

Thorncombe Village Trust **NEWS**

THE KINGCOMBE ESTATE.

JUNE 1989.

Due to illness Richard Jennings, the Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation Reserves Manager, was unable to give the talk which followed the AGM on the 11 May. In his place at short notice we were fortunate to be able to welcome Mrs Elton, DTNC Conservation Officer, who is responsible for recording biological specimens on the Trust's 40 reserves amounting to about 2,500 acres.

Mrs Elton traced the history of the Kingcombe Estate, which after many generations in the same family, was sold in 1986 to a Londoner who, a year later, put the 600 acres of farmland and cottages back on the market for sale by auction in 15 lots. Much of the land, already scheduled as SSSI, was of outstanding interest to conservationists because it had escaped modern intensive farming methods and had retained a rich wild life. The DTNC therefore launched an urgent appeal and received a generous response from donors not only in the UK but also abroad. As a result, 350 acres of the most interesting lots were bought and are now being managed so far as possible on non-intensive lines, with the object of preserving the special character and richness of the wildlife, some of which is attributable to the wide geological variations in the area. Mrs Elton showed a range of slides to illustrate the condition of hedgerows, old tracks, and field patterns which still coincide with those recorded in the Tithe Map of the 1840's and probably date from mediaeval times. Due to neglect, many of the old hedgerows are beyond laying and this has necessitated the erection of much stock-proof fencing given by the Duchy of Cornwall. The damp nature of the Hooke valley meadows causes red-water disease in cattle and the Trust has recently bought-through sponsors - a small herd of disease resistant Galloways from which it plans to breed. There is also a flock of Beulah sheep.

At Kingcombe itself, old farm buildings have been converted to house a small field-studies school. Additionally much of the Estate is accessible to the public, and it is planned to open a car park adjacent to the Crewkerne - Maiden Newton road. About 25 members attended the talk which was followed by a Bring and Buy and Raffle.

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DID YOU SEE.....?

To country dwellers at least, the Cuckoo and the Swallow are probably the best recognised heralds of Spring, and their arrival early in April is recorded at least mentally by many who know few other birds. A Cuckoo on the 2 April near the Thorns and a Swallow in Holditch on the 7 April were certainly among the first in the Parish this year, both dates being fairly typical. Sadly, the swallow is declining and numbers reaching the South West have been halved in the last 20 years for reasons that are largely man-made either directly or indirectly. Happily, the house-martin, the swallow's near relative, seems to be holding its own though local decreases have been recorded in Devon.

Readers should note that it is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 to destroy house-martins' nests during the nesting season. The nuisance caused by droppings can be allayed by fixing a shelf (a seed tray will do) a few feet beneath the nest.

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TALK IN ST.MARY'S SCHOOL.

Members of the Trust are invited to attend a talk on 6 June at St.Mary's School, Thorncombe. The Trust is sponsoring the talk by Mrs P Mills who heads 'WATCH', the Junior Branch of the Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation. If you are interested in attending please ring Archie Hunter - Winsham 30374 - for details of time.

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LADY FIRTH - MEMORIES OF 50 YEARS IN THORNCOMBE.

Lady Firth will be the Trusts speaker at the next bi-monthly meeting to be held on 12 July 1989 in the Village Hall, Thorncombe at 8.00pm.

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MEMBERSHIP.

It has been decided that membership fees shall remain unchanged for a further year and it will be much appreciated if members will kindly pay their subscriptions to Derrick Comley at Turnpike Cottage as soon as possible.

SUMMARY OF CHAIRMAN'S REPORT A.G.M. 10 MAY 1989.

Mr Hawkes resigned as Chairman in March due to pressure of work. The Trust is most grateful to him for all he did, especially in the past as founder-Chairman.

Most people would probably agree that the past year has been of particular significance to all conservationists and we must all adjust our ways before it is too late; the preservation of the environment figures prominently in the Trust's constitution and aims, and on a local level the character of the village and its surroundings are of immediate importance. In England everyone is encouraged to participate in planning matters. If, due to the thoroughness of our research or the cogency of our arguments, we win this or that argument, so be it. But we must continue this work. Remember, we function under the same planning authority which has permitted the suburban development of Salwayash on a skyline site in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The current Structure Plan laid guidelines for planning decisions. Under this plan Thorncombe was, in 1983, defined as a priority village with expansion of from 50-150 houses. When in Spring 1986 the Higher Farm application was published neither the Parish Council nor the rest of the village appreciated what had happened in the Structure Plan, and there was general consternation. In August 1987 the Chief Planning Officer undertook a local Planning Appraisal which stressed the inadequacies of the overloaded sewerage system and the limitations imposed by the local road network. Chiefly for these reasons the CPO decided that the expansion of the village should, up to 1996, be limited to 50 houses, subject to the provision of adequate sewage treatment. No decision was taken on the Higher Farm application and there followed a Public Enquiry held in April 1988. In July the inspector's findings were published and the application refused. The Inspector made a close study of the village and its surroundings and made observations which cannot be ignored when future applications are being considered. It is significant that these were repeated by the CPO at the Parish Council AGM last month. These points also influenced the conditions for the approval of the small industrial development at Millers Pits, where landscaping and the planting of 400 trees should minimize the impact of such a development on a landscape of outstanding quality. The Trust approved the scheme.

In 1987 in the local Planning Appraisal, a village envelope was drawn, including an expansion of the village opposite the Village Hall in Chard Street. A potential developer had submitted a scheme to build about 70 houses, but later the application was withdrawn. The Trust was unhappy about the nature of this development and the method of sewage disposal, it is also concerned that the good social mix of the village highlighted by the RDA Survey should be maintained.

The Trust's Committee has always preferred that any expansion should take place between High Street and the Playing Fields, and last month the outline application for 38 houses in that area gained the support of both the Parish Council and the Trust. This plan would enable the existing sewage works to cope with the new houses and existing users. A revised Chard Street application has been received, but no details of the sewage system have been divulged, though it would appear that the new plant would be for the Chard Street development only. Both schemes will be considered by the Western Area Planning Committee and the outcome will be of lasting significance for the village.

Alarmed by the absence of young trees in the local roadside hedges the Trust has begun a detailed analysis which shows that while some local landowners are providing a succession of trees, others are not. Many hedges are being flailed to such an extent that their value as a wildlife habitat is further reduced. We have planted 14 trees; the Trust buys the supports and the County Council the trees. Next season we hope to plant more with further promised financial help from the County Council.

The Trust is anxious that local children learn to appreciate their surroundings and this aim is enthusiastically supported by the school's headmaster, Mr Tatlock. A speaker from WATCH, the junior branch of the Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation is visiting the school in June. The Trust is also donating £20 to help with the purchase of equipment for the current school natural history project.

At our bi-monthly meetings we try to cover a wide range of subjects. For the coming year we have booked speakers on Fossils, The Marshwood Vale and the history of house and cottage building in Dorset and we hope that these activities reflect the aims of the Trust and look for your continued support.

P. Moreland.