

HARROW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Miss Pollard who was the chief Librarian in Harrow founded the Harrow Natural History Society in 1970. The first venue for indoor meetings was Wealdstone Library in Grant Road. The Society studied two main areas – Harrow Weald Common and Bentley Priory Open Space. Nature Trails were laid out on both these sites and records of the wild life collected. Miss Pollard retired and left the area in December 1973, she had been Chairman of the Society. Alan Tinsey took over this role when she left. He had already produced the first journal using the knowledge of members many of whom were very familiar with the district. He went on to produce four more journals but by this time articles were getting hard to find and it was decided to produce a newsletter telling members about the work of the Society which would be sent out to members with their programmes. This newsletter was compiled by a separate committee and it continued afterwards. Alan and Geoff Corney who had been Secretary since the beginning, both retired at the AGM in 1979. Geoff had been very active in the work of the Society and felt he needed a rest. George Alexander became the new Chairman and Kevin Reidy became the new Secretary. Two further publications were under discussion about the local wild flowers and birds. Jack Phillips a very knowledgeable botanist suggested the Society should produce a simple guide to the wild flowers. Merle Marsden undertook to do this. She collected a small group of helpers and produced the first flower book. During the 1970s a group of young ornithologists had been very active recording the local birds particularly in Bentley Priory. These records were given to the Society and Elizabeth Stainthorpe used them as a basis for the bird book also using many other records which had been received. Ernest Venis a local long standing bird watcher wrote the introduction.

In 1975 Summerhouse Lake in Bentley Priory was declared an SSSI and became an official Nature Reserve under the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust. As stated elsewhere the Society looked after it until the whole area was declared a reserve and it has now become part of the Harrow Conservation Forum. A further publication was produced on Nature Conservation in Harrow by the London Ecology Unit in 1987. The Society was asked to help with this and Roy Abbott and Elizabeth Stainthorpe acted as guides to the local sites in the area. The flower book was brought up to date in 1990 by Elizabeth Dowley and the bird book was redone in co-operation with the Pinner group of the RSPB. As much publicity as possible was given to the Society by displays and stalls at the Harrow Show and other shows and fairs and in the libraries in the area. The Harrow Arts Centre opened in 1978 and Min Tuffnell was keen for the Society to belong and in 1980 the monthly meetings moved to the Belmont Room in the building in Hatch End. The Society took part in the various functions particularly the Garden Day held in the Elliott Hall in the spring. Members would bring along plants to sell and they would make about £200 much to the delight of Glyn Cartwright who was Treasurer at the time. I must mention the very generous gift given to the Society by Jack Phillips who left his large collection of botanical books to the Society. Unfortunately we had nowhere to house them so they were offered to members to buy for a small amount. Thank you Jack. Members of the Society were interested in all aspects of nature and we would have meetings to identify butterflies and moths. Roy Hilliard had a moth trap in his garden near Stanmore Golf Club and he would lead walks to identify butterflies and later John Hollingdale would hold his moth evenings in Stanmore Country Park. Howard Matthews would take us to various venues to identify ferns and we would also go to local nature reserves for different wildlife including our regular fungus forays often on Stanmore Common with Geoff Corney and Elizabeth Stainthorpe trying to do the identification. I am afraid it impossible to include everything in this brief report I apologize to anyone I have not mentioned but I have tried to give a brief account of how it was forty years ago.

Elizabeth Stainthorpe