

# Living History

## NEWSLETTER MARCH 2008

### **Nature Jottings**

A rare sighting of a Snow Bunting in Croft Crescent, Yarpole during January. The bird was about five inches long with a short bill and a very distinctive call. It was seen during a period of high winds so the bird may have been blown away from its normal winter areas further north and east in Britain. It stayed for several days before disappearing.

Primroses were seen in flower in Leys Lane by the end of January. During the first week in February blackbirds were very active and obviously getting ready to mate.



### **The ‘Mistletoe Tree’.**

In winter, this tree – seen from the shop car park about 100 yards to the right - looks as if it is in heavy leaf but closer inspection shows it to be a very large standard cooking-apple tree with a huge crop of mistletoe.

A hemi-parasitic plant, the mistletoe (*Viscum Album*) also grows on poplars and limes. It is hemi-parasitic as it has green leaves which it can use to photosynthesise but it relies on the host tree for water and mineral nutrients.

## **New Footbridge**

At the end of 2007 the footbridge to Ladymeadow over the stream at the bottom of the village in Yarpole collapsed after the supports had been eroded. It was originally a single plank bridge but is now much improved and is very stable with a strong handrail.



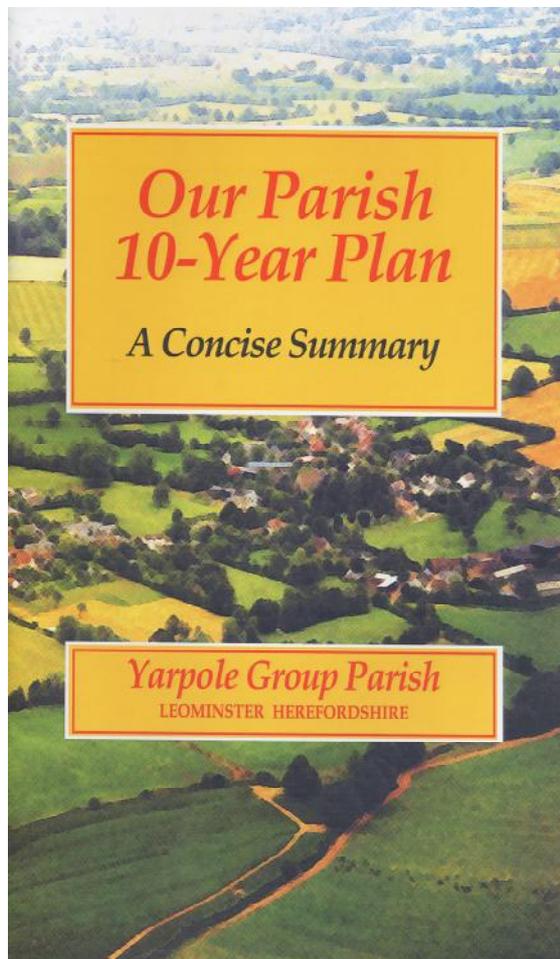
## **The Old Gatehouse**

The report in the December 2007 edition of the *Newsletter* showed that the Gatehouse roof had been made wind and weatherproof. However, some ridge tiles are missing and it has been noticed that jackdaws are roosting or nesting in the building. We have continued to monitor its condition and are in communication with various agencies concerning its upkeep.

## The Parish Plan

The Parish Plan has been published and a copy of the concise summary was sent to all households in the parish.

However, a few copies of the full report were also made available with colour pictures, detailed tables, analysis of questionnaires and appendices. A copy is available in the library at Yarpole Village Hall.



## Articles

Attached to this edition of the *Newsletter* are three articles by Ian Mortimer – ‘The Spanish Chestnuts at Croft’, ‘The Pollarded Ash Trees on Bircher Common’ and ‘A Curiosity at St. Leonard’s Church, Yarpole’. Also attached is the *Contents* page for Volume V of the *Living History Newsletter*.

## Thanks

Since the Living History Group first began publishing in 2003, Ian Mortimer has edited the newsletter with great care and attention to detail. He has succeeded in producing a regular newsletter of the highest quality through his insistence on professional values of authorship and use of high quality materials for its production. All members of the group are very much indebted to him for his hard work over the last five years.

## **Copyright**

To ensure that we conform to copyright conventions, Members and Friends are reminded that these *Living History* articles and newsletters may only be reproduced, by photocopying or 'scan and print', for the sole purpose of personal research.

## **Membership and Subscriptions for 2008**

Three new members joined in December 2007 which brings our membership to forty-one which is very good news. At our last meeting, in January 2008, eleven members attended making it one of the largest attendances for some time.

This year's membership subscription was due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008 but so far only one third of our members have paid. If you are one of those who has not yet paid please send your subscription to the Hon. Secretary - Ron Shaw at 3, Green Lane Crescent, Yarpole, Leominster HR6 0BQ or leave it at Yarpole Village Shop for his attention. £5 per year for local members (plus any donation you wish to make) or £12 per year for country members. Cheques should be made payable to 'Living History Group'.

## **Family History Fair**

Members may be interested in the biennial Herefordshire Family History Fair which is organized by the Herefordshire Family History Society. It is due to be held at Hereford Racecourse on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2008 from 10am – 4pm. There will be help and advice on starting your family history, displays by local history societies, military researchers and family history groups. Entry and parking is free. For more information see [www.rootsweb.com/~ukfhs/fair.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ukfhs/fair.html)

## **Date of next meeting of the Living History Group**

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 at 8 p.m. in the Committee Room of Village Hall.**

# Parish History

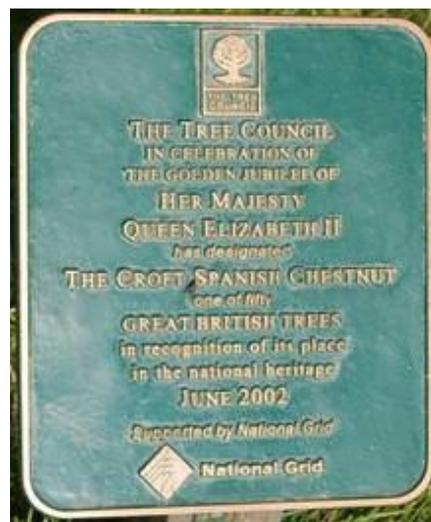
# *Living History*

## The Spanish Chestnuts at Croft:

In 2002, Fifty Great British Trees were singled out by the Tree Council as a very special way to mark the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

From the oldest and the rarest to some of the most historically or culturally famous they highlight the fundamental importance of trees to the national heritage and form a link between past and present.

The 50 chosen trees are all either impressively large, ancient, rare, striking or the stuff of history and legend; most of which would appropriately describe the avenue of ancient, pollarded sweet chestnut trees at Croft and so it would have been the avenue, rather than a single tree, which was given the award.



The avenue was planted by Sir Herbert Croft, who was M.P. for Herefordshire, 1592-1617, reputedly from nuts salvaged from the Spanish Armada in 1592 and were laid out, in conjunction with the other chestnuts in the park, in the battle formation of the Spanish fleet. It is a marvellous story and these trees really are 400 years old.

Unfortunately, some of these ancient trees are dying of a fungal disease (phytophthora) but the dead trees are being allowed to remain standing to provide a wildlife habitat and natural sculptural beauty.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer

# Parish History

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## The Pollarded Ash Trees on Bircher Common

In 1851, there were three spade-tree manufacturers in the Parish: Matthew Beavan, Richard Broadhurst and John Stanton ('tree' in this context meaning 'handle'). They would have made the handles for all farm implements using wood from pollarded ash trees.

Ash wood is light, tough, straight-grained, 'elastic' and very resistant to lateral stress; used as a lever it won't snap and is therefore ideal for the making of handles.

On the lower slopes of Bircher Common, by the pool – halfway between the 'entrances' from Welshman's Lane and Leys Lane - is this group of old pollarded ash trees.



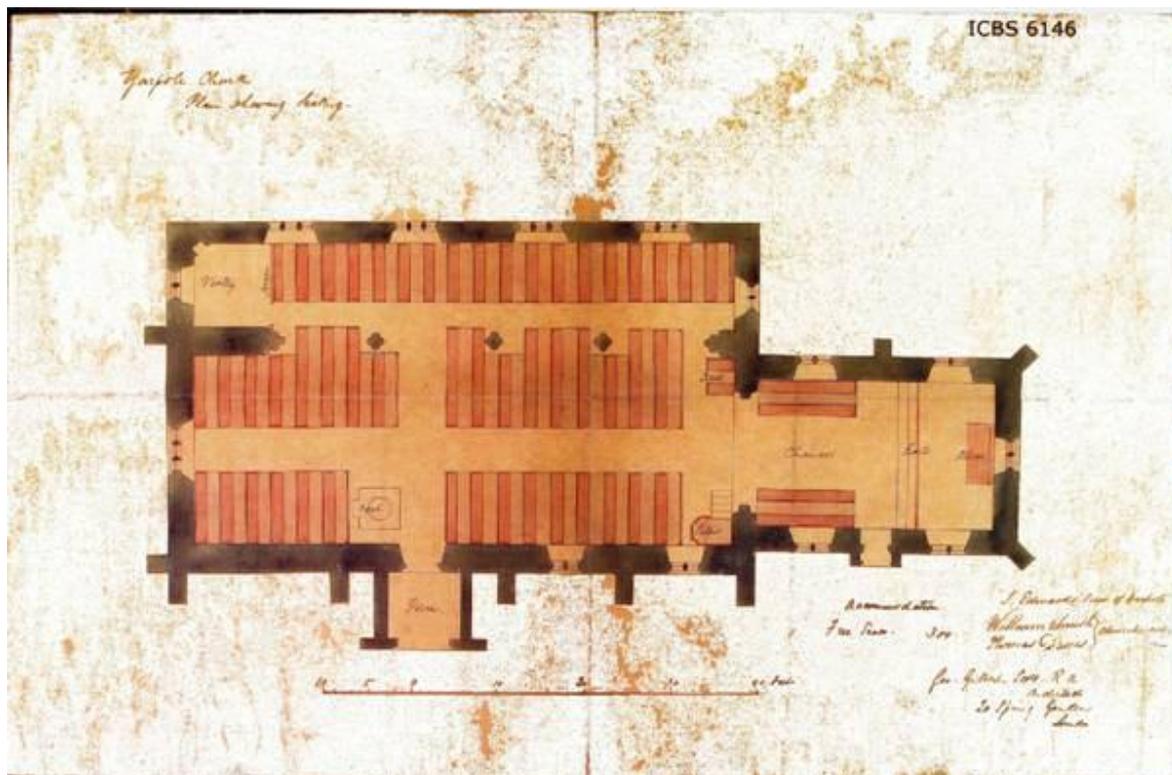
'Pollarding' - limiting the height of the trunk to 8/10 feet, encouraging a crown to develop from which boughs grow straight-up; these can then be harvested on an annual cycle.



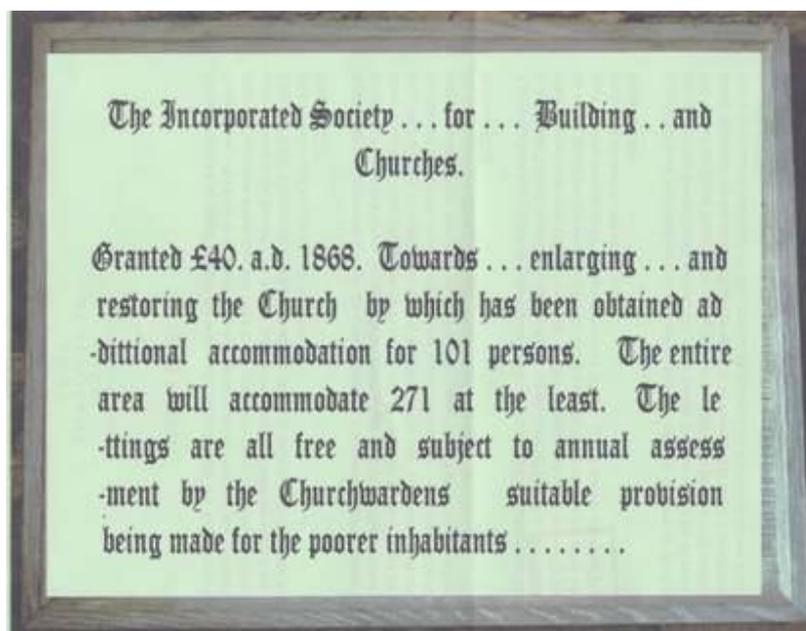
The Forestry Commission, when calculating the age of a living tree, use a formula based on the girth of the tree; using this formula, and based on their average girth of 372.5cms, it is estimated that the approximate age of these trees is somewhere around 175 years and therefore wood from these trees would have been used by the spade tree manufactures in 1851.

Compiled by Ian Mortimer (2007).





Customarily, the Society supplied a plaque to be fixed conspicuously in the church acknowledging the contribution and the white board in the porch is that 'plaque'. Over the intervening 140 years, the original lettering has been over-written (and misinterpreted) but this, we think, is a reasonable reconstruction of the original.



Compiled by Ian Mortimer (2008).

# *Living History*

## Volume V (2007)

Those Articles & Newsletters published  
by the Living History Group in 2007.

### Contents

Newsletter issued at Easter 2007

The Ancient Yew Tree

Stoneybrook

Newsletter issued in June 2007

The Parish Pound

Quaker wedding in Yarpole in 1686

Newsletter issued in October 2007

The History of Croft – 1746-1800

May Talbot: Interview

Newsletter issued in December 2007

Liturgical Colours

“Yarpole” A View from the Outside.