary!

During February, the reserve was officially declared as a part of the Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve. Our celebration events brought regional television and press coverage and over the weekend we welcomed around 500 people to our marquee and pop-up gazebo at the Lime Kiln carpark. This was followed up in March with a celebration event to mark the completion of LORP. All key people involved with the project were hosted by the Environment Agency and Clinton Devon Estates, in the event, held at The Holt, the new pavilion of the Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club. This was followed by a drop-in event during the afternoon that was well attended. To commemorate the project a short film was commissioned about the project by the Environment Agency and can be viewed here - [The Lower Otter Restoration Project | Adapting Landscapes \(youtube.com\)](#).

Wildlife sightings

Throughout January, up to four avocet were still present indicating they were already finding enough sustenance in the new tidal mud. Peak counts for our other winter waders included up to 32 dunlin, 31 curlew, 10 redshank, 6 ringed plover, 2 black-tailed godwit, and single greenshank and green sandpiper.



The single over-wintering greenshank

(credit David White)



Cetti's Warbler – their loud and explosive song is often heard, but the bird is rarely seen.

(credit: David White)

February brought occasional sightings of brent goose on several days during the month. Hinting at Spring, quite a few of our wintering wildfowl and wading birds began to move onwards and away to their breeding grounds, whilst many of the 600 black-headed gulls being seen were acquiring the chocolate brown heads in preparation for the breeding season. With these large flocks came reports of a

couple of Mediterranean gulls. Other highlights have included a high count of 21 little egret on the 21st, and maximum counts of 40 shelduck and 30 curlew, both on the 9th. The avocets departed whilst the lone greenshank continued to be seen throughout the month.

March saw the arrival of the first Spring migrants including chiffchaff and blackcap, singing alongside the resident cetti's warblers, reed buntings, and stonechats. Noteworthy shorebirds included the first little ringed plover's returning from Africa on the 20th, and the first bar-tailed godwit since last Spring for a couple of days from the 22nd. Early April has seen a greater variety of species as Spring bird migration gets into full swing with a whimbrel (the smaller relative of curlew) and a sandwich tern on the 6th sheltering from the strong winds associated with Storm Kathleen.

There are still places available on the upcoming guided walks on Thursday 16th May and Saturday 15th June, which are free to attend. You can book your place by searching for Otter Estuary Ranger Walk on Eventbrite.com.

If you are interested in volunteering on the reserve, we have several roles available. Please email the ranger at Rick.Lockwood@clintondevon.com for further details.

OVA Photographic Competition

Author: Chris Boorman

We invite everyone to take part in our first OVA photographic competitions. There will be two competitions:

- Children (15 years old or younger, as of September 30th 2024)
- Adults (16 years or older, as of September 30th 2024)

We are delighted to announce that these competitions will be judged by three notable people:

- Mr. David R White, naturalist. A local photographer who contributes amazing photographs to our OVA publications and facebook group.
- Mr Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger, Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. Rick has had a lifelong interest in birds, and nature. He has worked in a variety of ranger-type and community engagement roles in the nature conservation sector.
- Lucilla Phelps FRPS, freelanced for 10 years before joining Sotheby's full time, firstly as Principal Photographer and ending up as Head of Photography. Since retiring she has taught photography to adults in Richmond, lectured to scores of societies in the SE and now SW of

England, judged international exhibitions and had images accepted for many international and national exhibitions. She was chair for 10 years of the Professional Panel of the Royal Photographic Society assessing distinction submissions for ARPS and FRPS.

Prizes:

For each competition the following prizes can be won:

- Each winner will receive an RSPB voucher for £50.
- Each second place will receive an RSPB voucher for £25.
- All winners and second place will be invited to join Rick Lockwood and David White for a personalised photographic tour to the River Otter Nature Reserve.
- Each winner will receive their photo in a frame signed by David White.
- All winners and placed photographs will be published on the OVA facebook group, on the OVA website and in the winter newsletter.

Timelines

- The closing date for this competition is the 30th September.
- All entries must be submitted via email to Editor@ova.co.uk or by direct message to the editor on Facebook. Each entry must include contact details (name, phone, email), the date of the photograph and the location where the photograph was taken.
- The winners will be announced in October and included in the winter Newsletter.

Rules:

- Photographs of any fauna (mammals, birds, bugs) taken anywhere between Exmouth to Sidmouth and from Ottery St. Mary to Budleigh Salterton.
- Photographs must be taken in the defined competition timeline (May 1st to September 30th).
- Anyone who is a member of either the OVA Facebook group, or the OVA charity can take part.
- People can submit up to 5 photographs MAXIMUM.
- Judges decisions will be final.
- NO disturbance of habitats is allowed in the taking of pictures. Indeed, for certain species it is illegal to do this.
- Pictures will be judged in digital form.

River Otter – water quality and other pressures on its ecosystem

Author: Bruce McGlashan, Secretary – River Otter Fisheries Association

Healthy rivers and groundwater are essential to human life. They provide us with water to drink and produce our food. They provide recreational spaces for our health and wellbeing and support our economy - recreational fishing alone creates £1.7 billion of value per year in the UK. But is not just us, healthy rivers provide a variety of important and diverse ecosystems supporting bio-diversity.

Unfortunately, as you will I'm sure be aware from national and local coverage, all is far from well. The recently published report by the Rivers Trust on the state of our rivers highlighted that no single stretch of river in England was in good overall health and just 15% of river stretches achieved good ecological status under the



Water Framework Directive (WFD).

This status is assessed by looking at a range of measures including chemical water quality and the health of the aquatic plants, fish and invertebrate populations present, or not present, in the river. The River Otter is unfortunately no exception - much of the river is assessed as being in poor ecological health and the remainder is only moderate.

Why is this? Many of you I suspect will point the finger at South West Water (SWW) and you would be right to do so as their performance and other water companies is in my and many other peoples opinion scandalous. It's also depressingly predictable given the weak regulatory regime that they've been allowed to operate under.

In the case of the Otter, the problems from SWW assets arise not just from the all too frequently documented discharges of storm sewage from overloaded treatment works and sewer catchments in the Otter Valley but also discharges of treated effluent from some of the sewage treatment works in the catchment that contain high levels of phosphate, a plant nutrient. The problem of storm overflows is catchment wide, but the most frequent discharges are from sewage treatment works and systems serving Honiton, Gittisham, Payhembury, Talaton, East Budleigh/Ottertton and Budleigh. Although diluted, the sewage/storm water discharged still contains high levels of suspended solids, which can smother the river bed and aquatic plants, ammonia, which is very toxic to aquatic life and organic matter which when broken down by aquatic microbes can lead to low

dissolved oxygen levels in the river. Other pollutants in storm sewage include nitrates, pathogenic bacteria and viruses, toxic chemicals, pharmaceutical and veterinary product residues.



Excess algal growth in the lower river Otter due to high phosphate levels

However, unpleasant and unacceptable as the current level of sewage pollution of the Otter is, the most significant cause of water quality problems on the river is not the water industry, but the agricultural sector. A sad fact it has in common with many other rivers that flow through predominately rural areas.

This can be seen by examining data published by the Environment Agency on the reasons why stretches of rivers are currently failing to meet good ecological status. For the Otter, the most common reasons given are poor livestock, soil or nutrient management by the agricultural sector. This is followed by inputs of nutrients from treated and storm sewage. In several cases both causes contribute to the failure of a particular stretch.

The specific causes of agricultural pollution are many, but include:

- Poor land management of fields, both livestock and arable.
- The run-off of dirty water contaminated with animal and other wastes from farms yards.
- Poor/inadequate storage of farm wastes such as slurry and silage liquor.
- Over application of fertilizers both artificial and natural.
- Crop spraying with herbicide and pesticides, particularly if done very near to a ditch or stream.

- Failure of farm infrastructure and equipment leading to pollution incidents involving, farm wastes, chemicals or fuel oil
- Livestock being allowed to access river banks leading to loss of bankside vegetation which in turn allows rapid erosion of river banks as well as habitat loss.

A particular problem in the Otter catchment due to its sandy soils and steep terrain, is the run-off of silt and nutrients from fields planted with maize particularly after the harvest in the Autumn. Once in the river, the silt settles on the bed smothering aquatic plants, invertebrates and fish eggs, whilst plant nutrients such as nitrate and phosphate from run-off stimulate the rapid growth of algae which out compete other aquatic plants and can also reduce dissolved oxygen levels essential for fish and aquatic invertebrates especially at night when algae are no longer photosynthesising.

If the impacts of sewage and agricultural pollution weren't enough there are a number of other pressures that are currently impacting the Otter's water quality and ecosystems. These include:

- Over abstraction of groundwater for drinking water supplies particularly around Otterhead Lakes and in the lower Otter Valley. This leads to lower river flows which in turn reduces the dilution of pollutants, as well as warmer water temperatures in the summer.
- Man-made barriers to fish migration, both up and downstream. There are a number of weirs around Honiton and its tributaries including the River Wolf, the Gissage and the River Tale which are of particular concern.
- Poor habitat due to historic channel straightening and impoundment above weirs as well as disconnection of the flood plain from the rivers channel. These man-made changes to the river can also lead to faster spate flows which in turn cause rapid erosion of the river bank and the scouring of river gravels where invertebrates and fish eggs are found.
- The impacts of climate change, high water temperatures, low flows and flash flooding.
- Toxic chemicals including mercury and the so called forever chemicals which go under the snappy name of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These have hundreds of uses including within nonstick coatings, fabric protectors, firefighting foams and in plastic. Many of these chemicals, which can take hundreds or thousands of years to breakdown, are now found in rivers throughout the UK, usually discharged through residues in treated sewage effluent. Concern is increasingly being raised about the impact of some pet and livestock veterinary products, particularly the infamous neonicotinoid imidacloprid used in some pet flea and tick treatments, despite these being banned for agricultural use. Not only is this

acutely toxic to bees but it's also similarly very toxic to aquatic invertebrates. These products can enter the water where animals swim in the river or through residues not removed by the sewage treatment process.

- Polluted run-off from urban area and roads. Road run off is a particular concern on many rivers, as it can contain oil, diesel and petrol from small spills and leakages as well as particulates from tyre, brake and road surface wear and high salt and sediment levels when roads are de-iced.
- Plastics, not just the obvious examples such as discarded plastic bottles, crisp packets, cigarette butts and pieces of agricultural plastic, but also microplastics produced for example when plastics breakdown
- Increasing levels of predation of freshwater and estuarine fish, particularly from cormorants whose numbers have increased greatly in recent years along with changes to their feeding patterns as they move inland to find food.
- Invasive species, particularly Himalayan Balsam which leads to a loss of plant diversity and river bank instability. When the plant dies back, it leaves bare soil that's easily eroded.
- Poor survival of migratory fish species at sea. Overfishing is one likely cause but not the only one.



A weir on the River Otter below Honiton. This acts as a partial barrier to fish migration. Historic straightening of the river channel and cattle grazing of the river bank has led to increased erosion and poor habitat

These pressures should also not be considered in isolation as they have a cumulative impact. For example, climate change is predicted to result in reduced

summer flows, interspersed with flash flooding as well as increased water temperatures in both summer and winter. These in turn can exacerbate the impacts of pollutants by reducing dilution, dissolved oxygen levels or lead to river temperatures being too high for species, including trout and salmon to survive.

I hope I have not depressed everyone as despite all the pressures the Otter faces it is still home to some fabulous wildlife that lives by it, on it or in it and the river is enjoyed by both locals and visitors alike whether they are fishing, doing a spot of bird watching, playing in it or simply going for a walk beside it.

It is clear that the public mood has changed and our two groups (the OVA and the team I represent at the River Otter Fisheries Association) are working together with other local groups to prioritise and address these longstanding issues. We are meeting regularly and have agreed to help support and facilitate activities and, where necessary, be a voice for the river by highlighting issues that we feel are not being properly addressed. We will cover the work being undertaken in the next addition of this newsletter as well as highlighting some areas where we believe more needs to be done to protect and improve the river.

If you are keen to help restore the river Otter to it's historical excellence, why not volunteer and help our teams in their work?

Blue Plaques in the Otter Valley

Author: Dee Woods, OVA Built Environment Committee

In September 2023 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced a relaunch of the national blue plaques scheme to celebrate people throughout history who made an important and positive contribution to human welfare or happiness across England.

The scheme is being led by Historic England, and will recognise that every place has a unique story to tell, and help to showcase the importance of heritage everywhere.

However, the placing of blue plaques on buildings is not a new idea, and was started in London 150 years ago. More recently it has been taken up by Historic England. They have produced detailed guidance and procedures. However it is and has been used by various groups, such as civic societies, to identify where famous people lived, or important events took place. It is a way of celebrating our heritage, local history and notable people. The Sid Vale Association has erected 64 blue plaques around the town, and they produced a book about their famous

historical people. The Museum also organises regular 'Blue plaque' walks around the town in the summer months.

There are a number of plaques in the Otter Valley, but not all are blue. Details of these can be found on the website - Devon's Historic Plaques – Rural Devon. The Friends of the Fairlynch Museum and the OVA and others have erected blue plaques in Budleigh Salterton. East Budleigh has a few; Newton Poppleford has one in the High Street for Walter Hill who bred the King Alfred daffodil (1899); and at Colaton Raleigh footbridge there is a plaque erected by the OVA for Alan Jones, in recognition of his extensive civic work for the area and for the OVA. Otterton has several plaques for the Rolle family in and on the outside of the church and the village hall, but they were erected to record that the family commissioned these building works.

The local (mostly blue) plaques are listed below.

Budleigh Salterton

- Brushfield, Doctor Thomas Nadauld (1828 – 1910) - Cliff Road. English doctor and antiquarian
- Carter, Dr H J (1813 – 1895) - Fore Street Hill Surgeon in India and researcher of zoology, geology and paleontology
- Dennys, Isabel Dorothy Joyce (1883 – 1991) - Fore Street Hill Cartoonist, painter and illustrator
- Hatchard-Smith, Colonel William Hornby (1887 – 1987) – Plaque on Public Hall, Station Road Architect and served in the Artists Rifles and East Surrey Regiment. Served in WWI. Built many houses and war memorials and built and lived in Watch Hill, Cricketfield Lane
- Lackington, James (1746 – 1815) - Fore Street. London bookseller, built original Temple Methodist Church 1812
- Lee, Belinda (1935 – 1961) - Cliff Cottage, Cliff Road Film star and Actress
- Millais, Sir John Everett (1829 – 1896) - Fore Street English painter and illustrator. One of the founder members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood
- The Old Lime Kiln (1801) - Saltings Hill/Granary Lane
- Osgood Family - 14-16 Fore Street (not blue) Long established family dating back to 14 century
- Raleigh Wall - Marine Parade - the location of the famous painting of Raleigh's boyhood by Millais
- Simcoe, John Graves (1752 – 1806) - Fore Street Hill British Army general and first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada 1791 - 1796
- Trollope, Thomas Adolphus (1810 – 1892) - 10 Cliff Road. English writer and brother of Anthony

East Budleigh

- Conant, Roger (1592 – 1679) - plaque in the grounds of the Church Hall, above car park in Hayes Lane New England colonist and drysalter. Credited with founding community of Salem
- Raleigh, Sir Walter (1552 – 1618) - born in Hayes Lane, plaques in All Saints Church and by his statue in Vicarage Lane
- Salem Chapel - Vicarage Road (not blue). Built 1719

The full criteria to be used by English Heritage is going to be published in May, when they open for public nominations. In the meantime, here are the key points to consider if you are thinking about nominating someone for a plaque:

- At least 20 years must have passed since the candidate's death
- They must have made a significant contribution to human welfare or happiness
- At least 1 building in England associated with the figure must survive in a form that the commemorated person would have recognised, and it must be visible from the public highway
- Although the nomination should be for a person, it is possible to nominate more than 1 person and events

So, if there are any local historians, or history societies working on notable people in the Valley, that fulfil the above criteria, please let the OVA know, so that they can be considered for nomination for a blue plaque.

The Information Centre in Budleigh Salterton also has a new blue plaques self-guided walk. You can access it by photographing the following QR code with your smartphone – it should take you to their web-site where you can see the walk.



The OVA have also developed an interactive map which shows the locations of blue plaques in the Otter Valley, so check out the OVA's website and click on the link under "History". In addition, there are articles on some of these people, and references to them, on OVApedia.

Blue thoughts on Valley notables

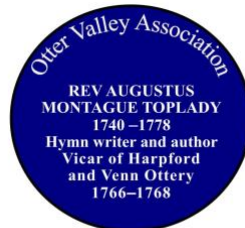
Author: Michael Downes

In a recent newsletter I read about the OVA's desire to identify people of historical importance in our area and grow its 'blue plaque presence' across the Lower Otter Valley. The article got me thinking about various individuals whom readers may like to know about: not just past residents of the area, but also its particularly interesting visitors.



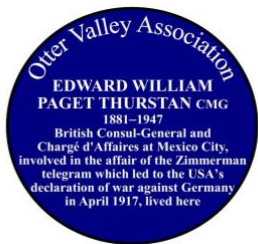
The more I thought about possible additional ones, the longer my list grew. Indeed, if you add blue plaques to commemorate notable buildings you would find that we easily outnumber those of Exmouth (30) and even Sidmouth (64). Of course there's a long way to go between proposing a blue plaque and actually installing it. Matters such as deciding on an approved text and a suitable design, covering the cost and obtaining the permissions of owners and the local authority will all take time, especially where listed buildings are concerned. Faced with such thorny issues involved with the creation

and installation of an actual blue plaque it's much easier to con-jure up some virtual images.



My first was inspired during one of the OVA's 'Ghost Train' walks when our group ended up outside St Gregory's church, pictured opposite, in the village of Harpford. I was reminded that the Rev Augustus Montague Toplady, three years before becoming its vicar, had written the well known hymn 'Rock of Ages'. He was vicar there for only two years before apparently deciding that he had been wrongly appointed, the post having been purchased for him. He went on to be vicar of Broadhembury, also in East Devon. Along with hymns, books and essays

on religious matters, notably opposing his contemporary John Wesley, he wrote about the natural world and animals.



My second blue plaque is based on an article from the OVA's OVApedia. It concerns an East Devon resident who, according to author Roger Lendon, 'probably had a hand in one of the most significant events to occur in WW1'. Edward William Paget CMG, listed as living at 37 Exmouth Road in Budleigh Salterton, was based in Mexico when a coded telegram, sent by Germany's foreign secretary Arthur Zimmerman to its ambassador to Mexico in January 1917, was intercepted by British intelligence.

The contents, sent to US President Woodrow Wilson and released to the American press on 1 March, were dynamite. They contained the proposal that, were the United States to abandon its neutrality and enter WW1 on the side of the Allies, Germany would assist Mexico in regaining the states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona which had been conquered by the US in the war of 1846-1848. The above cartoon by Clifford Berryman, published in the Washington Evening Star in March 1917, shows a hand in a gauntlet – decorated with the imperial German eagle – carving up a map of the southwestern United States.



Did you know that the so-called 'Queen of Crime' was a regular visitor to our area?

The above photo shows Dame Agatha, left, in the garden of 'High Knowle' on Dark Lane, Little Knowle, on the outskirts of Budleigh Salterton, with her friends John Reeder Makeig-Jones CBE and his wife Agnes.

Mrs Makeig-Jones, born in Torquay in 1892 as Agnes Antonia Yvonne Dundee-Hooper was two years older than Agatha Christie but the pair were best friends, as they grew up together in the town, both living in large Victorian villas. Agatha was Agnes' bridesmaid at the latter's wedding and they remained close until Agatha passed away in 1976.

'High Knowle', has been described in a local estate agent's brochure as 'one of Budleigh's finest family homes, believed to date from 1923 and to have been built for a member of the Huntley & Palmer family'. The brochure also mentions that Agatha Christie visited 'High Knowle' on a quite regular basis.

Author Michael Downes has had a hand in designing and installing the following blue plaques: Jean Blathwayt, T.N. Brushfield, William Hatchard-Smith, James Lackington and Belinda Lee in Budleigh Salterton; and Roger Conant in East Budleigh.

Forming a Blue Plaque Committee

We are excited to announce that the OVA will be collaborating with the Fairlynch Museum and Michael Downes to form a committee to review and judge potential candidates for future blue plaques.

Our goal is to identify and research candidates across the valley with a set of consistent criteria and then to agree, and hopefully arrange funding for, the production of blue plaques.

We will provide updates to everyone and look at how we can ensure the records are digitally maintained inside OVApedia.

More on this will be forthcoming and shared in future newsletters and across the web and facebook groups.

Again, as mentioned above, if you know of people who you think would be worthy of a blue plaque, please do send their details to us.

Views across the Otter Valley



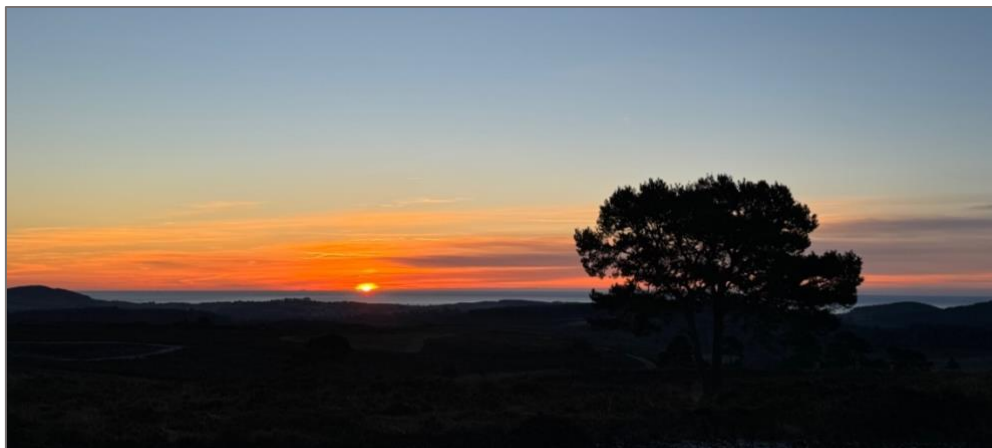
Credit: Rob Chidgey Photography



Credit: Chris Boorman



Credit: David R. White



Credit: Chris Boorman

Fairlynch Museum: New Exhibitions

Author: Linden Harris, Fairlynch Museum

A new season brings new exhibitions. 'Otterton and the River Otter' in the Local History Room where curator of local history, Roz Hickman, has uncovered a long-forgotten aspect of village industry; that of shipbuilding. A 1619 survey recorded 21 shipwrights in the village making Ottermouth the third largest shipbuilding port on the south coast of Devon, after Dartmouth and Plymouth. Thanks are due to Topsham Museum, who have kindly loaned some shipwrights' tools to the exhibition. The exhibition is accompanied by a new Fairlynch publication, "*Ships and Shipbuilding on the River Otter*", £3, available from the Fairlynch shop.

Curators of costumes and lace, Jill Salen and Sue Morgan, are presenting 'Dress to Impress' in the Joy Gawne Room, featuring military and diplomatic costumes of the 19th century, plus an exhibition of machine-made lace. Fairlynch has a significant collection of Honiton lace and bobbins. One of the bobbins is thought to be the oldest dated bobbin. It is inscribed with the initials MR and the date 1662 and believed to have come in a large collection of bobbins donated to the museum in 1970.



Beside the River Otter in East Devon has always been a popular place to live. The views across the estuary today take in tidal saltmarsh and mudflats, as well as freshwater creeks and reed beds, which is similar to how it must have looked for people who lived here thousands of years ago. Evidence for those early dwellers, including the stone tools they used, has been found where they lived, in the fields overlooking the estuary.

The oldest artefacts found were Mesolithic microliths from the fields overlooking the flood plain. Mesolithic people were hunter-gatherers who lived roughly 8,000 – 6,000 years ago and made composite stone tools from tiny, carefully fashioned flakes of sharp, glassy flint.

There are also Neolithic flint tools in the collection from roughly 6,000 – 4,300 years ago, made by the first wave of farmers to settle here. The most common type of tool is the scraper. There are several in our exhibition, as well as knives and piercers, showing the ingenuity of the makers in fashioning precisely the tools they needed to cut vegetation and meat, clean hides, and manufacture clothing and homes.



Above White Bridge, on the eastern bank, a stunning barbed and tanged arrowhead emerged good as new from the plough-soil. This dates from the Early Bronze Age, about 4,000 – 3,500 years ago.

The last object in our exhibition also survived astonishingly well - for 1700 years. It is a Roman nummus: a low value coin minted in Trier in the reign of Constantine the Great and perhaps dropped by the owner of the Roman farm at the end of Otterton Point.

The finds are on loan from South West Archaeology and displayed in the Priscilla Carter Room.

Finally, we are delighted to be collaborating with the Budleigh Salterton Art Club and hosting a display of paintings by club members in the upstairs Exhibition Room.

Bird Boxes & Bug Hotels

Author: The OVA Natural Environment team

Our Environment committee have been busy creating a series of leaflets for the local community – focusing initially on bird boxes and bug hotels. These are available online from our OVA website (<https://www.ova.org.uk/>).



Song of the River Otter

Author: Paul Painter

The river it rises in the Blackdown Hills,
and flows 30 miles to the sea.
It's powered the mills and watered the land, for
many a century.
As it weaves its way south, to the river mouth, it's
fed by the streams either side.
'til it finds its way, past village and farm,
and by Budleigh Brook meets the tide,

*So flow, river, flow
Through the wind and the rain and the snow
Let the river run wild and free
on its way to the rolling sea.*

Lord Rolle made plans to build up the banks,
to drain the marsh and the mire.
And there they stood for two hundred years,
though the waters grew steadily higher.

As the river was tamed and the land reclaimed,
cattle grazed where boats once sailed,
still the floods got worse and the waters spread
and the banks began to fail.

*So flow, river, flow
Through the wind and the rain and the snow
Let the river run wild and free
on its way to the rolling sea.*

Then came the time to change again,
the need to do something bold,
So the work began to regain what was lost,
to return to the floodplain of old,
First the land was cleared, and channels laid,
the marshes were restored
Then the paths and roads and bridges were built,
so the valley was free to explore.

*So flow, river, flow
Through the wind and the rain and the snow
Let the river run wild and free
on its way to the rolling sea.*

There are some who mourn for what was lost,
who yearn for the status quo,
There are those who want to count the cost,
though the trees in their thousands will
grow.
and the fish will swim, and the birds will fly,
and nature will sing its song,
As the river flows into the sea,
and the circle of life rolls along.

*So flow, river, flow
Through the wind and the rain and the snow
Let the river run wild and free
on its way to the rolling sea.*

Redshank and shelduck, and dipper and teal,
moorhen and godwit and rail.
Will fly back here for many a year,
to weather the storm and the gale.
Where the beavers swim and build their dams,
and the sparkling kingfishers dive,
And the herons and curlews, geese and swans
make us happy to be alive.

*So flow, river, flow
Through the wind and the rain and the snow
Let the river run wild and free
on its way to the rolling sea.*

The Otter Valley Association

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Otter Valley Association

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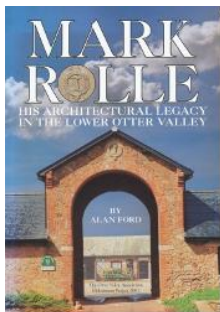
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OVA PO BOX 70

Budleigh Salterton

EX9 6WN

OVA Publications



Mark Rolle

His Architectural Legacy in the Lower Otter Valley

Ever wondered about the many improved farm buildings and cottages in this area? This lavishly illustrated book gives a very readable overview of how a large landed estate was managed in the last 40 years of the 19th century.

£4.95 from Budleigh Salterton Information Centre

Or visit www.ova.org.uk



Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from Budleigh Salterton Information Centre

Or visit www.ova.org.uk



Leaflets

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley.

They can usually be found in the Budleigh Salterton Information Centre and in other outlets around the valley.

Some of these leaflets are only available online from the OVA web