

## ON HEARING THE FIRST CUCKOO IN SPRING.....

With apologies to Frederick Delius, I heard my first cuckoo in Marden last night (10<sup>th</sup> May) singing for a mate at around 9 p.m. The worry is though that this song is getting harder to hear as cuckoos are in serious trouble, we have lost half our cuckoos over the last 20 years.

“My” cuckoo will have just returned from wintering in or around the Congo, we know this from work carried out by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) who have fitted radio



collars using GPS technology to track their migration. Five cuckoos were initially tagged in Norfolk, and one named Chris (after Chris Packham) continued transmitting for 5 years until the signal was lost in Chad in 2015. It is interesting to note that they do a round trip, taking 4 months to travel south generally via Italy on the way out but coming back in 2 months via West Africa then north via Spain and France, but still crossing the

Sahara twice! Cuckoos arrive in Britain in late April and early May and many leave again during June. Of course once they have laid their eggs in the nests of unsuspecting Dunnocks, Meadow Pipits or Reed Warblers etc, they have nothing else to do! This means that a Cuckoo like Chris spend roughly 47% of his time in Africa, 38% on migration and just 15% in Britain! The BTO have now tracked around 50 cuckoos and you can see where those still active are at: <http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking>. Of course the Congo is not the safest place to spend your winter and crossing the Sahara is tough, then they must run the gamut of the Mediterranean hunters who will shoot anything that flies, so it is perhaps not surprising that we are losing them.

And sadly it's not just the cuckoos that are in trouble. Turtle Doves are in serious decline and Curlews have also been put on the “Red Data List” of threatened species. The UK supports around 68,000 pairs of curlews, around a quarter of the world's population, but as for the cuckoo we have lost around 50% of the population over the last 20 years. The haunting burbling call of the Curlew epitomises the Call of the Wild, but on a trip to Norfolk last year, I did not hear a single call over the mudflats. Curlews live on the coast, but breed on upland moors, e.g. the Peak District, but “improvement” of pastures for cattle does not help them. Comical Puffins are also in trouble and on the Red Data List, there are still good populations but they are not breeding due to lack of sand eels, their preferred food. This decline is most likely caused by global warming.

Still it's not all bad news, some bird species are flourishing. Avocets, the RSPB signature bird were rare 30 years ago, but can now be seen all along the north Kent coast. Buzzards are common, and I have seen them circling over Marden from our back garden. Red Kites are spreading east from their reintroduction sites in Wales and the Chilterns and have been seen in Marden. Ravens are back above the cliffs at Dover, but we have lost the Kittiwakes. Goldfinches are common on our birdfeeders now, but we are losing sparrows. Lapwings (another red listed species) still nest around Bunches Lake in Marden, and there is another site close to the proposed KM275 footpath diversion described in the last Parish Pump. So all is not lost for the birds, but we do need to work to protect them. *Steve McArragher*

# The Parish Pump

## THE JOURNAL OF THE MARDEN SOCIETY - JUNE 2016

With regret we announce the death of Mike Judd on 11<sup>th</sup> May. Mike was a longstanding member of the Marden Society and had an enormous knowledge of Marden life and people. He will be greatly missed.

Our **SUMMER OUTING** on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June is a visit to **Lullingstone Castle and the World Garden** (many of you will remember Tom Hart-Dyke speaking to the Horticultural Society a few years back). The guided tour of the castle, gardens, and the church is just £10, and will take about 2.5 to 3 hours. The Tour is booked for 2.00pm so we should leave Marden at 11.30am by cars from the car park. You can get refreshments there or take a picnic. To reserve a place please see either myself or a member of the committee, cash or cheque payable to Marden Society please. As we shall be sharing cars, perhaps you could indicate whether you can drive and/or take passengers or if you would like a lift. Mo Clayton: 01622 831529, 7 Jewell Grove, Marden, TN12 9EB, [tillergirl2913@aol.com](mailto:tillergirl2913@aol.com)

Our next Evening meeting is 7.30 on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> September in the Vestry Hall when **Wilf Lower** will give a talk entitled “**Under Billowing Sail**”

## MARCH TALK – HERE COME THE VIKINGS by Imogen Corrigan

Despite the competition from The Lady In the Van being shown in the Church, there was a good audience for Imogen's talk, which was amusing as well as informative. This group of Northern people made a huge impact on the future shape of Europe. The Finnish and Swedish Rus tribes headed north to form Russia, while the other Nordic races headed for Greenland, Iceland, even Newfoundland, and as far south as Constantinople, and of course the group of islands which we now know as Great Britain. They sailed down the Seine in France, forming trading centres, and earning a fearsome reputation as fierce pirates wherever they went.



Their leaders were buried with goods for the afterlife, which has revealed a great deal about their culture and beliefs as these graves have been discovered and excavated. Their leaders were given names like Harald Bluetooth (after whom the wireless network standard is named), Eric Bloodaxe, Ivar the Boneless, Cnut (Canute) the Great and his father Sweyn

Forkbeard and other descriptive definitions. This makes them easier and much more graphic than Henry I through to VIII!

The women had to be strong and resilient for they were left, sometimes for many years, in charge of farms and to bring up the family single handed. Divorce for women was not difficult, and they could keep their share of the property – one delightful reason for divorcing your husband could be that his shirt was too effeminate! Working magic was strictly a female occupation – any man who practised magic would be accused of homosexuality, which was punishable by death.



Etiquette and honour were paramount. Men who died in battle were honoured. The Vikings traded with Britain long before they invaded. The warriors gave their swords names, such as their reliance on these weapons. The swords were often broken in two upon the death of the owner, to make sure no-one else could use them. The horns on helmets were only used for ceremonial occasions – certainly in battle a horn on a helmet would be too easy to take hold of by an enemy.

The first British area to be invaded was the Island of Lindisfarne in Northumberland. It was not invaded because of its Christianity but because it was known to have riches, was undefended, and could easily be defended in its turn by any invading armies. In time their raids extended from the Orkneys and Shetlands further south until their control was almost complete. With up to 250 ships capable of arriving at any one time, resistance was difficult to achieve.

Imogen painted a fascinating picture of these invaders, and their impact on the lives of all they came into contact with.

*Mo Clayton*

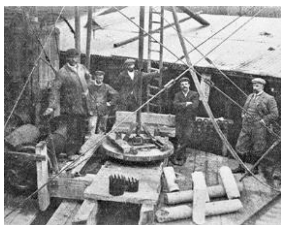
#### APRIL TALK: THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY IN KENT by Jim Davies

Jim had been a miner in the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent for 33 years, until it closed in 1987 after the Miners' Strike.

Coal was already being mined in France and Belgium so it seemed likely that the rich seams would spread across under the Channel. And so coal was first discovered in Kent in 1890 during borings for the first Channel Tunnel.. Arthur Burr was a speculator who formed the first Kent coal company in 1896 to build the colliery at Shakespeare Cliff with a maximum depth of 1,600 feet. The Colliery was supposed to cost £50,000, with the aim that it would be



producing 3,000 tons of coal per day by 1900. In the twenty-two years in which Shakespeare Colliery was operating, it cost more than £1 million and never produced any commercial coal!



Irish labourers were brought over to sink the shafts - this was the hardest job of all and the "sinkers" were a tough breed. They had a poor reputation with the locals which spread to all

miners, who had to be brought in from all over the country to extract the coal.

Accidents were frequent, 8 drowned at Shakespeare, 5 in Betteshanger and there were also explosions in other collieries. Work at the coal face was hard and dangerous, with women and children also working underground. In the early 20th century many girls first went into service before returning to their homes to work at the pits on the surface.

Britain was in the midst of a post war recession after WW1, with the Great Depression only a few years away. At least 17 collieries were planned for East Kent, but only 10 were opened, and only four were successful long term, Snowdown, Tilmanstone, Chislet and Betteshanger. 147,000 miners were needed, which caused hostility from local residents, due to the poor reputation of the "Sinkers". So housing for miners was built away from existing towns and villages, and also some distance from the coal face. Pubs might have 'No dogs, No Miners' signs, accommodation advertisements carried texts such as 'No miners'. The communities became self-sufficient, with churches, schools, social clubs, sports activities, brass bands and choirs (like the Snowdown Choir heard recently in the Church). There was a tradition of taking care of young and old with outings and entertainments, including an Annual Inter Colliery Gala day with tug of war, children's games and other activities.



By 1934 pithead baths began to be installed – before that miners had to walk still 'pitblack' to their homes, where it was hoped their wives had heated water and filled the portable baths – several miners in one family meant the last one in got very dirty water. Canteens and baths were financed by the Management and the miners themselves. Before the NHS in 1947 there were insurance schemes to cater for dependent wives and children but striking miners could be sacked with loss therefore of health cover.

Railways were built to transport the coal to Dover Harbour and roll-on roll-off ferries were built at Richborough to take trains loaded with coal. Underground locomotives were introduced by the late 1950s, and by 1966 £4.50 per shift was the agreed countrywide wage level. With stronger roofing materials the mines were becoming safer. Mechanisation was being used more and more so the working environment was much improved.

The last Kent mine closed in 1989, after the Miners' Strike which created much bad feeling within the mining community. This was one year short of 100 years after coal was first discovered in Kent. There is coal all over East Kent and much more still lies there.

A Visitors' Centre is being opened at Betteshanger (formerly Fowlmead) Country Park in 2017 so I reckon the 2017 Marden Society Summer Outing should be there! Thanks to Catherine for the mining artefacts she brought along. And a big thank you to Jim Davies and his pal Jim for making the journey up from Deal.

*Mo Clayton*