



CARDIFF NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Founded 1867

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Charity No. 1092496

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Cover: Reed bunting (female) on reed, photographed on the Cardiff Birdwatch, Sunday 6 January 2019, by Linda Nottage (see pages 16-20).

Student Bursary Award 2019

We congratulate **Oonah Lessware** for winning this year's CNS Student Bursary, awarded in memory of Prof Ursula Henriques and Dr Mary Gillham. Oonah received her award at the meeting on 11 March 2019 from Mike Dean (photo by Andy Kendall). She delivered a fascinating talk about her fieldwork project in Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park in Sabah Borneo, looking at the effects of coral bleaching, caused by climate change, on coral reef fish assemblages. Her general finding was that both generalist and specialist species significantly decreased in abundance and species richness as coral damage increased.



Outdoor Meetings 2019

Monday 3 June

Cosmeston Lakes Country Park

An evening guided walk starting at 7 pm, to approximately 8.30 pm, led by Countryside ranger Sharon Mullins.

The walk will take in the history and development of the park, its habitats, and current projects.

Meet for 7 pm in Cosmeston Country Parks Park near Rangers' Office, CF64 5UB.

Tuesday 18 June

Howardian Local Nature Reserve

A guided walk, led by orchid expert Roy Bailey-Wood.

Meet 6.30 pm on Ipswich Road, near the John Lloyd building, CF23 9AQ.

Saturday 29 June

Alun Valley

The South Wales branch of Butterfly Conservation have set a date to visit Alun Valley in western Vale of Glamorgan, near St Brides Major, to look for High Brown and other Fritillaries. The date and start time and precise meeting arrangements are weather dependent, so those interested in joining them are recommended to contact Branch Project Organiser, Richard Smith a couple of days ahead. rgsoverton@gmail.com or 07977 811404. Note mobile reception unlikely once on site on the Saturday!

Please look online for all the latest information and additions to the CNS Meetings Programme:

<http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/p/programme.html>

In addition, Cardiff Naturalists' Society members are welcome to join the Cardiff Group of Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales (WTSWW) at the following outdoor meetings:

Saturday 8th June

Craig y Rhiwarth and Allt Rhongyr Reserves, Craig-y-Nos

Join Cardiff local group of WTSWW for guided walks around these Trust reserves in the Brecon area, led by People and Wildlife Officer Pauline Hill. After lunch we will look around the adjacent Craig-y-Nos Country Park. Meet in the Craig-y-Nos car park (SN 83987 15535) at 10.30 am, just north of Penrhos
<https://www.welshwildlife.org/events/craig-y-rhiwarth-and-allt-rhongyr-reserves/>

Saturday 6th July

Coed Craig Ruperra

Ruperra Car Park, Draethen, Caerphilly

Evening walk, 7.30 to 10.30 pm, led by Sue Price, manager of the site. Ruperra Conservation Trust is a local community group that is returning an area of conifer plantation to deciduous broad-leaved woodland. After, there will be an opportunity to see the emergence of the colony of Greater Horseshoe bats at Ruperra castle. Meet Ruperra car park just outside Draethen (ST 228 871) at 7.30 pm. Please bring warm clothing and a torch.
<https://www.welshwildlife.org/events/coed-craig-ruperra/>

Saturday 13th July

Nature Walk at Coed-Y-Bedw Nature Reserve, Pentyrch

10.00 am to 12.00 midday. Meeting Place: Park at the quarry entrance on Heol Goch Road between Taffs Well and Pentyrch (ST 10937 82507). Price: Suggested donation of £2 to support the conservation work of the Wildlife Trust.

Indoor meetings 2019/2020

Hilary Wicks asks if members have any suggestions for (or offers of) speakers for the next indoor meeting programme, which starts in September 2019.

Please contact Hilary with your ideas:

indoor@cardiffnaturalists.org.uk

hadwicks@hotmail.co.uk

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Prestigious positions available at Cardiff Naturalists

Cardiff Naturalists' Society has been in existence for over 150 years—and it is to be hoped it will exist for a long time into the future. However, if it is to do so, it is essential that volunteers are found from the membership to help run the Society. People may be reluctant to volunteer because they are not sure what is involved, so below are 'Job Descriptions' of two rewarding roles for which we aim to make new appointments at the next AGM (September 2019).

President

A prestigious position nominally for a 2 to 3 year term to act largely as the figurehead for the Society. The President is expected to represent the Society at any events and to 'chair' the Council meetings, which take place about 3 or 4 times a year, and attend the AGM. It is NOT necessary to attend every 'Indoor Meeting' or every 'Field Trip' as they can be run by other Council Members.

Secretary

A person familiar with the use of e-mail and able to type the minutes and answer any letters to the Society. This rewarding role also requires someone able to file and organise any associated paperwork, and to be able to 'stand in' at meetings to act as 'chair' when necessary.

Orchards for Wildlife

Bruce McDonald

Members of Cardiff Naturalists' Society joined others in 2018 on a walk led by Wenvoe Wildlife Group covering the four community orchards created by the group. At Goldsland farm there was an opportunity to see the beginnings of a fifth orchard which is now proceeding apace. If there happens to be a mature traditional orchard around in need of some TLC then one does not have to wait the decades for trees to mature but all ours involved starting from scratch. For many the two main questions are:

Why is a wildlife group bothering with orchards?
What will you do with all the fruit?

The simple answer to the first question is that many forms of wildlife benefit from orchards, both common and rarer species, and the benefits increase over time as the trees mature. We in Britain have lost a significant percentage of our orchards and although this has been happening since the 1900s, it is estimated that 60% have disappeared since the 1950s alone. Once every farm had an orchard as farm labourers were paid partly in cider. When that stopped there was less incentive to keep orchards. During World War II the 'Dig for Victory' campaign led to many orchards being grubbed up as they were considered less useful than vegetables. The final nail in the coffin was the retail shift to predictable crops and regular-sized fruits such as French Golden Delicious. Orchards are now a priority habitat in most Biodiversity Action Plans.

But with the decline in orchards came an equivalent decline in wildlife that was partly or wholly associated with orchards. Whilst many more common species such as Blackbirds, Foxes and Red Admirals will carry on regardless, rarer species, particularly those that are more dependent on orchards, will head towards local extinction.



A key distinction should be made at this point between traditional and commercial orchards. In the case of the latter, usually standard varieties of trees are kept small to ease harvesting, sprayed up to 20 times a year, and grubbed up after 8 to 10 years. In a traditional orchard the trees are allowed to mature and age, at which point they become hosts to a variety of invertebrates, lichens and birds. Whilst commercial orchards are there to provide the shopper with cheap, uniform fruit, they offer little to wildlife, although some growers are attempting to increase wildlife benefits by reducing spraying frequency and other measures. The guideline for traditional orchards is to allow 7.5 metres of space around each planting to allow for long-term growth and agricultural subsidy schemes specify 10 metres.



Traditional (top) and modern orchards.

Another reason for planting a traditional orchard is to help to conserve some of the old varieties of apple, pear and plum. There are around 60 different varieties planted in the 5 orchards including Ribston Pippin (a favourite from Yorkshire) and Ashmeads Kernel, much praised by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. But Wales also has its own favourites, some adopted from elsewhere and others originating from the Principality with clues to their origins in their names, such as Machen, Gabalva, Gwehelog and Bardsey. The Denbigh Plum has recently been awarded European protected status putting it on a par with Champagne and Stilton.



Left, Denbigh Plum. Right, Machen apple.

The benefits to wildlife can be categorised into three phases. In the first simply demarcating an area, stopping spraying and cutting and allowing nature to re-colonise can bring rapid improvements. In the Wenvoe Community Orchard, comparing densities of worm populations within a year of starting showed significant increases in the orchard area compared to the adjacent playing fields – Darwin referred to them as ‘nature’s ploughs’. Vole and field mice became increasingly evident and molehills started appearing—though they never appear on the nearby playing fields. Planting fruit trees gradually improves the ability of the soil to absorb excess rainfall. The area was prone to flooding, which was the main reason the Council were prepared to let the community take it over as an orchard, but since then flooding has become less of an issue.

Once fruit starts appearing advantage is taken by otherwise more common wildlife, with records of Blackbirds, Foxes, Badgers and Hedgehogs taking fruit or preying on the smaller species. Blossom is utilised by a range of invertebrates. The photo shows the Mirabelle Plum in full bloom in February followed by pear, cherry and finally apple with medlar and quince also contributing to the pollen supply which with the different varieties can extend over a four-month period. The third and final phase can take several decades and this is when the fruit trees really mature and age and by which time you have a mosaic of habitats established including hedgerow, ponds, meadow etc. Surveys of mature orchards reveal the range of wildlife present. At Bowcastle farm in Worcestershire 1,868 species were recorded in the orchard, including 224 that are dependent on decaying wood. The rare Noble Chafer Beetle recorded as Vulnerable is linked to orchards with the grub spending its life eating away at the heartwood of old fruit trees. It has not yet been recorded in Wales but the Gwent Wildlife Trust are optimistic that there are some of the right trees in the right places to make its appearance a possibility. Other rarities include moths such as the Red Belted Clearwing and a whole host of lichens and mosses.



Left, Mirabelle plum blossom in February. Right, Winter Nells pear blossom in May.



Left, Noble Chafer Beetle. Right, Mistletoe Weevil.

Mistletoe, although not confined to orchards, has its own attendant species such as the Mistletoe Weevil but is rare in the Vale of Glamorgan (2 records). Anecdotal evidence suggests there may be examples tucked away in back gardens but these have yet to materialise as authenticated sightings.

Finally, community orchards offer an opportunity to engage with local residents and visitors, via noticeboards, guided walks, blossom/apple days or, for traditionalists, wassail or similar ceremonies. A local producer of preserves is already using our Medlars for her Elizabethan Medlar Jelly and a local author of children's stories refers to the group in his introductions.

The versatility of fruit trees which grow all over Britain suggests these are relatively easy habitats to establish. We are still buying heritage fruit trees at around £15 each with little additional cost and the fact that as a small parish Wenvoe now has 5 community orchards indicates that both public and private landowners will co-operate in these schemes. Other groups are also getting involved. Community orchards at Porthkerry, Peterston and Dyffryn Gardens have recently seen the planting of over 70 traditional varieties.

Bruce McDonald

Photos by Bruce McDonald and online stock images.

Further reading: Community Orchards Handbook - Common Ground - ISBN 1 870364 26 0

Weather Report for North Cardiff 2018

From a friend of the Society

Note: This weather summary for North Cardiff has been compiled from figures recorded in Thornhill, a location with observations going back to 1986.

2018 will be remembered for its weather extremes: cold with lots of snow in the spring and a hot dry summer.

The lowest temperature recorded during the year in Cardiff was -6.3°C on St David's Day, 1st March. The bitter easterly winds that followed brought noteworthy snowfall with considerable drifting. Snow depths were measured as 18 cm in North Cardiff, though 51 cm fell at St. Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Cardiff escaped the heavy thundery downpours which affected much of the UK in the last week of May and recorded its driest May since 2010. June was even drier, only 19.0 mm for the whole month, the driest June since 1995.

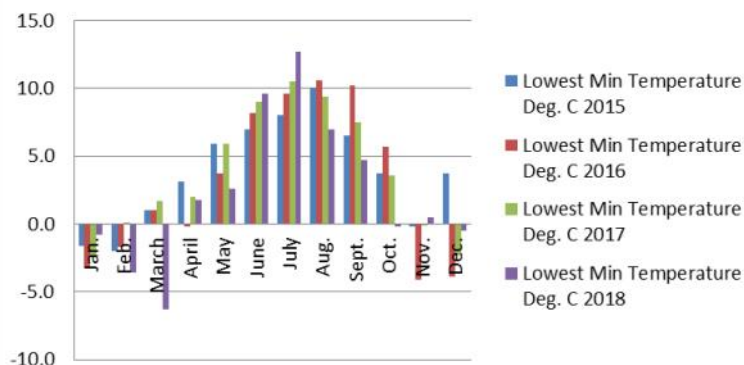
Daytime temperatures exceeded 27°C (80°F) in each of the months May to August, the highest, 32.5°C (90.5°F), on 8th July.

A waving cold front associated with storm Callum resulted in a major rainfall event in West Wales on 11-13th October, causing the worst flooding for 30 years. Otherwise the autumn was relatively mild with few frosts.

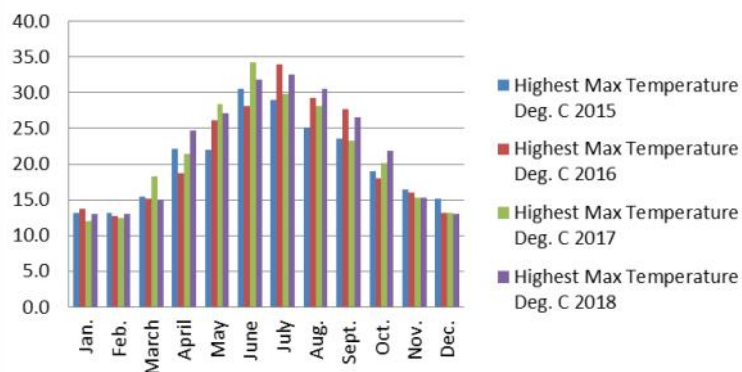
December was the wettest month with 224.3 mm (8.8 inches) contributing to an annual total of 1378.0 mm (54.25 inches), a little below the long-term average. The wettest day of the year was 11th August with 48.1 mm (1.89 inches), probably the wettest day since 12th December 2003.

Note: Whilst the rainfall figures may be taken as representative of the Thornhill area, the non-Met Office standard of the exposure of the thermometers and the recent refurbishment of the screen means that the temperature data is representative of the site only and not of the a wider area.

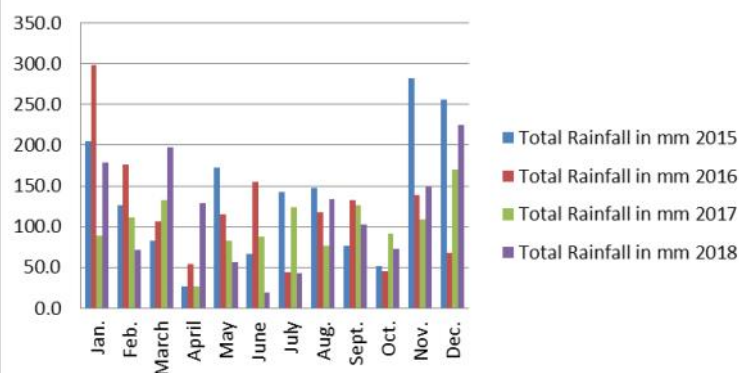
Lowest Min. Temperature



Highest Max. Temperature



Rainfall mm.



Annual Weather for North Cardliff 2018					
	<u>Jan.</u>	<u>Feb.</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>
Total Rainfall in mm	179.0	71.2	197.3	128.9	56.4
Highest in one day in mm	20.8	23.0	31.0	36.0	17.0
Date of Highest Rainfall	21st	10th	9th	1st	1st
Highest Maximum Temperature Deg. C	13.0	13.0	15.0	24.7	27.2
Date of Highest Temperature	2nd /23rd	19th	25th	19th	6th
Lowest Minimum Temperature Deg. C	-0.8	-3.6	-6.3	1.8	2.6
Date of Lowest Temperature	12th	28th	1st	5th	1st
Note: Exposures for both rainfall & temperatures are not to Met. Office Standards					

<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Aug.</u>	<u>Sept.</u>	<u>Oct.</u>	<u>Nov.</u>	<u>Dec.</u>
19.0	42.5	134.1	102.9	73.0	149.4	224.3
5.8	19.1	48.1	29.0	20.8	24.2	36.1
17th	28th	11th	20th	12th	27th	6th
31.8	32.5	30.5	26.6	21.9	15.3	13.0
26th	8th	5th	2nd	10th	28th	1st/2nd
9.6	12.7	7.0	4.7	-0.2	0.5	-0.5
21st/22nd	28th	25th	25th	30th	2nd	14th/15th
		Total Rainfall			1378.0	mm
					54.3	Inches
		Long Term Average			1447.0	mm
					57.0	

Cardiff Birdwatch 2019

Richard Cowie

Twenty five of us gathered on 6th January 2019 at the Channel View Leisure Centre in Cardiff Bay. As usual, it was a bit of a mixed bunch with members of the Cardiff Nats, the Cardiff Wildlife Trust group and even a few from the local RSPB group. The expertise of the group also varied which was useful as the more experienced birdwatchers, ably led by Rob and Linda Nottage, were able to share their knowledge with others who were less experienced.

We started by heading round to the Nature Reserve by the St. David's Hotel, which initially meant heading north going upstream alongside the river Taff. We immediately ticked off some of the usual suspects, such as lesser black-backed gulls, black-headed gulls, mute swan, coot, great crested grebe and cormorant, but then came to the most puzzling bird of the day. This was a male duck swimming with a group of tufted ducks, which on first glance looked suspiciously like a male lesser scaup! Out came the telescopes and the bird books, and a small huddle of the keener types tried to work out exactly what it was. At the end of about fifteen minutes of deliberations the decision was that it was probably a hybrid resulting from a male tufted duck getting together with a female pochard (see photo page 17). It had too much black at the tip of its beak for a lesser scaup, a slight reddish tinge to its head when it caught the sun, and no distinct vermiculation marks on its back. Anyway, it was quite a challenging bird to come across within 10 minutes of setting out!

The rest of the walk up to the road bridge and then down the river on the other side towards Hamadryas Park allowed us to pick up a few more species: little grebe, moorhen, a Cetti's warbler singing briefly, and pied wagtail. There were quite a few passerines flitting around the alders and other trees on the embankment including goldfinch, greenfinch, chaffinch, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit and wren.



The tufted-pochard hybrid male.



Scanning the lagoon.

Photos on this page by Richard Cowie.

We eventually arrived by the boardwalk in the wetland area (photo page 17) to hear a brief screech from a water rail in the reeds, then settled down to scan the lagoon for birds. Unfortunately, it was a bit disappointing and apart from the usual gulls, cormorants, coots, and tufted ducks the only new species we came up with were teal and Canada goose.

After spending about 20 minutes on the boardwalk we set off towards St. David's Hotel, walking slowly on the path through the reed beds. This turned out to be more productive and we were soon treated to lovely close-up views of reed buntings (see cover photo) feeding on the *Phragmites* seed heads. They seemed to be predominantly females, but there were a few males mixed in as well. It's only when you see female reed buntings close up that you can really appreciate the beautiful, light, dark and chestnut brown streaks in the plumage - really handsome little birds. We also saw several stonechats, in their typical upright pose, perched on top of the willows which were poking up through the reed beds.

The viewpoint by St. David's Hotel did not yield many new species: only some goosanders out on the bay; and a queen buff-tailed bumblebee which had emerged very early from hibernation and was trying to find some nectar on the bushes around the hotel. Unfortunately, I think it will probably turn out to be a bad call on her part, and she will join the 80% of over-wintering queen bees that do not survive until spring. At this point, we all started to wander back towards the Leisure Centre, but at different rates, so that the group got rather strung out. However, we all made it back safely, and I think everyone had an enjoyable morning.

The majority left at this stage, but some of us ate packed lunches in our cars (it had got rather cold). After lunch, some debate, and a referendum, we decided to drive round to the barrage and look for the black-necked grebe that had been seen between 'the sails' and the sailing centre.

About 12 of us headed round there, and basically we found the grebe exactly where it was meant to be. It was very obliging, and at times was only a few metres offshore. It seemed quite tame and spent most of its time feeding. Its red eye, and fine pointed, slightly upturned beak were very distinctive (photo below).

While we were on the barrage, we also saw shelduck and a redshank feeding on the mudflats offshore, and some linnets and rock pipits flitting around.



Black-necked grebe. Photo by Linda Nottage.

Altogether we saw 45 bird species during the day (see list below) with a few memorable sightings. Another successful start to our year, and as usual, many thanks to Rob and Linda for leading us so well.

Bird List

Black-headed gull, Black-necked grebe, Blackbird, Blue tit, Canada goose, Cetti's warbler (heard), Chaffinch, Common gull, Coot, Cormorant, Crow, Dunnock, Feral pigeon, Goldfinch, Goosander, Great tit, Great-crested grebe, Greenfinch, Heron, Herring gull, House sparrow, Lesser black-backed gull, Linnet, Little grebe, Long-tailed tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pied wagtail, Redshank, Redwing, Reed bunting, Robin, Rock pipit, Shelduck, Song thrush, Starling, Stonechat, Teal, Tufted duck, Tufted x pochard, Water rail (heard), Woodpigeon, Wren

Text and bird list: Richard Cowie - January 2019.

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**Deadline for submissions to next Cardiff
Naturalists' Society newsletter:
Monday 26 August 2019**



Early purple orchid at Kenfig. Photo by Phill Blanning.



Greater horsetail at Porthkerry. Photo: Linda Morris.



Emperor moth at Kenfig. Photo: Phill Blanning.



Orange tip female (top) and male (below). Photos: Phill Blanning.

Colonel H. Morrey Salmon, CBE, MC, DL, DSc, (1890-1985) 72nd President

On Monday 14 January 2019, **Andy Kendall** gave a talk about our former president Colonel Harry Morrey Salmon, focussing on his extraordinary photography. He brought along some of the photography equipment that the Salmon family have donated to the Morrey Salmon Project, which has started to digitise his photos.

There is a substantial entry for Col. Morrey Salmon in the Presidents' pages created by Andy Kendall for the Society's 150th anniversary: <http://www.cardiffnaturalists.org.uk/htmlfiles/150th-05.htm>

This includes an Appreciation by Mairead Sutherland, a Former President of the Society, based on a transcript of a lecture she gave to the Cardiff Naturalists' Society on 4th January 2001.



Lapwing by Harry Morrey Salmon - his first photograph of a nesting bird, taken in 1909. Photo from CNS archives.

A field trip to Steep Holm in 1911

Stephen Howe writes: The Morrey Salmon archive contains much interesting information about Morrey, his bird photography, the society and his long friendship with another CNS ornithologist, Geoffrey Ingram. The following, kindly sent by Hugh Salmon, was written by Morrey recounting their first field trip to Steep Holm in 1911, which turned out to be quite an adventure!

Harry Morrey Salmon

"By the summer of 1911 I had worked with Geoffrey Ingram for a year and I suggested to him that we might try to visit Steep Holm: it was Somerset, of course, but it was the only seabird colony near to Cardiff. He was quite willing so I started to make enquiries. I found that it was owned, or leased, by a Gloucestershire family who lived there off and on, occupying some of the old barrack buildings. I wrote them and obtained permission to go there to study and photograph birds. I could not, however, find any boat owner in Cardiff or Penarth willing to take us across so went over to Weston-Super-Mare by the passenger steamer and eventually found one there, from among a number of small craft taking visitors out for short runs in the Channel. Having arranged that and the day, June 22nd, which was Coronation Day, a public holiday, we decided to increase the party, originally Geoffrey and myself, by inviting Herbert Short and Bert Evans, to reduce the expense per head.

We crossed to Weston on the evening before and went to the boat, which had been moored ready for an early start just offshore under Brean Down and we slept in the boat that night. The boat was about 24ft, open, with a stump mast, inboard engine and crew of three. They turned up punctually next morning, which was fine, though with a fairly stiff wind and somewhat choppy sea. We set off, tide being high and made Steep Holm in good time, landing on the beach with our gear, cameras, food etc., arranging with the boatmen that they would return at 4pm, this being the time they advised to suit the tide.

We had an excellent day, finding considerable to us, inexperienced in seabird colonies, numbers of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls breeding, the former down the cliffs and the latter mainly on the tops. There was no widespread nesting then over the flat top of the island. It was late in the season, of course, and only one Herring Gull's nest still had eggs: in fact, most of the young were quite large. Ravens, Peregrines, Kestrels and Shelduck were all present and breeding or had bred and nine passerine species. The owners were not in residence though their boy and girl were with someone but we saw very little of them.

The day continued fine but the wind freshened and against the ebbing tide made a choppy sea. The boat turned up a little early and we got down to the beach, where the boatmen made us an offer: for an extra £1 a head they would take us back to Cardiff. This suited us very well and we accepted. However, we were then going across this rather choppy sea, which was not abated when the tide turned and began to flow. One result was that when we got on the crest of a wave the propeller was out of the water and the engine racing, to be brought up abruptly as the propeller entered the water again. Half an hour of this and the propeller either lost or sheared the key: it was thus loose on the shaft but could not be lost because of an angled fitting. However, we were now drifting rapidly on the flood-tide towards Flat Holm and our boatmen, with one pair of short oars only, were quite helpless. Luckily, Herbert Short came of a seafaring family and I had some small boat experience as a boy, fishing off Porthcawl. We found a boat-cover from which we improvised a sail, lashed to the top of the short, stump mast with a boat-hook as gaff and we just managed to clear the rocks on the west side of Flat Holm, but only just, and sailed round to the northern landing beach of that island.

We went along to the Flat Holm Hotel, then licensed as a pub, and had drinks, while the boatmen set to work on repairs, with the help of one of the lighthousemen. They assured us that everything was alright, though we noticed they had taken the precaution of borrowing a sail and an extra boat-hook from the lighthouseman.

Just as well, because soon after we got into rougher water the propeller came loose again and there was nothing to do but hoist this sail, much too large as it was, but we rested it in and, to cut a long story short, sailed up to Cardiff pierhead with just enough water to get to the stern of one of the paddle-steamers at the pontoon and ashore over it, at 11pm. We paid off the boatmen as agreed but what they did I have no idea. It had been a day long to be remembered."



Colonel Harry Morrey Salmon (1891-1985)

David Saunders writes: A biography of Colonel Harry Morrey Salmon has been added (Feb 2019) to the Dictionary of Welsh Biography, which is freely available online: <https://www.biography.wales/>



Spring in Bute Park. Photo: Linda Morris.

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