

# The Northumberland Wildlife Trust: A History



Northumberland



*Angus Lunn*

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### Origins

Perhaps a good place to start is early in the Second World War. Hostilities were still raging, it was before Pearl Harbour (bringing in the Americans) and Hitler's *Barbarossa* (bringing in the Soviets) and an Allied victory was very far from assured. Yet there was talk of planning for the future - of 'post-war reconstruction'. On the voluntary side, a Nature Reserves Investigation Committee was set up in 1941 on the initiative of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) and the RSPB. This led, two years later in 1943, to the publication by the Committee of a memorandum entitled *Nature Conservation in Great Britain*, including a list of existing nature reserves. But more significantly for the present story, the Committee sought help from county societies in compiling a fuller inventory of areas of particular interest. They were asked to "collate and sift areas of natural history interest in their counties". A recipient of this request was the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne (now 'of Northumbria'). Its Honorary Secretary at the time was George Temperley, and, at the Investigation Committee's request,



he convened an *ad hoc* local sub-committee to draw up a list of Northumberland sites. After the war the Nature Reserves Investigation Committee's resulting inventory was to become one of the bases of official nature conservation policy and of SSSI designation - as was the case in Northumberland, after re-surveying by Dr Kathleen Blackburn and Dr William Clark, both of the

Botany Department, King's College, Newcastle. William Clark later became a long-serving Chairman of the Conservation Committee of Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

At this stage, a diversion. The Natural History Society had been founded in 1829, and is one of the more venerable local natural history societies in Britain. It was an offspring of the

Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, founded in 1793, and was set up in part to accept responsibility for that Society's natural history and ethnographical collections, which eventually became housed, from 1884, in the Museum which a few years later became known as the Hancock Museum, after two eminent naturalist brothers. This diversion is relevant, both because, as we shall see, the Natural History Society played an important part in the birth of the Trust, and because the Hancock Museum served as the Trust's headquarters for the first 31 years of its life. So,



indirectly, the Trust can trace its origins back to the founding of the Lit and Phil in 1793!

Now we move onto a further diversion. SPNR, established in 1912, now exists under its modern name, The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT), and will therefore celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2012. SPNR was the invention of Nathaniel Charles Rothschild, the first influential figure to recognise the need for nature reserves - in fact he invented nature conservation in this country as we came to know it. His Society compiled a 'shopping list', and by 1915 this consisted of 284 sites, most of which are now reserves (including the Farne Islands). It was not intended that the Society would itself own land, but rather such bodies as the National Trust, and Rothschild himself funded the acquisition of such famous sites as Blakeney Point in Norfolk and Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire. Influential members of SPNR included the Northumbrian Sir Edward Grey (long-serving Foreign Secretary, including in the First World War) and Neville Chamberlain. Rothschild was a partner in the family bank, and a notable entomologist (discovering and naming the plague vector flea; his flea collection is in the Natural History Museum). A daughter was the zoologist Dame Miriam Rothschild. However, after Rothschild's death in 1923 nature conservation languished, until, as noted earlier, the new initiatives during World War II. It is also worth noting that in more recent times, the very active and generous President of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation (RSNC, as SPNR was then known) was Christopher Cadbury, grandson of the founder of another famous company and himself a successful businessman.

Clearly, after the Second World War, mechanisms were needed to deliver Rothschild's vision

of a system of nature reserves, beyond what the newly created Nature Conservancy could be expected to achieve, and the local lists of sites now existed as prompts.

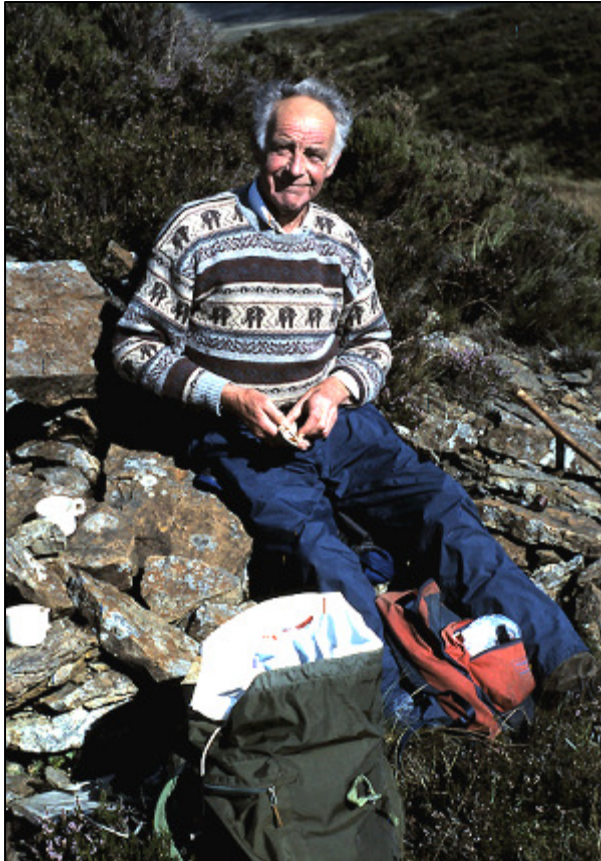


Fast forward to early 1961 when Grace Hickling, who had followed Temperley as an Honorary Secretary of the Natural History Society, reported to her Council that she hoped to receive some guidance from Mr AE (Ted) Smith, of the already well-established Lincolnshire Naturalists' Trust, about establishing a Trust in Northumberland and Durham. The very first such Trust, in Norfolk, dated from 1926, and the Lincolnshire Trust had been set up in 1948. The Council agreed that it was not within their remit to inaugurate such a project but if there was a firm proposal for such a Trust the Council would 'give it sympathy'. In April 1961, Grace further reported to the Council that she had attended a meeting in London of representatives of Trusts, where it was pointed out that Northumberland and Durham were two of the few coastal counties where Trusts did not exist. However the Council, perhaps lacking initiative, felt that at the moment a Trust would serve little useful purpose and agreed to take no further action.

Nevertheless interest was growing locally, and in the autumn of 1961 a small group of interested individuals met in the Natural History Society's Gosforth Park Nature Reserve. Grace Hickling was present and was extremely helpful in the discussions, and also present was the relatively new curator of the Society's Hancock Museum, Tony Tynan - a Yorkshireman and a graduate in natural science. The group agreed that a Trust should be set up, and Tony was asked to take over the arrangements and to convene a meeting in the Museum. This took place in February 1962, and Ted Smith, who, apart from his Lincolnshire role had become Honorary Secretary of the SPNR (which at Smith's instigation and with Christopher Cadbury's help was now actively promoting the formation of county trusts), was an inspirational guest speaker. The meeting was chaired by Lord Howick of Glendale, and present were amateur naturalists, academics from King's College (then still part of Durham University) and the Durham Colleges of the University, and others with an interest in the land. This 'formation meeting' voted unanimously to proceed with the establishment of a Northumberland and Durham Naturalists' Trust. It was to be one of the many Trusts

established in the early 1960s, and, since in the natural history world Northumberland and Durham had always been closely-knit, it was natural (no discussion on the matter even took place) that a Northumberland and Durham Naturalists' Trust should be founded.

The Trust was incorporated on 13 March 1962, and the first public meeting, calling for members, was held in Newcastle City Hall three days later. At the meeting the celebrated



wildlife artist and sculptor, James Alder, introduced John Philipson, historian, engraver and a dedicated Northumbrian. He became our first Chairman, and Tony Tynan was elected Honorary Secretary. Tony also became the Trust's mentor and guiding hand, with a wide network of contacts in the Universities of Newcastle (which King's College had become) and Durham, in the SPNR, and in the museums' and National Parks' worlds. His base at the Museum, which was by then funded by the University of Newcastle, became the headquarters of the Trust until it moved to its present premises at St. Nicholas Park in Gosforth in 1993. James Alder became an informal

public relations officer for the Trust, and was hugely important in recruiting members,

Eight years later, at the AGM in 1970, it was amicably agreed that Northumberland and Durham should separate, the volume of work and travelling over such a wide area being beyond the capacity of the one body, and in 1971 the Northumberland Wildlife Trust came into existence (at the time Northumberland and Durham had approximately equal numbers of members, and Northumberland more reserves). We were the first, apart from Scotland, to use this new title. Tony Tynan continued as Honorary Secretary, retiring only in 2000, when he was honoured with the title Founder. The Trust covers the old geographical county, embracing modern Northumberland County, the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the metropolitan borough of North Tyneside. For biological recording purposes it consists of vice-counties 67 (South Northumberland) and 68 (North Northumberland).

## Early reserves

At first, and for many years, the Trust saw its main objective as being to acquire and manage nature reserves (which included geological sites). At the time there were severe agricultural, forestry and development pressures on almost all habitats, as well as the effects of pesticide residues on predators, and it was imperative to save as much as possible. Also, SSSI designation conferred very inadequate protection at the time, and acquiring reserves showed that we meant business. The first prestige reserves were in Durham - Hawthorn Dene on the coast and the Witton-le-Wear gravel pits, complete with farm house. The first reserve in



Northumberland, in 1964, was Big Waters, in the southeast of the county. A coal-mining subsidence pond, albeit a big one - it even had a tiny cottage, which was destroyed by vandals before the agreement could be finalised. Our second was Throckley Pond, leased from the Trustees of Greenwich Hospital. These two reserves were seen as part of a necklace of educational sites within reach of school parties from urban Tyneside and southeast Northumberland. The first Northumberland reserve that we actually owned, from 1966, was Tony's Patch, ancient woodland above the South Tyne. The Tony in question is Tony Clissold, who tragically drowned in a local pond while attempting to approach and photograph whooper swans at close quarters, and the reserve was gifted to the Trust by his brother Roger in Tony's memory. Harbottle Crag, in 1970, was the first primarily geological reserve (the story of its acquisition and that of the nearby Holystone reserves comes later), and for these upper Coquetdale reserves we owe a great debt of gratitude to Alan Rix, the Forestry Commission's very conservation-minded Rothbury District Officer. Later, in 1986, an enlarged Holystone Burn reserve was the first joint Forestry Commission-Wildlife Trust reserve in the country.

## Other activities

In subsequent years, like other Wildlife Trusts, we expanded our activities in many directions, including advising the Nature Conservancy Council and its successors on sites meriting SSSI status, and many other things (we were largely instrumental in the Council setting up its Newcastle office - previously we had had to deal with its regional office in Grange-over-Sands). Later it returned the compliment by funding reserve acquisition and management, and much else. Of huge future significance was the setting up by the Trust of a system of Local Wildlife and Geodiversity Sites (second-tier sites: until recently we called them Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, SNCIs), as input to the planning system; there are now about 250 of these Local Sites. The Trust became a consultee on local authority planning documents, development plans and now local development frameworks, and planning applications in general. Opencast coal came to loom largely, and more recently wind farms. In 1977 we supplied a report to the Ministry of Defence on the wildlife and geological conservation resource of the huge Otterburn Training Area. This became the basis of its conservation management and the Trust has been involved there in an advisory role ever since. We have also been talking to the MoD about Prestwick Carr (where it has a rifle-range) and its management for almost half a century (since 1965) and at last have some hope of a resolution.

We have been careful to give proper attention to our half of the Tyneside conurbation (in part because of early, and unfounded, worries that an urban Trust might emerge, as had been the case elsewhere) and we not only established reserves there but contributed substantially to the Tyne & Wear Nature Conservation Strategy, and its later review.

Early in its history, mainly before the separation from Durham, the Trust became closely involved in some major conservation controversies. First, in 1964, it was the cull of grey seals on the Farne Islands (we supported Grace Hickling and the Natural History Society in opposing it on the grounds that it was based on inadequate scientific data and consequently lost our then Chairman, who disagreed with the Trust's position). Then, later in the same year, came the Cow Green reservoir proposal in Upper Teesdale, in County Durham (we strongly opposed that). Then, from 1969, came several proposals for reservoirs in Northumberland. An Irthing reservoir would have drowned The Wou, by then a reserve, and a North Tyne reservoir (now Kielder Water) would drown varied valley-floor habitats and interfere with the river

system (we opposed both the Irthing and North Tyne schemes). Although (apart from the Irthing scheme which was not progressed) we were unsuccessful, the seal culling was later stopped, and substantial mitigation accompanied the Kielder Water scheme, so much so that the Trust is now a partner in promoting both conservation and ecotourism in the Kielder Partnership. More recently we took part in the successful campaign to stop sand extraction from the beach at Druridge Bay, which was threatening our good work there.

### **Border Mires and other reserves**

Probably the main direct and indirect conservation achievement has been in connection with the Border Mires - mainly ombrotrophic (rain-fed, nutrient-deficient) peatlands within the Forestry Commission's Kielder Forest. In 1970, a batch of 8 bogs, the first Border Mires, was leased from the Forestry Commission in order to prevent their afforestation. Times have

changed, and since 1986 the *Border Mires Committee*, with the Commission as lead partner and the Trust a key player, now looks after no less than 55 mire sites in Kielder Forest. 13 of these sites are actually in Cumbria, and the Trust, as a partner on the *Border Mires Committee*, accepts



responsibility for these on behalf of the Cumbria Wildlife Trust. Key phases in Border Mires conservation have been the EU LIFE-funded *Border Mires Active Blanket Bog Rehabilitation Project* from 1999 to 2004 (with the Trust, through our Estates Manager Duncan Hutt, acting as proponent), and more recently the Public Service Agreement between the Government and the Forestry Commission requiring 95% of SSSIs to be in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition by 2010. The latter brought funding such that the overall total now expended on Border Mires conservation amounts to about £2 million. Not only in connection with the Border Mires but in other respects too, there has been a particularly close relationship with the Forestry Commission.

The Trust's other reserves include ancient woodland, calaminarian grassland (contaminated by



zinc, lead and other heavy metals), other subsidence ponds, geological sites and England's most extensive Wildlife Trust reserve - the 1,508 ha Whitelee Moor in upper Redesdale, against the Scottish Border, with more or less undamaged blanket bog and upland heath. It was purchased in 1999 with financial assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, and has considerable industrial archaeological interest, with limekilns and coal pits. We also look after lime kilns on other reserves, as well as a colliery chimney. The Whitelee acquisition brought national publicity in the tabloids when we advertised for a goatherd to warden this reserve; the job was to include lonely herding of the feral goat population.



If Whitelee Moor is by far our largest reserve, the smallest comprised the two inspection chambers at Collywell Bay, Seaton Sluice. When a coast protection sea-wall threatened a remarkable geological exposure - a coal seam naturally coked by heat from an intrusive dyke - we persuaded Blyth Valley District

Council, in 1983, to create the chambers, to be accessed by man-holes. However, after a few years we decided that control of this subterranean reserve was best left to the Council and relinquished our direct interest. Previously we had thought that the slightly larger Silver Nut Well, an artesian chalybeate spring near Otterburn (where silver marcasite-plated hazel nuts could be seen in the churning mud), was Britain's smallest reserve. Visitors had to borrow a ladder from the nearby farm, cantilever it out over the pond, and stomach-crawl along to stare down into the mud (this was before present Health and Safety regulations). This site too we later relinquished.

The Trust now has a somewhat indeterminate number of reserves, depending on the amount of management interest that we have. Officially it is 61, but if all the sites managed in close partnership with the Forestry Commission and others are included, it is in the order of 100. The great leap forward in number of Trust reserves was in 1970, just before the separation from Durham - by the time of the split we managed 18 Northumberland reserves. The total area of the present 61 'official' reserves is about 3,500 ha. Of these, 22 (including 13 of the Border Mires) are in the Northumberland National Park.

Reserve acquisition needed professional advice. At first Richard Harris, Estates Officer of the University of Newcastle, helped informally, and later Honorary Land Agents were Bob Edmonds, prominent in Newcastle business (and who became for 22 years Chairman of the Trust), Brian Furniss, Peter Edmonds and Colin Matheson..

In 1966, together with the Northumberland Association of Youth Clubs, we formed a Conservation Corps to carry out work on reserves and elsewhere, a key activity now internally based.

### **Druridge Bay**

Although the Trust has limited interests along the northern part of the coast (where Natural England and the National Trust manage Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve and the Farne Islands respectively), a focus of interest further south since the early 1970s has been the Druridge Bay area, at the northern end of the coalfield coast. In only the second issue of our members' magazine *Roebuck*, in 1973, a member, Ian Kerr, floated the idea of a Northumberland Minsmere (the famous restored coastal wetland in Suffolk), following coal extraction at some east Northumberland opencast site, and coincidentally in 1971 the National Coal Board Opencast Executive had begun discussions with the County Council and the Trust on just that subject. Soon Tony Tynan, appreciating the scope for the Trust to become involved more broadly in wetland and other habitat creation in the Druridge Bay area, widened the scope of discussions with the local authorities.



The first opportunity came with final working of the Radcliffe opencast site, south of Amble, and the planned creation of the present lagoon at Low Hauxley. This was purchased by the Trust in 1983, after protracted negotiations over adjacent land use and after the NCB had plugged an unfortunate fissure that was draining the newly-

created pond. The *Newcastle Journal* sponsored an appeal for funds, and we developed the site as a diverse wetland reserve, primarily of ornithological interest, with Nick Scott appointed as warden in 1984. Tony Tynan invited Bert Axell, responsible for the design of the Minsmere site, to visit and advise on design here (although we regard the Norfolk Broads as a better analogy for Hauxley, because it is a flooded coal digging and the Broads flooded peat diggings). The creative process received a considerable boost with the 1990 Gateshead Garden Festival (on the Durham side of the Tyne), where the Trust's experience in wetland creation at Hauxley produced a gold medal-winning natural garden, inspired by a Monet painting, with sponsorship from British Coal Opencast Executive (British Coal was the renamed NCB). The garden was effectively and non-conventionally managed by Nick Scott, who then turned the experience to further advantage by completing the equally challenging enterprise back at Hauxley.

Other wetland reserves at Druridge Bay, including the huge East Chevington site (acquired in 2003), now complement Hauxley, and collectively are very early UK examples of both creative and landscape-scale conservation. Ongoing Trust plans for the wider Druridge Bay area, working with the County Council, the National Trust and local communities, should take Tony's original concept to fruition. This new *Coal and Coast* project should see Druridge Bay established into the long-term as a key area of nature conservation value and as a regional hub for ecotourism.

### **Reserve stories**

It is worth recording some of the processes sometimes involved in reserve acquisitions. At Harbottle Crag, in upper Coquetdale, we first became involved when Dr Douglas Robson, a trustee of the Trust who was a professional geologist and who had a second home in the village, drew our attention to the acquisition by the Forestry Commission of the area of mainly heather moorland on the outskirts of Harbottle, with the intention of planting it (this was in the days when forestry policy was highly expansionist). Afforestation would effectively obliterate the important exposures of Fell Sandstone on the site, including at the Drake Stone, and the area was also within a biological SSSI. We approached the Commission who, while appreciating our concern, pointed out that their remit was not only to grow timber but to provide local jobs. However, Robson had contacts in the Ministry of Defence, and was able to secure for the Commission the release of some land on the fringes of the neighbouring

Otterburn Training Area for afforestation, as compensation for not planting the Harbottle site. This we were then able to lease as a reserve in 1970.

In the neighbouring valley of the Holystone Burn, the Commission had already been looking after The Oaks, on MoD land, for its nature conservation interest. Shortly after the Harbottle negotiations, the Trust's attention was drawn to the considerable variety of relict woodland, scrub (including juniper) and flush habitats a little further down the Holystone Burn valley, which was then being planted with conifers. We enquired as to ownership, found that it belonged to the Forestry Commission (again), approached them offering to lease the site as a reserve, and were told that this land was part of the transfer to the Commission from the MoD as compensation for not planting Harbottle! However, the Commission agreed to relinquish the most important part of the site, and it too was leased by the Trust as a reserve in 1970, with the Conservation Corps soon weeding out newly-planted spruce and blocking newly-dug drains. Alan Rix (the Commission's District Officer) even threw in Holystone North Wood as an additional reserve. As mentioned earlier, we now manage these reserves jointly with the Forestry Commission.

Another rather complicated saga concerns The Wou, one of the Border Mires and a very wet valley mire - bog, fen and swamp, extremely wild in aspect - near the River Irthing in the far west of Northumberland. We first became involved in 1968, leasing part of the site from the private owner of Moss Peteral farm. In 1971 the Forestry Commission, who already owned the northern part of the site, bought Moss Peteral for afforestation, but continued our lease of the southern part of the site and indeed extended it to the northern part. However, because there was a sitting farm tenant, the land outside the reserve remained for the time being unplanted. It was at this time that the area of The Wou was being considered, and rejected, for a reservoir project.

In 1983 our tenancy expired, by which time there had been several new developments:

- 1) The Government instructed the Forestry Commission to dispose of peripheral properties, and the still unplanted part of Moss Peteral, containing the greater part of The Wou, was one of these.
- 2) The Northumberland National Park had strengthened its presumption against new afforestation, particularly within the vistas northwards from Hadrian's Wall, so that

any sale of Moss Peteral could probably only be for farming or conservation.

- 3) The Nature Conservancy Council recognised The Wou (an SSSI) as being an internationally important peatland site, and it was also listed under the RAMSAR Convention as an internationally important wetland site.
- 4) There had been a national agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Royal Society for Nature Conservation that Trusts should have first refusal of important sites being disposed of by the Commission (if the original owners were not interested). Therefore we sought to purchase The Wou, not just the existing valley mire reserve but also to include a large buffer area to the south coincident with the SSSI, about 300 acres all told.

Then various snags arose. Firstly, the Forestry Commission argued that the agreement with RSNC (to give Trusts first refusal) was with respect only to wooded areas, which Moss Peteral, unplanted, clearly was not. This seemed to us an absurd proposition, and a letter to The Wou's MP speedily reversed the policy. Then there was the question of the agricultural viability of the rump of Moss Peteral farm, if the whole 300 acres was excluded from it. Therefore we conceded the right to graze a limited number of sheep on the future reserve. There were negotiations with the District Valuer over the proper monetary value of wilderness! And finally there was the matter of raising the money, solved by generous grants from several sources. At last, in 1989, we purchased The Wou.

Another reserve acquired in an indirect way is Whitelee Moor. It is part of the catchment of Northumbrian Water Ltd's Catcleugh Reservoir, and it was formerly the policy of water utilities to purchase catchments, mainly in order to control potential pollution. Most of the site is an SSSI and also a European conservation site, for its intact blanket bog, and wet and dry heaths. During the 1990s the Company decided to dispose of much of the catchment, and the Woodland Trust in 1997 sought to purchase Whitelee Moor in order to establish native woodland on the lower slopes, while inviting the Trust to help it to manage the higher blanket bog and heath. However, the woodland planting met with local opposition and also that of the neighbouring National Park, both because the open moorland landscape was greatly valued and because hill-farming land would be lost. The Woodland Trust withdrew, and we decided to step in, proposing to manage Whitelee Moor as a nature reserve but with a more limited amount of new woodland planting, whilst maintaining farming use with a tenancy. We were able to purchase the reserve in 1999 with financial assistance from the National Heritage

Memorial Fund and others. The Fund's assessor, a former Professor of Botany at Newcastle University, had visited the site with us in the spring of 1998, walking in from Carter Bar, and when he reached the point where it was possible to look over the valley of the Bateinghope Burn at the magnificent blanket bog opposite, we knew that we would hear good news. The goatherd



story was told earlier. Whitelee Moor was designated as a National Nature Reserve in 2001, and is the largest Wildlife Trust reserve in England.

Holywell Pond was another of the reserves acquired in 1970, very much owing to our then Chairman, Bill Potts. This 13 ha colliery subsidence pond near the southeast Northumberland coast had been known to birdwatchers for many years. Its main claim to fame was the huge herd of whooper swans to which it gave safe haven every winter, and other wintering and migrating birds. Bill, a solicitor and a keen shooting man, together with a small army of part-time gamekeepers, protected the appropriate species whilst dissuading others - corvids, egg-thieving small boys, etc. So when the farm which included the pond came up for sale, Bill got early notice, grants were secured and Holywell Pond became yet another Trust reserve. We stocked the pond with trout and leased the fishing.

### Survey

At a very early stage, in 1965, Douglas Robson drew up a list of quarry sites that he considered merited conservation; this was up-dated in 1974 by Eric Skipsey, and since then Trevor Hardy has maintained a watching role to ensure that the Trust maintains its geological interests. Dr William Clark, another trustee, played a corresponding role in identifying important habitats, especially in the uplands (as mentioned earlier he made use of the information compiled by George Temperley's sub-committee). In 1966 Elizabeth Clark produced a report on sites of educational value in southeast Northumberland, which later led to reserve acquisitions. However, as the 1968 Annual Report commented, regarding educational use of reserves, "only a lunatic would take a couple of thousand primary school

children round The Wou” - a particularly hazardous mire (and not one of Elizabeth’s sites). In the mid-1970s, high unemployment led to Government funding for useful job-creation activity and we benefited from a succession of projects, not least COASIPEC - an acronym made up as a joke, but which stuck (Collecting Of and Assembling Scientific Information to be used in the Planning of Environmental Conservation). This project, completed in 1978, laid an initial basis for our list of SNCIs (now Local Sites). The COASIPEC geologists added further sites to the quarry lists, and all told the teams looked at more than 1300 sites. The COASIPEC site data was supplemented by brainstorming by members, and by information gained from habitat surveys funded by grants, especially from the British Ecological Society. We looked at Whin Sill grassland (a survey recently repeated and showing severe losses), Allendale meadows, Tynedale hedges, limestone grassland, neutral grassland in southeast Northumberland, sand dunes, invertebrates of subsidence ponds and North Pennine heavy-metal mine sites. We also organised or carried out surveys of otters, water voles, badgers, great crested newts and large heath butterflies.

### **People and wildlife**

Like other Trusts, we have always been involved in a wide variety of people-based activities, appreciating that volunteers bring numerous benefits to the organisation, including practical work on reserves. As a membership organisation, people engagement is key to the success of the Trust. When resources have permitted, school-level education and community-based activity has developed, with an emphasis on work in urban Tyneside and industrial southeast



Northumberland. We ran a flourishing Watch Club from 1978 until 2008. Other educational activity has been with many different partners, for example with Northumbrian Water on their sites including Kielder Water, and with our neighbouring Trusts on projects such as *Living Waterways* (from 2006 onwards), focussed on the key rivers and

waterways in the region, and *Wild Places* (2008-2010), which employed for the first time here digital technology and remote cameras to involve people in urban areas in watching and recording mammals.

Nature tourism has also increasingly become one of our concerns, demonstrating the economic value of wildlife. In one way it always has been, and for a number of years the Trust organised self-guiding nature trails across the county (mainly funded by the Northumberland National Park), and manned its own mobile information unit at reserves. From 1985 until 1996 we ran a shop selling Trust goods in Morpeth (it was opened by the actress Virginia McKenna), entirely with volunteer support, and we constructed a more permanent information hut at Harbottle Crag, alas now defunct, and an education centre at Hauxley. The Harbottle hut was manned for several seasons by a volunteer, Jim Milligan, and a geologist friend of ours, Mick Jones, even brought up a mobile drilling rig to bore for water on the reserve to supply the hut, but to no avail. The Hauxley building (sadly recently destroyed by arson) was heated geothermally, and had a “green” (vegetated) roof. We have always mounted stands at shows, and delivered countless talks about the Trust to community groups, and many of these activities continue or are replaced by new people engagement activities. For many years we ran new members’ nights in the Hancock Museum, when the author of this account described the Trust’s reserves to sometimes two successive houses, fortified by a glass of whisky in the interval. There was fund-raising at Christmas fairs, and flag-days.

From the beginning, in 1962, we had produced a Newsletter, and from 1973 this became the glossy and ambitious (for a small Trust) *Roebuck*, thanks to the energy of trustee John Dodds and his success in attracting advertisers. In fact the roebuck emblem, designed by James Alder, had been used by the joint Trust almost from the first, and James illustrated most of the early publications. For a time *Roebuck* even had an offspring, a supplement *Fawn* with up-to-date events news. Tommy Wanless edited both the Newsletter from the outset and *Roebuck* until 1977. We even persuaded Yehudi Menuhin to write a message for *Roebuck* in 1974, praising the Trust for its *Music at the Hancock* evenings, based on the interaction of music and nature. Apart from *Roebuck* there has been a succession of reserve guides (the first in 1971) with detailed plans of the reserves, in the early days drawn by Jean Lunn. However, the first map of our reserves, all two of them in Northumberland, appeared in a 1966 Newsletter. We abandoned the roebuck emblem in 1998 and adopted the collective Wildlife Trusts’ badger logo. An important social development was the regular get-together over many years of a group of *Roebuck* packers, led by Dorothy Hardy, now superseded by mechanisation.

Our unofficial photographer, responsible for many images in *Roebuck*, was Geoffrey Willey,



a very dedicated Yorkshireman and, before retirement, the University of Newcastle's senior photographer. On several occasions the Trust arranged flights for him with Newcastle University's Air Squadron, in order to take aerial views of reserves. He still sponsors our regular photographic competition, and celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011.



Peter Winter, a trustee, vigorously stimulated local groups from the earliest days of the Northumberland Trust. They were, and continue to be, very important to the Trust, and their activities featured largely in *Roebuck*.

Recently the Trust has moved firmly into 21<sup>st</sup> century communications with an e-newsletter to members, and our first Facebook site and blog are planned alongside a new state-of-the-art website. We are also, as ever, very linked to the media and have benefited over the years by association with all the key TV presenters on natural history, from David Attenborough through Bill Oddie, to our new national patron Chris Packham. David Bellamy served on the Council of the old Northumberland and Durham Naturalists' Trust, and has since helped in many ways. On local TV, Tony Tynan and Ian Armstrong were stalwarts of *Looks Natural*, and the well-known local TV presenter Tom Kilgour was an active supporter who later became a Vice-President. Increasingly, people-related work is integral to all aspects of our work.

### **Management and administration**

Commensurate with the development of conservation and people-related activities, the administrative arrangements of the Trust have evolved. From being an entirely volunteer-run organisation (with tacit, we think, logistical support from the University of Newcastle), paid office assistance began in 1974 - except that our first paid employee, Ron Norman as Assistant Secretary, seconded as an administrator from the National Westminster Bank, did not cost us a penny! By now, the organisation had outgrown its office in the Hancock

Museum, and in 1976 acquired, at a knock-down price from the Newcastle and Gateshead Water Co., a second-hand portacabin to erect in the back yard of the Museum.



Shortly afterwards Olive Marshall, a Scottish Borderer, retiring as Hancock Museum Secretary and already unofficial unpaid Trust Secretary, became the first member of staff - a sort of secretary/PA - that we actually paid. Olive finally retired in 1982 (and died only in



2010), and was replaced as Office Manager by successively Ursula Beal and Jacqui Durling. Jane Speak followed in 1989, later becoming Head of Business Management, and has thoroughly professionalised the Trust's governance and management. She has received much assistance from Colin Dickinson, our very long-serving Honorary Solicitor (he succeeded Winifred Tweedy, equally long-serving, who, introduced by Grace Hickling, had been in that role from

the founding of the Northumberland and Durham Trust). The hut (*aka* "an office suite near to the centre of Newcastle") remained our headquarters, just about standing, until the move to the present site. At last, in 1979, we could afford our first Conservation Officer, Ian Bainbridge, by now a deeply-felt need. This was particularly opportune in the light of the recently-completed COASIPEC and other survey work, and although Ian was appointed mainly to get to grips with reserve management plans, he soon had to devote much more time to preparing reports on these Local Sites for local planning authorities.

We were now struggling to cope with the growing demands on the organisation, and found resources in the early 1980s to employ Barry Lamb as Development Officer, to run the

British Wildlife Appeal locally and so raise funds for the Trust. This was a very useful contribution, but in 1988 funding by RSNC allowed us to appoint management consultants to advise comprehensively on the way forward. Critical, said the consultants, was to have a Marketing and Development Manager, and so it proved. The Trust's resources and influence really took off with the appointment of Frances Rowe in that role in 1989.

Of course we now needed a Director to hold everything together, but that was still beyond our means. However, Hugh Watson (the then Conservation Officer) agreed to double up as Acting Director to oversee the implementation of the consultants' recommendations. After Hugh left we were fortunate that the recently retired Peter West, already a trustee and with managerial experience, offered his services for free. When Peter left the region we were at last able to take the very big step, in 1991, of appointing David Stewart as our first Director (his successors were recast in the role of Chief Executive). David proved to be a lateral-thinker *par excellence*, and largely engineered the move in 1993 to our present headquarters at St. Nicholas Park, the development of an urban wildlife park there and the subsequent construction of the Green House visitor centre in 1999. This was in collaboration with the Newcastle City Health Trust and with financial help from Northumbrian Water. He also negotiated the purchase and ongoing funding of the Trust's largest reserve, Whitelee Moor.

In 1995 we became the first voluntary nature conservation body in the country to have earned the *Investors in People* award, for attainments in managing and developing staff and volunteers, something we have retained ever since.

For many years, the Trust benefited from the enthusiastic support of Lord Ridley as President, himself a naturalist and wildlife artist.

### **Maturity**

As the Trust has matured it has become, as already implied, much more business-like, with a mission statement, development plans, targets, costed work programmes, risk assessment and all the paraphernalia of modern management. As described later, Chief Executives after David Stewart have found themselves as much involved in business planning and financial management as in nature conservation. On the conservation side, Ian Bainbridge's successors were Liz Teece (from 1984), Hugh Watson (from 1986: he, together with farmer and now

Vice-President Charles Baker-Cresswell, instigated the hugely-successful North Northumberland Otter Project in that year), Andrew Bielinski (from 1989: he further developed the Otter Project) and Lisa Kerslake (from 1995). From reserve acquisition having been a rather haphazard affair in the early years, we drew up and repeatedly revised acquisition strategies (it has to be said they are easier to draw up than to implement), and reserves acquired structured management plans. We relinquished eight reserves for various reasons. For example, Elf Hills, near Cambo, was acquired for training of our conservation volunteers and had little intrinsic scientific value. Throckley Pond and Wallsend Swallow Pond are now managed as nature reserves by their local authorities, and Kielderhead Moor as a National Nature Reserve by the Forestry Commission. Lisa was followed as Conservation Manager in 2000 by Steve Lowe, who began his association with the Trust as a conservation volunteer and later carried out survey work on the Border Mires for English Nature.

We developed a broad conservation strategy, and a portfolio of policies on numerous key issues, both to support campaigns and to inform our advice and responses, for example on minerals working. Our policy on opencast coal was drawn up in 1989, by which time the industry had become very controversial owing to its scale in southeast Northumberland and on the upland margin. Our 'wilderness policy' included the principle that wildlife is best appreciated in wilder landscapes. We responded to innumerable consultations from planning authorities (neither the county, nor the Northumberland districts, until recently, employed an ecologist). In 2003, we produced a *Vision for Northumberland* (for wildlife and geology) as an overall guide to our activities. Funding has become much more diverse, with a considerable amount of project-funding. Core funding, however, has remained very tight, and until very recently we have lacked the resources to involve, or even to notify, most owners and occupiers of the existence of their Local Wildlife and Geodiversity Sites. Now, however, we have a Local Sites Officer, funded by Northumberland County Council, who is actively surveying sites and developing management prescriptions, and have employed a geological consultant who has done likewise. We had already determined the criteria for designating Local Wildlife and Geodiversity Sites, a very necessary step now that they have a formal role in planning policy.

## Species work

While we have always appreciated that conserving habitats, either on our reserves or through influencing other land and water managers, will do much to conserve species, there are species which need additional individual attention, and since some of these very much engage public sympathy and attract funding it is not surprising that species safeguard and recovery have become, since the 1990s, very much to the fore. The North Northumberland Otter Project involved an otter survey and then a habitat creation programme on the northern rivers, which with the active cooperation of landowners and the energetic activity of Duncan Glen as project officer, has been a resounding success. It was followed by the Tyne Otter Project.

We sponsored research at the University of Newcastle by Peter Lurz on red squirrels, which resulted in the North East Trusts' *Red Alert* initiative in 1991 (later copied elsewhere in the country), backed by Lord Ridley and involving the general public in plotting squirrel



distribution, and eventually in the multi-million pound collaborative Save our Squirrels (SoS) project, covering much of northern England and led by this Trust. This involved the protection of red squirrel 'reserves' - large areas of mainly conifer forest, including Kielder - determining invasion corridors, grey squirrel

control and raising awareness of the issues. Red squirrel conservation now continues under revised structures.

Water voles also became a focus of activity, with surveys of their much-depleted distribution and the planning of conservation measures. Birds are an increasing focus, with habitat management at Druridge Bay and the subsidence ponds, and we have set up a marsh harrier watch point at our East Chevington reserve, and also are coordinating the osprey watch at Kielder. This year, the very first avocets to breed in Northumberland were also at Druridge Bay. We had a very active badger group, now operating independently, and for a while, an ancient woodlands group.

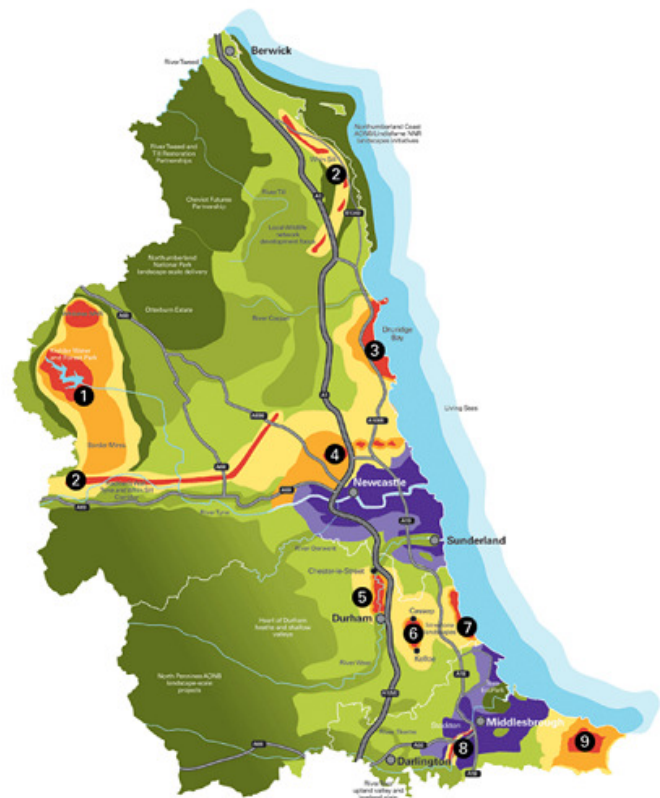
## **Biodiversity planning**

We readily bought into biodiversity planning, both for habitats and species, and in the late 1990s, took the initiative with the Natural History Society of Northumbria in compiling and publishing a *Red Data Book for Northumberland* (1998, 1999) of rare and threatened species, edited by Lisa Kerslake. This has informed subsequent Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The Northumberland Biodiversity Action Plan was launched in 2000, detailed species and habitat action plans were published in 2007, and we host the Northumberland BAP officer.

We have always worked closely with cognate organisations, obviously including Natural England and its predecessors, and through regional biodiversity and geodiversity fora. There are close ties with Northumberland National Park, and the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the North Northumberland Coast and North Pennines), all of which have management plans to which we have contributed.

## **Landscape-scale conservation**

Throughout, the Trust has greatly valued being part of the wider UK Trusts' movement, although we had reservations during the period, now long past, when RSNL considered itself more than the collective voice and service organisation of the Trusts but rather at the top of the pyramid. We also, since regionalisation, have appreciated links first with the North of England group of Trusts and latterly with the other two North Eastern Trusts, including our former Durham partners. This regional link through NEWTs (North East Wildlife Trusts) has provided the context for the recent



emphasis on landscape-scale conservation. We have identified five parts of the county on a regional opportunities map, published in 2009, as our contribution to the Wildlife Trusts'

*Living Landscape* initiative: (i) Prestwick Carr together with the northern fringe of the Tyneside conurbation; (ii) the Hadrian's Wall and Whin Sill corridors; (iii) Druridge Bay and southeast Northumberland; (iv) the Kielder Forest and Border Mires area; and (v) the wider area of the uplands in the northwest of the county (the 'Border Marches'), which are seen as a longer-term, very large-scale partnership opportunity. In fact, at the western side of the county, adding together the Border Mires, the Kielder Western Moors (managed by the Border Mires Committee), the Kielderhead Moors (once a Trust reserve, from 1998 a National Nature Reserve), Whitelee Moor, and if we include adjacent parts of east Cumbria and the Scottish Borders, already well over 10,000ha of blanket and raised bog, and upland heath is under conservation management, with much Trust involvement - the other pole to Druridge Bay of large-scale conservation in Northumberland.

Druridge Bay and Kielder Forest also have major ecotourism opportunities. The dolerite Whin Sill has become a particular focus in recent years, owing to its botanically-rich, unusual and increasingly rare species-rich grassland. Although the Trust now has no reserves on the Sill, it is responsible for much management activity there, in co-operation with quarry-owners and operators, and is planning further landscape-scale habitat improvement.

### **Leadership and the future**

After David Stewart's nine-year tenure as Director, which saw rapid expansion and development, successive Chief Executives have built on this legacy and added their own emphasis and vision. Alec Coles joined the Trust for a brief two-year period, during which he brought new dynamism and influence through his high-level contacts in the heritage and cultural sectors, developed a strategic business plan and refocused the marketing and fund-raising functions, significantly raising the Trust's profile by doing so.

David Knight, who succeeded Alec and was in post for four years, brought his academic prowess and considerable organisational skills to bear on the Trust. He extended partnership working and consolidated the Trust's internal systems and procedures, including a complete overhaul of the salary structure, as well as bringing in new funding and projects.

The current Chief Executive, Mike Pratt, has continued to build on these achievements over the past seven years and this period has seen a substantial growth in the scale of the Trust's

operation, in its profile and in the scope of its development. The Trust has become more professional, its governance more streamlined and business-focused as it adapts to today's ever-changing environmental and business world.

The Trust is increasingly undertaking larger-scale projects and is now recognised as one of the leading conservation charities in the region, punching well above its weight as an environmental advocate and exerting a strategic regional influence. However, the importance of volunteer and member participation remains at the heart of the Trust, and considerable effort continues in developing and sustaining this for the future.

### **Conclusion**

Which areas of activity have we neglected? We have always been aware of the need for marine conservation, and for a time had a Marine Conservation sub-committee which undertook surveys of inter-tidal habitats. It has, however, been difficult for the voluntary sector to get a handle on practical conservation, but we are becoming much more involved, particularly with the new Marine Management Organisation being based in Newcastle. ERIC (Environmental Records Information Centre) is only very recently off the ground as a collaborative venture, with the Trust as a key partner. We set up an arms-length ecological consultancy, Northumberland Ecological Services, in 1988-89, with some early success, but latterly it was managed without dedicated staff until the recent launch of EcoNorth with a full-time business manager. This is hosted by the Trust and is proving very promising.

From all of this activity, with nearly 14,000 members, 50 paid staff and over 150 active volunteers, it will be seen that we have travelled a long way from our original focus mainly on nature reserves. This has been a journey taken by all Wildlife Trusts and has sometimes been seen as a dilemma - reserves or influence? Obviously it should be both (and the two are synergic), although the influence is in part exercised through RSWT.

In 2004, turnover topped £1 million for the first time, but the list of officers on the next page shows the considerable continuity in the people who have steered the Trust over nearly half a century.

**Angus Lunn  
Published 2011**



The Trust's officers:-

(The transition from the Northumberland and Durham Naturalists' Trust (NDNT) to the Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) was in 1971)

**Chairman**

*NDNT*

John Philipson 1962-63  
Lord Richard Percy 1963-1964

*NDNT-NWT*

William Potts 1964-1977

*NWT*

Bob Edmonds 1977-1999  
Graham Taylor 1999-2008  
David Brettell 2008-2011  
Caroline Stewart 2010-

**Director/Chief Executive**

David Stewart 1991-20000  
Alec Coles 2000-2002  
David Knight 2002-2005  
Mike Pratt 2005-

**Hon. Secretary**

*NDNT-NWT*

Tony Tynan 1962-2000

*NWT*

Ian Armstrong 2000-2010  
Barry Butterworth 2010-

**Hon. Treasurer**

*NDNT-NWT*

Angus Robson 1962-1986

*NWT*

Chris Paley 1986  
Doug Johnson 1986-2010  
Sue Loney 2010-

Photographs (by page):

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 2. George Temperley             | 14. Bateinghope Burn, Whitelee Moor          |
| 3. Hancock Museum               | 15. Kara Jackson, <i>WildPlaces</i> Officer  |
| 4. Grace Hickling               | 17. Tony Tynan, Geoffrey Willey & Mike Pratt |
| 5. Tony Tynan                   | 18. 'The Hut' at the Hancock Museum          |
| 6. Big Waters Nature Reserve    | 18. Olive Marshall                           |
| 8. A Border Mire                | 21. Red Squirrel (Allan Potts)               |
| 9. Whitelee Moor Nature Reserve | 22. Living Landscapes map                    |
| 10. Druridge Bay                |  |

*Invaluable assistance from Tony Tynan and Mike Pratt in the preparation of this history is gratefully acknowledged.*

**Dr Angus Lunn, a Vice-president of the Trust, was awarded the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts' *Cadbury Medal* for 2009 in recognition of his services to the advancement of nature conservation in the British Islands, through his contribution to ecology, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Parks movement. He has been particularly involved in the recognition and conservation of the Border Mires.**

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