



# Sussex Botanical Recording Society

## Newsletter

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May 2019

### President's Message

The January Newsletter kicked off with an 'Editor's Note' explaining the absence of the traditional President's Message, so with apologies and five months late I do indeed now write from VC17 on the edge of Thursley Common. I was also interested to read that the editor went on to presume to predict what I would have said had I written the piece! She was right. The discovery of the first Sussex record of the Great Pignut, *Bunium bulbocastanum*, on a SBRS field meeting was indeed a significant botanical event.



*Bunium* at Fulking (photo: Nick Sturt)

What is it that makes the record so interesting? Not only is it the first record for Sussex, but it is also the first British record of *Bunium* from south of the Thames. It is one of a small group of plants that are widespread in northern France but absent from the chalk of south-east England, reappearing again north of the Thames. The clearest example of this distribution is *Gentianella germanica*, the Chiltern Gentian, confined in Britain, as its name suggests, to rough chalk grassland and open scrub in the Chilterns. *Bunium* has an almost identical distribution and how to explain this odd geography has long puzzled British botanists, notably Francis Rose who wrote extensively on disjunct distributions. For instance, the legend to its map in *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* reads 'its absence from the North and South Downs is difficult to explain in view of its abundance in similar habitats at Boulogne'.

(continued on page 2)

### Dates for your Diary

#### Saturday 26th October 2019

The Autumn Get-together will be held at Staplefield Village Hall. The doors will be open from 10.00 a.m. The meeting will start promptly at 10.30 and will include a talk. Please remember to bring a packed lunch; tea, coffee and cakes will be available. Members are invited to bring books and plants for sale, any items of interest or specimens for display, and digital photographs to show in the afternoon (see note below). Homemade cakes are always welcome and are greatly appreciated.

#### Saturday 7th March 2020

As usual, the Annual General Meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. at Staplefield Village Hall. After the AGM, there will be information on this year's field meetings, and details of interesting records received in 2018. The hall will be available from 1.30 p.m. if you wish to bring any books or plants for sale. The meeting will conclude with tea and cakes. Please note: members bringing digital photographs of Sussex plants are asked to include captions.

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## Treasurer's Note

Following preparation of the Society's Accounts for 2018 I may now update you as to the state of the Flora Fund which stood at 31 December 2018 at £23,978. Since then we have received a further £1,795 from sales and we have paid all the costs of production. At the time of writing we have sold almost 830 copies. The Committee is considering various publication ventures to use the funds wisely.

Subscriptions for 2019 remain as for 2018: £8 for an individual and £11 for two people at the same address and receiving one copy of the mailings as they arise. Subscriptions may be sent to me at my home address or paid at the Autumn Get-together in October. If anyone has not paid their subscription for 2018 or earlier, please now do so if you wish to remain a member. If you are uncertain of your subscription status please contact me and I shall let you know.

**Trevor Lording**

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(continued from page 1)

Hence the stir caused by its discovery on our Fulking Escarpment meeting on June 16th. It clearly poses a number of questions: how long had it been there; where did it come from; had it simply been missed or wrongly identified; and for the plant geographers, does it mean that there is no problem after all?

Those who were on the excursion, and sadly I wasn't but visited the site soon afterwards, will remember that the plants were found in rough chalk grassland on the north-east facing slope of Perching Hill at an altitude of 148m. in three patches totalling eleven individuals. The land is owned by the National Trust who acquired it in 1988. Charlie Cain, the head warden, tells me that at the time it was rank chalk grassland within a barley desert. It was then heavily grazed down and has been grazed with sheep and cattle since. One feature of many of the sites in the Chilterns is that they often have a history of disturbance or reversion from arable. Interestingly, the turf of the Perching Hill site shows some evidence of this too. It is not particularly species rich and lacks a number of species that one would normally expect to see in a typical rich chalk sward. It seems unlikely that the *Bunium* was present in the tall rank grassland when the National Trust took over, but could have come in when the sward was opened up by the heavy grazing that the Trust then instituted. This, of course, still begs the question, where did it come from? All very intriguing.

To return to the discovery. Those who were present will remember that there was some debate about the identity of the plant. The excursion had been billed as an educational meeting and attention was drawn to the plant when enthusiastic members, keen to confirm the identity of specimens, spotted that the umbellifer key was pointing in unexpected directions; common chalk grassland umbellifers do not possess bracts! Final identification was confirmed by Dr Mark Watson of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the BSBI's Apiaceae referee.



*Bunium* in chalk grassland at Fulking. (photo: Nick Sturt)

Finally, the *Bunium* story is splendid confirmation of the value and importance of these kinds of meetings in our programme and that even such well-worked counties as Sussex have secrets still waiting to be uncovered, some of which might even challenge accepted ideas about the origins of some members of our flora. We plan to write a more extensive account of the discovery for *BSBI News*.

**David Streeter**

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## SBRS News: notes from the Chairman Nick Sturt

Our President opened the proceedings at the March AGM with a minute's silence in which we were able to remember my distinguished predecessor, Rod Stern, whose obituary appears elsewhere in this Newsletter. We were fortunate on the day to have

two members who in the early 1980s served alongside Rod on the Steering Committee of the Sussex Flora Society which reformed that body into the SBRS: Pat Donovan and Arthur Hoare. I reflected that without their efforts we should not be gathered in Staplefield Village Hall united in our interest in plants great and small. Of course, in David, chairing this meeting, we had one of those on the original Sussex Flora Committee who started the whole ball rolling back in 1965 with the project to produce the *Sussex Plant Atlas*.

In the nursing home Rod was always eager to hear news of the Society and I suppose that the last snippets which I brought him concerned the partnership with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre on Local Wildlife Sites. The LWS initiative is just one example of the work in which the Society is engaged, and indeed Helen's Churchyard Survey has already contributed valuable data to it. Our new mission to seek out and record village greens and recreation grounds of botanical interest will certainly feed into this. But in fact our help and advice is routinely sought by landowners and communities concerned about portions of their local 'patch'. At the western end of West Sussex members are advising on the wildlife corridors around Chichester.

As noted in the January Newsletter, we have been approached by Portsmouth Museums about the Henry Guermonprez Collection. It is sizeable and of great importance to Sussex, comprising many herbarium sheets of vascular plants, mosses and marine algae collected in the early years of last century; the numerous birds and animals so expertly mounted by Guermonprez were dispersed when the collection could no longer be housed in Bognor. The new curator has asked for volunteers to catalogue and curate further the specimens – a fascinating and rewarding task for anyone with an interest in Sussex natural history. Most recently Sussex Past has come to us for botanical and contextual information about its fine collection of Victorian plant portraits. Several artists are involved, three of them from the Burder family and one of these the Mrs H. S. Burder who appears in the list of contributors to the Wolley-Dod Flora. An exhibition of these works is planned in the Barbican in Lewes later this year: the details will be advertised in due course on the SBRS website.

Then there are the publishing activities of the Society. We have just published the first comprehensive Flora of the county since 1937, the fruit of many years' labour, but already a list is forming of future works. We need not wait too long before the first of these, namely Frances Abraham's

volume on Sussex Stoneworts which should appear later in the year.

Overseeing all the activities of the Society is its dedicated Committee. At the AGM you elected to it Jacqui Hutson: you can read in this issue how she will be co-ordinating the recording of the village greens and recreation grounds and I urge as many members as possible to involve themselves in this project. Jacqui is also representing the SBRS on the panel overseeing LWSs in East Sussex, with Frances Abraham as her counterpart on the LWS panel for West Sussex. You also elected Nevil Hutchinson but he had already been pressed into service earlier selling copies of the Flora at two events in Haywards Heath, the Sussex Ornithological Society Annual Conference and what we still call affectionately 'Adastra' (where there is always a large SBRS presence). Nevil is eager to take on a part in the data handling department. I should like to take this opportunity to thank warmly Ruth Eastwood for all her work over the past few years, and particularly for her fund of ideas (not all implemented yet but carefully filed for future reference): with the arrival of Idabea as a sister for Esme, Ruth understandably felt that, just possibly, she might not manage the SBRS Committee as well.

When the Editor set the deadline for copy for this Newsletter April seemed a world away, yet here I sit on a sunny Spring morning thinking that if I manage to complete this message and one or two other bits and pieces owed I shall be free to go out in search of some early plants on nearby greens – in fact I fancy I can hear *Montia fontana* calling me!

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## Survey of village greens and recreation grounds

Jacqui Hutson

In the May 2108 and January 2019 editions of the newsletter Nick Sturt urged members to survey their neighbourhood village greens and recreation grounds. The aim was to identify those that are of botanical interest so that the bodies that manage them can be informed of their value. In some areas village greens may be among the oldest surviving species-rich grassland. Many go back to the earliest days of the village as a human community and have been the common property of the village ever since. We have now received some very interesting results from Frances Abraham, who visited fifteen greens and recreation grounds in West Sussex. While five of these were disappointing because of changes in



management and loss of species, ten were botanically interesting and Frances surveyed these in detail. In four of them *Chamaemelum nobile* (Chamomile) was widespread and abundant or locally frequent.

We would like to make some good progress this season and to this end a survey form and tables of village greens in both counties are available to download from the website. One table is from *The Common Lands of England and Wales* (Stamp & Hoskins, 1963, Collins New Naturalist). It will be interesting to see how many of these greens still exist today. The other two tables are more recent and derived from the County Councils of East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove City Council. I have also consulted maps related to the registrations held by The Keep in East Sussex and County Hall, Chichester. The tables include grid and tetrad references, which I have gleaned from maps as far as possible. They are by no means comprehensive because they include only those registered by the respective local councils, and this does not seem to be obligatory. Even the list in *The Common Lands of England and Wales* is not comprehensive. Although it was based on the final returns made by counties to the Royal Commission on Common Land (1955-58) it was thought to be incomplete. So there will be many others to explore and we would like you to use your local knowledge to let us know about them.

If you would like to help please contact me at [jacqueline.hutson@btinternet.com](mailto:jacqueline.hutson@btinternet.com) and let me know of the greens and recreation grounds you would like to survey. The tables make clear which sites have already been surveyed or allocated. In the case of those in the two recent tables I can, for most sites, supply PDFs of maps with the location of sites outlined in green. I look forward to hearing from you.

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## **The Newhaven *Limonium***

**David Streeter**

Many members will be familiar with the puzzling *Limonium* that was first recorded on the cliffs at Peacehaven in 2002 and also, more accessibly, on the shingle at the Newhaven Tidemills. Some of us have tried to track it down using the not very friendly *Limonium* key in *Flora Europaea*. This usually ends up taking you to *Limonium minutum*, although it clearly isn't a precise fit.

In an attempt to resolve the problem, I gave some material to Clive Stace last year who sent it to Jean-Marc Tison, the main author of *Flora Gallica*. I thought that members would be interested in his reply:

'I think that you can forget *L. minutum* and *L. pseudominutum*, as well as the Spanish taxa of this group. All have smooth or rarely hairy leaves and branches, spikelets at least 5 mm long (without calyces) and narrowly marginate (<20%) lower bracts. Your plant has strongly tuberculate leaves and branches, spikelets c. 4 mm long and widely marginate lower bracts. These characters are reminiscent of a Corsico-Sardinian group (*L. tenuifolium* agg.). From the specimens sent, I can only say that they almost perfectly match with *L. obtusifolium*, endemic to the calcareous cliffs of Bonifacio (Corsica), and no other French taxon could be suitable. However, similar taxa could occur in Sardinia (or other Italian islands) where I don't know the flora enough. *L. obtusifolium* grows in huge, very dense cushions often exceeding 1m wide and 20 cm high, with thousands of small inflorescences.'

As Clive says, 'A plant endemic to the calcareous cliffs of Bonifacio (Corsica) does not seem the most likely thing to find in Sussex'.

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## **Travel to Staplefield: bus route tested!**

**Helen Proctor**

Congratulations to the three members who successfully travelled by public transport from Hastings to Staplefield for the AGM on 2 March! Trains and replacement buses took them to Haywards Heath railway station where they walked on to the Metro Bus 271 at 12.59pm. The bus driver dropped them off at Staplefield Village Hall at 13.15.

The last return bus leaves Staplefield for Haywards Heath and Brighton at 16.12. I followed it for part of my route home! However, the Hastings members were offered a lift part of the way home.

The Metro Bus 271 runs a two hourly service on Saturdays from Brighton to Crawley. If the return time is unsuitable, please ask a committee member in advance to arrange a lift. These details were correct at the time of going to press, but members are advised to consult the Metro Bus website: <https://www.metrobus.co.uk/route-information/271>

## **The Chairman adds:**

The Society has been based at Staplefield almost since its inception and the hall provides a central location with most of the facilities required. Recent research has failed to identify any other suitable venue which is more convenient to the non-car-user and so I ask members who drive to indoor meetings

to approach others who may appreciate a lift. If you find it difficult to come to Staplefield contact a member of the Committee and we shall see if we can put you in touch with someone who will bring you.

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## Churchyard recording

**Helen Proctor**

Thank you to those of you who have kindly offered to record a churchyard this year. A few are left on my list as shown below:

Broadwater St Mary  
Buncton All Saints  
Chidham St Mary  
Compton St Mary  
Donnington St George  
Middleton St Nicholas  
Moulescoomb St Andrew  
Sayers Common Christchurch  
Selsey St Peter  
West Grinstead St George  
Winchelsea Beach St Richard

Are there any more urban churches of any denomination, especially in the coastal towns that may have burial grounds worth recording? Are there any more cemeteries which may have been missed? A perusal of your county's street atlas may reveal some we did not know existed!

Please enter the records as usual, on the Excel Ver.1.7 recording form **and send the records to me very soon after each visit and the last records by September 15th.**

If you find native plants which you suspect were planted, please enter a note in the Comments column. Species which may have been planted include *Primula veris*, *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* and ones included in 'Meadow' seed mixes. The latter may be obvious if they are flourishing in one area only or in an unlikely habitat.

Survey forms or even just a note, describing the habitats and management regimes are useful too. Photographs of interesting species are welcomed. Images which show the church or gravestones in the background put the plant into context. If this is not possible, a separate photograph of the church is still useful.

Thanks to Helen Dignum's sterling work, records of many sites have now been analysed and vernacular names added.

If you are new to recording, please ask and I will send you more information.

## ADDITIONAL FIELD MEETINGS

### **Saturday 6 July 10.45am Moulescoomb Forest Garden** (Leader: Helen Proctor)

Rachel Bicker invites us to visit the Garden, which provides outdoor education to young people with learning difficulties. The site includes Queensdown Woods and a small area of open grassland. A management plan can be seen at:

<http://www.seedybusiness.org/documents/queensdown-wood-09.pdf>

For a hot meal, bring some cash for a donation.

The Forest Garden is opposite Moulescoomb Rail Station. Buses no. 25, 25A, 10, 24, 28 and 49 go to the Cockcroft site of Brighton University. Walk along the Lewes Road for a couple of minutes. Turn left up Queensdown School Road. Go under the railway bridge and take the first turning left. The entrance is just past the electricity buildings. The postcode is BN1 3XG, but continue along the road and under the railway bridge.

### **Saturday 10 August 10.45am Medmerry Reserve RSPB**

(Leader: Nick Sturt)

Meet in the RSPB Earnley car park, SZ81639667, signposted from Earnley Church and just past the Adult Education Centre. We shall cover a variety of coastal habitats including newly-establishing saltmarsh on the W side of the Reserve. There will be some brisk walking.

And:

### **Extra notes: Normans Bay meeting June 8**

**By train:** trains run hourly to Normans Bay on the Ashford-Eastbourne / Eastbourne-Ashford lines. Walk seawards from the station, follow the road round to the right & continue to our meeting place at TQ67550511, about 4/5 mile (15–20 min walk).

**Toilets:** There are public toilets just seaward of where you bear right from the station, at TQ68400549 c.1km from the meeting place.

## SBRS Photographic Competition 2019

Peter B. Smith

Following the success of the 2018 Photographic Competition, we shall be holding a further competition this year. The rules will be much the same as for last year, but with a change to the categories that you may enter. As last year, Class 1 will be for a close-up of one or more plants. Class 2 will be focussed on one or more plants in fruit. Last year's competition attracted 37 entries. Let's see if we can do better than that this year. Just as a reminder of the talent within our ranks, on page 5 are the winning entries from the 2018 competition: Helen Dignum's portrait of Starry Clover, and Jacqueline Rose's picture of Sea Milkwort in its habitat. Please remember to have your camera with you when you see just the subject for your new best shots! Entries are now open and the detailed rules are given below:

### Rules

1. The competition is free to enter and open to all SBRS members who are amateur photographers.
2. Photographs must be taken in East or West Sussex but do not have to be taken in 2019.
3. You may enter up to two digital images per category but you don't have to enter both categories.
4. The winners will be selected by a popular vote of those attending the SBRS Autumn Meeting.
5. The plants you photograph may be of any native or alien plants, including flowering plants, conifers, ferns, horsetails, club-mosses, stoneworts or bryophytes, casual or established, but growing *in the wild* (i.e. anywhere outside private gardens).
6. The competition is now open and will run until **Saturday October 12th 2019**. Please send your entries to Peter Smith, the Competition Organiser, (psmith@sussex.ac.uk) by that date.
7. Please submit the largest possible file sizes, but consult Peter Smith as to how files over 10MB could best be submitted.
8. The photographs should be labelled using the following format:  
CLOSE UP: "Photo title (including location) by photographer's name\_Close" e.g. "Buttercup at Woods Mill by Joe Wolley-Dod\_Close".  
FRUIT: e.g. "Ghost Orchid at Woods Mill by Jane Wolley-Dod\_Fruit"
9. Copyright of images will remain with the photographer. However, SBRS claims the right to exhibit the entries, and to use them to further its aims generally and to promote SBRS and its Photographic Competition. This includes publishing them in its publications, on the SBRS website or social media. All published photographs will be credited. SBRS also claims the right to edit or use images in combination with others.

## Winning photos from the 2018 Competition



Sea Milkwort by Jacqueline Rose



Starry Clover by Helen Dignum

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## Obituary: Rod Stern (1928- 2019) SBRS Chairman 1986-2012

Nick Sturt

When Paul Harmes and Alan Knapp set before the SBRS Committee in 2003 their plans for preparing a new Sussex Flora Rod Stern had no hesitation in giving his blessing to both the project and the Working Group which they had tentatively assembled. As Chairman of the SBRS he enjoyed a productive partnership with his President, Mary Briggs, and they had already overseen two other important publications, the *Selected Supplement* (1990) updating the *Sussex Plant Atlas* of 1980 and *The Sussex Rare Plant Register of Scarce and*

*Threatened Vascular plants, Charophytes, Bryophytes and Lichens* (2001). By the time the *Flora of Sussex* appeared in February 2018 Rod was resident in a nursing home in Fishbourne: he was delighted to see the fruits of the long labour and on his regular visits Howard Matcham read him portions of the text, starting with *Hieracium*, that tricky genus with which Rod had done combat for a number of years.

Roderick Carter Stern was first encouraged to take an interest in natural history by his mother on walks across Wimbledon Common from the family home. The Sterns were comfortably off and essential equipment on the annual stay on the Isle of Wight included their two maids and the canteen of silver cutlery. These and other holidays introduced the young Roderick to a wider range of species but it was a war-time break from the bombing in Killin, Perth in 1943 which brought two special plants he would never forget – *Saxifraga aizoides* and *Parnassia palustris*.

Rod was educated privately, notably at Kings College School, Wimbledon and Radley College. At the former the Biology master ‘Bolly’ Barker was an important influence; at the latter Rod remembered fondly excursions with friends to explore the flora of the surrounding countryside. The Biological trail led Rod on to read Forestry at Worcester College Oxford (1946-50).

National Service in Egypt provided exotic specimens for Rod’s herbarium and birds for the lifetime list he had begun at the age of fourteen, and then he returned to work with the Forestry Commission in Wales. Based in Machynlleth, Rod learned the Welsh names of trees so as to be able to communicate with his workforce – something which rebounded upon him when the men automatically assumed him fluent! While in Wales he won the cup for the best athlete at the Civil Service Sports at Aberystwyth four years running (no pun intended). A love of sport fostered in school remained with Rod throughout his life, particularly golf, sailing, squash and tennis; he played the last of these well into his retirement.

In 1968 Rod transferred to London Headquarters and took the opportunity to join the London Natural History Society and the Surrey Flora Committee. He was befriended by Joyce Smith, Jack Gardiner and Ted Wallace of Surrey who encouraged him to concentrate his attentions on bryophytes: thus Rod began to form the important bryophyte herbarium which is now in the care of the Natural History Museum, London. Ever willing to share his knowledge with others, Rod later went on to nurture

a most apt pupil, Howard Matcham. Longer established members of the Society will know that Howard first became an international authority on bryophytes before acquiring equal eminence in the worlds of micro-fungi and phycology.

In partnership with Francis Rose, Brian Coppins and Howard Matcham, Rod produced the *Atlas of Sussex Mosses, Liverworts and Lichens* in 1991; from the fruits of (largely) his own work there came ‘A bryophyte flora of South Wiltshire’ in *Journal of Bryology* (2001) and *An Atlas of South Hampshire Bryophytes* (2010). He was a member of the British Bryological Society until his death and had served as Conservation Officer for twelve years and Member of Council for fourteen. It was never enough for Rod merely to be a member of a society, his innate idea of service always prompted him to take on responsibility.

After his first marriage collapsed in Wales Rod was balancing his career with looking after two sons. Setting up home in Yapton, West Sussex he was introduced to the dynamic Vanessa by match-making friends which resulted in matrimony and a new house in Fishbourne named by them Botany Bay. On their honeymoon Vanessa proved herself by collecting for her new husband a specimen of a *Sphagnum* from a decidedly quaggy bog. She became Rod’s unofficial botanical Secretary and PA, and she also lured him further afield to enjoy the floras of parts of the Mediterranean, Australia and the USA.

Not only the SBRS benefited from Rod’s time and expertise: he was elected to the Council of the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation (Sussex Wildlife Trust) and served on its Scientific and Conservation Committees. At Woods Mill Henri Brocklebank is keen to emphasise the contribution Rod made to the fledgling Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. Rod was also a member of the Conservation Association of Botanical Societies, serving as Chairman in 1989-90; and then he was instrumental in setting up Plantlife, elected to its Board from 1992 until 1995. In 1999 he was presented with the Plantlife Award for Outstanding Contribution to Plant Conservation by the President, David Bellamy. Although we are naturally dwelling on what Rod did outside work, we should reference his successful career; in particular some important papers on Sycamore helped to secure him the honour of Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. The final phase of Rod’s career with the Forestry Commission saw him able happily to combine his professional interest in growing trees for timber with his personal passion for conservation.





Rod cuts the ribbon to open Plantlife's Furnace Meadow Reserve at Ebernoe in 1994 (photo: Nick Sturt)

Rod's proficiency in bryology should not obscure his expertise with higher plants – and in a lifetime of botany he had seen an extremely large proportion of the vascular plants of the British Isles. His study of the genus *Hieracium* has already been mentioned but it prompts two observations: firstly, that all the plants which he encountered were of a real interest to him, and secondly, that he was always ready for a challenge. Mike Shaw has made good use of Rod's previous work on *Hieracium* and holds his herbarium specimens.

As a man Rod was by nature reluctant to give a quick off-the-cuff answer and he could appear reticent. He seemed most at home in woodland where his all-round knowledge of natural history and keen ear for birdsong were shared with anyone lucky enough to be at his side. His quiet sense of humour could be overlooked. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, as he was delivering his speech to a large gathering in Fishbourne Village Hall, the table behind him caught fire: the candles on the cake had set the paper tablecloth alight and flames were beginning to leap alarmingly: Rod was unaware of the drama taking place only a metre or so behind him and was orating in his usual thoughtful, unhurried way. For several minutes the audience sat riveted: at last several individuals dashed past Rod – who was still in full flow – and tackled the blaze, a task not aided by the non-extinguishable candles which Vanessa had supplied. Afterwards Rod, with one of his characteristic light laughs, remarked that he had noticed his audience seemed rather more attentive than usual.

Swimming was a particular joy and whenever a field meeting was within striking distance of the sea or fresh water at some stage Rod would discreetly disappear to enjoy ten minutes' energetic crawl, emerging refreshed and ready for further serious botany. Rod invariably used the word 'work' for his botanical activities and for him it was the most delightful occupation imaginable. Those who studied plants beside Rod found this delight infectious.

## Sovereign Harbour (or the Crumbles in old money)

Matthew Berry

For most people Eastbourne's Sovereign Harbour is a good place to take a pleasant Sunday afternoon stroll, or to indulge in a little relaxed shopping. For a very lucky few, it is also a safe place to anchor one's yacht. But there is plenty to occupy the botanist as I hope to demonstrate. Indeed, I would argue that in terms of habitat, it competes admirably with other more obviously wildlife-friendly settings. Before going any further, I should briefly touch on what might still be a sensitive subject - that for some Sovereign Harbour was and always will be, in defiance of the facts, the Crumbles, an extensive area of vegetated shingle ridges and flooded gravel pits which were as obviously good for wildlife as those at Rye Harbour and Dungeness.

Let me cheat a little bit to start with and commence our virtual walk to the west of the Harbour at Sovereign Park. There is an 'enclosed' area here, set aside for picnics, which has an interesting more or less calcicolous flora: *Viola hirta* (Hairy Violet), *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), *Clinopodium vulgare* (Wild Basil), *Origanum vulgare* (Marjoram), *Veronica chamaedrys* (Germander Speedwell), *Asperula cynanchica* (Squincywort), *Cruciata laevipes* (Crosswort), *Carex flacca* (Glaucous Sedge), *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid) (possibly a more recent arrival). I have wondered if it might match some little known but entirely natural vegetative community, but this doesn't seem to be the case. Although the site looks pebbly, I suppose chalk must have been brought in when the Park was first landscaped, and that chalky material still lies very close to the surface – none the less it is shocking to think that what must have been prime habitat was raided for such a purpose. Is there a better explanation that I am missing?

We magically pick up our walk on the footway at the western side of the outer harbour, where we might be diverted for a time by the Common Seals which can occasionally be seen basking on the associated shingle beach. We follow the wide curve of the outer harbour and then turn left, down a steep bank and past a residents-only single-storey car park. We then follow the edge of the marina until we reach the bridge which connects the sections of footway between the Piazza and Havana Court. The first plant you will notice at your feet here is *Polycarpon tetraphyllum* (Four-leaved Allseed). Young plants can be very inconspicuous, but more mature ones make stiff, highly branched miniscule bushes which are much more noticeable. When first found at



Sovereign Harbour by SBRS member Roy Wells in 2009, it was fairly restricted in extent – not so now when it is hard to find a crack or a bare area that doesn't host it, although it doesn't seem to have penetrated into the more open, less sheltered spots and perhaps won't. If we stay on this footway, turning corners where necessary and always keeping the water of the marina in view, we should also see bird-sown *Leycesteria formosa* (Himalayan Honeysuckle) at the bases of the walls on our left and scatterings of *Lobelia erinus* (Garden Lobelia), that very familiar neon-flowered garden escape.

Just before the footway runs out and delivers us into the residential tidiness of Dayton Quay, there is a strip of paving on our right which holds an established population of *Euphorbia maculata* (Spotted Spurge). Each plant covers a very small area and lies completely flat to the ground. The tiny almost oblong leaves of this population invariably bear a black slot-like mark in their centres, the “spot” of ‘maculata’, but this need not always be so.

Now we reach that part of Sovereign Harbour which is made up of Atlantic Drive and the Waterfront, the latter not a long abandoned film set, but for the casual visitor a small collection of shops, cafés and restaurants, and for the botanist an interconnecting jumble of footpaths, ramps, steps and terraces. This is a good moment to pause and make a more general point. It is a curious feature of Sovereign Harbour that what could be called “marsh plants” are to be found here and there in seemingly inappropriate habitat. *Stachys palustris* (Marsh Woundwort) in flower beds just to the east of the Sovereign Harbour Retail Park; *Rorippa palustris* (Marsh Yellow-cress) on the edge of a terrace outside the Harvester restaurant at the Waterfront; *Myosoton aquaticum* (Water Chickweed) along a wall base, also at the Waterfront; *Juncus articulatus* (Jointed Rush) between pavement slabs by the Piazza. Is this continuity or coincidence? After all Pevensy Levels are not far away even today and in the past such species as *Galium uliginosum* (Fen Bedstraw) and *Groenlandia densa* (Opposite-leaved Pondweed) were recorded from “Crumbles tetrads”. On the other hand, I have certainly observed *Myosoton aquaticum* (Water Chickweed) eschewing its typical wetland habitats to grow as a weed in apparently dry ruderal ones. And perhaps this also applies to one or more of the other three species. Still in Atlantic Drive, we pass an area used by fisherman to store their nets and lobster pots, and then behind a boat repair and maintenance yard, taking care not to drift accidentally into the adjacent cycle path. Atlantic Drive becomes Harbour Quay, the area on our left soon to be dominated by a large whale-backed ridge

of shingle. This man-made formation can't have been in existence for very long but is already quite ‘scrubbed up’ in places. Among other species, it has been colonised by *Calamagrostis epigejos* (Wood Small-reed), a grass particularly associated with damp open areas within woodland, but which can occur in a variety of other habitats ranging from coastal dunes to railway embankments, and here it is the dominant species in a low-lying dip or furrow on the south side of the ridge. The flower heads of this population start off purple and become wheat-coloured later on. *Festuca brevipila* (Hard Fescue) is an established alien on road verges in this area.

We cross a busy two-lane road and leave Harbour Quay behind us. Pacific Drive is botanically rich with broadly three types of habitat: on our left stony ground and sandy banks, and on our right relatively infertile sandy road verges. The flora consists of a pleasing combination of native species and non-native and the following list is far from exhaustive: *Ranunculus parviflorus* (Small-flowered Buttercup), *Cerastium diffusum* (Sea Mouse-ear), *Malva alcea* (Geater Musk-mallow), *M. moschata* (Musk-mallow), *Trifolium arvense* (Hare's-foot Clover), *Euphorbia exigua* (Dwarf Spurge), *E. myrsinites* (Glaucous Spurge), *E. platyphyllos* (Broad-leaved Spurge), *E. cyparissias* (Cypress Spurge), *Geranium sanguineum* (Bloody Cranesbill), *Myosotis ramosissima* (Early Forget-me-not), *Verbena rigida* (Slender Vervain), *Verbascum virgatum* (Twiggy Mullein), *Kickxia elatine* (Sharp-leaved Fluellen), *K. spuria* (Round-leaved Fluellen), *Galium parisiense* (Wall Bedstraw), *Poa humilis* (Spreading Meadow-grass), *Polypogon monspeliensis* (Annual Beard-grass), *Allium trifoliatum* (Hirsute Garlic), *Asphodeline lutea* (Yellow Asphodel). Some of the plants mentioned in this list might not have survived the recent housing development, which was accelerated over the autumn and winter and must now be nearing completion.

The sandy road verges provide excellent habitat for *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Stork's-bill), and where the nutrient levels are somewhat higher and the grass cover somewhat thicker, *Petroselinum segetum* (Corn Parsley) and *Torilis nodosa* (Knotted Hedge-parsley) as well. The first plant of *Erodium moschatum* (Musk Stork's-bill) for Pacific Drive has also been seen recently in such higher nutrient turf.

Before leaving this particular stretch of Pacific Drive, two other plants deserve special mention. On a low shingle bank delimiting the southern edge of a now defunct car park, a short way to the east of the Medical Centre, there can be found a little *Vicia lutea* (Yellow Vetch), with its relatively large, solitary,

unstaked, cream-coloured flowers, followed later by hairy seed pods. It is rather erratic in its appearances. At the far eastern end of this same straight section of Pacific Drive, near what is now the entrance of a new housing estate, there is also a single plant of a white-flowered (yellowish in bud) form of *Vicia sativa* ssp. *segetalis*. I have never seen this variant anywhere else.

It was once possible to continue walking eastwards, leaving Pacific Drive, and take a short cut across waste ground into Old Martello Road. To get onto that road now we would have to double back on ourselves, pick up the A259 and then take the appropriate right hand turn. It is worth doing though and, if you make your foray in the month of May, you might be fortunate enough to see the distinctive culms of *Poa bulbosa* var. *vivipara* (Bulbous Meadow-grass) on its eastern verge.

Pacific Drive is also the first place where you will see *Cynosurus echinatus* (Rough Dog's-tail), a Mediterranean grass established here for many years, its very compact and slightly lopsided flower heads a familiar companion from now on wherever we pass open stony ground. Further along Pacific Drive, where the road straightens out after something of a hairpin bend, there is what was once an interesting open area on the right which had *Cerastium semidecandrum* (Little Mouse-ear), *Poa compressa* (Flattened Meadow-grass) and naturalised *Silene coronaria* (Rose Campion). In a ditch close to the pavement there once stood a bush of *Prunus persica* (Peach), grown up, presumably, from the spot where a discarded peach stone had landed. This small area, which I'm sure is that shown in the photograph on p. 49 of *The Flora of Sussex* (2018), has now been built on. On ground immediately to the west/south-west of Port Moresby Place, as the new address is known, plants of *Puccinellia distans* ssp. *distans* (Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass), *Suaeda maritima* (Annual Sea-blite) and *Sagina maritima* (Sea Pearlwort) can still be found.

We turn another sharp bend and at the first opportunity leave Pacific Drive and cut between the houses to get onto the footpath which stretches along the northern edge of the beach all the way from the German's to the harbour mouth. The same pleasing combination of (slightly different) native and non-native species as we saw on Pacific Drive and elsewhere also occurs here, and once again the

following list is far from exhaustive: *Lathyrus latifolius* (Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea), *Melilotus indicus* (Small Melilot), *Medicago polymorpha* (Toothed Medick), *Trifolium hybridum* (Alsike Clover), *T. ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover), *T. resupinatum* (Reversed Clover), *T. scabrum* (Rough Clover), *T. striatum* (Knotted Clover), *Linum bienne* (Pale Flax), *Pastinaca sativa* ssp. *sylvestris* (Wild Parsnip), *Catapodium maritimum* (Sea Fern-grass), *Cordyline australis* (Cabbage-palm), *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid). All the plants on this list should be secure, as surely the most rapacious developer would think twice before applying to build on a beach...

Some way to the west of Martello Tower no. 64 and a good way east of the bouldery eyesore that is the Breakwater, just off the footpath on the beach itself, there is an intriguing population of a brome species very close to *Anisantha diandra* (Great Brome), but which according to the expert opinion of Dr T.A. Cope of Kew is strictly speaking not determinable! This might simply be because the plants are ill-grown for some reason.

Instead of walking straight ahead and onto the promontory which juts into the harbour mouth, with the Breakwater projecting from it at a right angle into the Channel, we take a sharp right in the direction of the Hamilton Quay roundabout. Before we get to the roundabout we take a sharp left and walk the footway between the apartment blocks of Midland Quay and the outer harbour, heading for the locks which separate the outer harbour from the marina itself; a stretch which unusually for our walk is rather dull botanically, giving us time to lament the species which had to be omitted from this account, *Conyza bonariensis* (Argentine Fleabane), *Epilobium lanceolatum* (Spear-leaved Willowherb)... We cross the locks, examine the ground on our right for *Trifolium fragiferum* (Strawberry Clover) and push on. Now we stand again on the western edge of the outer harbour, our virtual tour concluded. Have I convinced you of the botanical merits of the place? Enough for you to try the walk, or a variation of it, for yourselves? If you go early in the season, you might be able to re-find *Vicia lathyroides* (Spring Vetch) – last seen 1993 by D.L. Vinall. If you go later, in mid-summer, you might solve 'the mystery of the Martello *Anisantha*'!

## Notable records 2018

Selected by Matthew Berry and Nick Sturt from the many interesting records received.

### West Sussex VC13

Species	Location	Tetrad	Status	Comments	Rec
<i>Arum italicum</i> ssp. <i>neglectum</i>	St John the Baptist, Findon	TQ10E	N	Patch by N wall of churchyard.	FA
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	West Chiltington Rec. Ground	TQ01Z	N	Damp ground in N part.	FA
<i>Bunium bulbocastanum</i>	Perching Hill	TQ21K	U	First county record. See President's Message.	SBRS
<i>Festuca filiformis</i>	Carron Lane Cemetery, Midhurst	SU82U	N	Det DES; also present: <i>Nardus stricta</i> , <i>Thymus pulegioides</i>	SBRS
<i>Galium pumilum</i>	Wolstonbury Hill	TQ21W	N	3 patches of this rare native, first discovered at this site in 1893	TAL
<i>Gypsophila muralis</i>	Brandyhole Copse, Chichester	SU80N	C	One plant, probably the result of dumped garden waste.	N&ES
<i>Juncus conglomeratus</i> var. <i>subuliflorus</i>	Graffham	SU91J	N	This var. is new to vc13 (but not vc14: see <i>Flora of Sussex</i> p356).	SBRS
<i>Morus alba</i>	Chichester Canal	SU80L	U	2 young trees, possibly planted. (A few weeks later Sue met with a mature tree in a hedgerow in Pulborough.)	DES
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Amberley Museum	TQ10F	N	4 plants in low vegetation – not reported here for some years.	DMD
<i>Orobanche minor</i> var. <i>flava</i>	Westhamnett	SU80Y	N	Estimated c.20,000 plants.	HWM
<i>Salvia verbenaca</i>	Rustington	TQ00F	E	The Crescent. Established over 10 m2.	DMD
<i>Scilla bithynica</i>	West Dean church	SU81R	E	Extensive patch in car-park.	DNE

### East Sussex VC14

Species	Location	Tetrad	Status	Comments	Rec
<i>Himantoglossum hircinum</i>	Polegate	TQ50Y	N	New site for nationally rare, notoriously sporadic species.	Colin Boyd
<i>Baldellia ranunculoides</i>	Pevensey Levels	TQ60D	N	First Levels record for many years and new tetrad record for rare Sx species.	EVJ
<i>Scleranthus annuus</i> ssp. <i>polycarpus</i>	Lydd	TQ91Z	N	First VC14 record since 1999. First Sx record for any subspecies.	EMC/ JVC/ JAR
<i>Carex nigra</i>	Pevensey Levels	TQ60D	N	New site record	EVJ/ MBE
<i>Digitalis lutea</i>	Lewes/Houndean Bottom	TQ40E	Introd.	Very few Sx records	HUTC
<i>Hieracium cheriense</i>	Crawley Down	TQ33N	N		MMS
<i>Hieracium cheriense</i>	Sedlescombe	TQ71U	N	First VC14 record for many years	MMS
<i>Datura inoxia</i>	Newhaven	TQ40K	Introd.	First Sx record.	MBE
<i>Thladiantha dubia</i>	Newhaven	TQ40K	Introd.	First British record.	MBE
<i>Lens culinaris</i>	Eastbourne	TQ50V	Introd.	First Sx record since 1905.	MBE
<i>Plantago afra</i>	Hastings	TQ81F	Introd.	First confirmed Sx record.	JAR
x <i>Agropogon lutosus</i>	Newhaven	TQ40K		<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> x <i>Polypogon monspeliensis</i> . First Sx record since 1985.	MBE
<i>Ruppia cirrhosa</i>	Normans Bay	TQ60X	N	New site for rare Sx species.	EVJ/ MWIL



**Recorders' Initials**

DES Sue Denness  
DMD David Donovan  
DNE Dawn Nelson  
EMC Ellen Campbell  
EVJ Evan Jones  
FA Frances Abraham  
HUTC Nevil Hutchinson  
HWM Howard Matcham

JAR Jacqueline Rose  
JVC Judy Clark  
MBE Matthew Berry  
MMS Mike Shaw  
MWIL Martin Willing  
N&ES Nick & Liz Sturt  
SBRS Sussex Botanical Recording Society  
TAL Trevor Lording