

# OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION



Winter 2023

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## Our Cover Photo

A significant amount of work has been done in developing the Lower Otter Restoration Project. In order to install a new footbridge across the river mouth, a huge crane was installed to lift the three sections into place.

# Chairman's update

Author: Haylor Lass

In early July, my wife and I were fortunate to spend a couple of weeks in the Outer Hebrides. The islands are usually very windy (3000 miles of open ocean between them and America), sometimes wet, often wet and windy, but in fine weather they are magical. Miles of deserted white shell-sand beaches, fringed by turquoise sea to the west and marram-grass dunes to the east, backed by the Machair – level fertile land where all the farming takes place and a blaze of wildflowers in the spring and early summer. Nearly all of the islands are areas of outstanding natural beauty and with large areas of various special scientific status, bird reserves and the like. The people are welcoming, and the islands are abundant with wildlife, in the sea, on the land and in the air.

A bit of a nostalgia trip for me – 55 years since my first visit to South Uist, a year after my elder sister had married a crofter and settled there.

So, what has changed over 55 years? The ferries are no more reliable – it used to be the weather that disrupted services, now it seems to be 'technical issues' with Calmac's management and ageing fleet. Far less peat cutting and burning; Far fewer small strips of individual crofters' crops of potatoes, barley and cattle fodder; Visitors and incomers used to be few but now, with the ability to work from home via the internet, many more incomers settle. It's a wonderful place to bring up children!

What has not changed? The islanders' deep love of their culture, their heritage and their land. Their respect for learning, not only in schools, but through community centres and activities. Their generous hospitality. Their recognition of the need for new enterprises to be commercially viable, but not at the expense of the environment and wildlife.

All very interesting, you may be thinking if you have read this far, but what has this got to do with the Otter Valley? Well, we too live in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with many smaller areas of special scientific interest. We also face many changes – in the planning system; with the introduction of Landscape Recovery and changes to farming practice; with the pressures of development and tourism; and pollution and climate change ... we too need to cherish our history and our environment; to welcome the invigoration that new blood brings; to encourage knowledge and understanding of the special qualities of our area, and to influence, where possible, those whose decisions affect 'our patch'.

We have only a small handful of active members working to this end. Volunteers are an essential part of keeping our communities thriving and engaged.

My question to you all is “Will you join them?” .

# Brian Turnbull - retiring walk leader

Author: Jane Connick

Brian Turnbull has decided to take retirement from his role as a walk leader for the OVA. It has been quite a journey! According to Heather Fereday's research Brian led his first walk on 2 December 2000 and he has decided his last one was on 28 February 2023. He has led walks for longer than anyone else – 20+ years is an incredible achievement.

For those of you who have had the pleasure of joining his walks you will know they covered a wide range of subjects, a small selection includes:



- Sir Walter Raleigh Anniversary walk in 2018
- The history and remains of Dalditch Camp and WW2 on Woodbury Common
- Keble's Seat and Northmostown
- Mark Rolle buildings in the Otter Valley
- Canterbury Green!

“Easing the Spring” was his final walk (pictured above) and included a lovely poem read to the group with a great Yorkshire accent.

Dee Woods, also a walk leader, commented:

*“His walks in the Otter Valley are always interesting. He is so knowledgeable about the area and its history and has an easy way of sharing that knowledge. His contribution will be much missed by the group”*

Brian's long history with the OVA also includes his father, Phipps Turnbull, who was Chairman for many years and I am sure you will have seen the tree planted by the OVA in his memory.

Thank you, Brian, from all the walkers and various walk teams over the years.

# The Importance of Hedgerows

Author: Chris Hodgson

Driving through the East Devon countryside recently and last winter, I was struck by how severe the hedge cutting appears to have been. Indeed, in many cases, rather little of the original hedge was left. Whilst the state of these hedges is probably the result of many years of trimming, it is clear that they are not in a good state.



Hedges of one sort or another are an iconic feature of the English lowland countryside and are one of the country's most widespread and precious types of habitat. The word 'hedge' possibly comes from the German (*Hecke*) or Dutch (*haag*), meaning 'enclosure', and the function of the first hedges was as a barrier.

However, in the intervening millennia, their role has changed, and those that remain now have greater importance and are recognised both as part of our cultural heritage and historical record and for their great value to wildlife and the landscape. In particular, they serve as important wildlife corridors, especially here in the UK, where they link the country's fractured ancient woodland. As the land within a few metres of many hedges is difficult to plough, sow, or spray with herbicides, the land close to hedges also typically includes high plant biodiversity. Hedges also serve to stabilise the soil and help prevent soil creep, and the leaching of minerals and of plant nutrients on slopes. Hedge removal thus weakens the soil and leads to erosion. In addition, the increased earthworm diversity in the soils under hedgerows also helps to store organic carbon and support distinct communities of fungi.

The current network of hedges in rural England is estimated to have been in existence for more than seven hundred years, probably originating in the medieval period, although the earliest "hedgerows" are believed to have appeared in the Bronze Age. These early farms are thought to have had fields about 0.1 hectares (0.25 acres) for hand cultivation. As the first farmers began clearing small areas for cultivation, they left strips of trees as boundaries. When cut or browsed by

livestock, these trees adopted dense and vigorous new growth, which became not only stock-proof, but also windproof – greatly enhancing the survival of any crops within. These original hedges cost nothing to create, required no importation of materials and, in time, yielded valuable materials such as wood products (whips and poles) and fruits, berries, nuts and flavourings. This network still exists – some of them still following the ancient lines of feudal and parish boundaries.

Some old hedges retain the flora of the original woodland, sheltering specialist woodland species such as bluebell and speedwell, while the extra sunlight encourages edge-loving plants to colonise the sward on either side. These older hedges – many several hundred years old – consist of a wide range of species, typically distributed at random. However, most newly planted hedges contain many fewer species, typically three or four. Originally, hedges included trees that were allowed to grow tall and served as immovable boundary markers, and these older hedges still include many of our oldest and grandest trees – veteran giants whose huge girth and spreading form reflects having grown in the open away from other trees as in woodlands.

Farming expansion in the 15th century led to more widespread hedge planting, but the greatest use of hedges came during the Enclosure Movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. The name Enclosure Movement is used to describe the habit of wealthy landowners enclosing common land for their own use, usually for the purpose of raising sheep. Although hedge removal began during the Napoleonic Wars, this accelerated after World War II. Since then, decades of agricultural intensification have seen ever-larger farming machines being used, requiring ever more room to maneuver. In addition, demand for cheaper food has placed great pressure on profit margins. Tens of thousands of miles of hedge have been ripped out in the last fifty or so years.

Many of the hedges crisscrossing our arable land now have their margins stripped by flailing and their roots severed by ploughing to squeeze in one more row of wheat or other arable crop. Hedges are no longer just trimmed, but flailed, ripped and brutalised. Many have lost all their horizontal structure, having not been properly laid for decades. And this leads to gaps, some small, that could be stopped with a couple of plants, but others wide enough to drive a combine harvester through. Many are gone altogether. Along with the hedgerows, we have lost the flowers, the cover and the larval foodplants for pollinators and other insects, the weed seeds and nesting sites for farmland birds, and the highways and hiding places for small and medium-sized mammals. The many bodies and

agencies that are interested in hedgerows state that, while recently the length of Britain's hedgerows has remained relatively stable, most are 'in poor condition.

Making Space for Nature ecologist John Lawton emphasised the pressing need for wildlife habitats in the UK to be bigger, and more and better connected. In an ideal England, there would be a national network of habitats – joined by wildlife highways that allow species to spread and disperse. Conservation efforts have introduced incentives to farmers to maintain the hedges, and losses have slowed somewhat. Estimates vary, but there may be upwards of 500,000 miles of hedgerows in England today.

The CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) have recently conducted a survey of 1,100 farmers that concluded that farmers strongly support any government support for improving hedgerows – the farmers see the benefits - indeed consider that the nature-boosting attributes of hedgerows to be the greatest benefit, followed by others such as providing crop shade and attracting pollinators and pest predators. The key findings were:

- the vast majority (86%) of farmers say that hedgerows are important to them and their business,
- overall, six in ten have planted some hedgerows in the past 10 years,
- 70% cited cost as the biggest barrier to planting hedgerows,
- 70% would plant more hedgerows with improved government incentives,
- 86% see wildlife habitat/nature corridors as the top benefit of having hedgerows,
- massive support (80%) for a new government target of 40% more hedgerows by 2050.

In response, under the new Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, the government has finally announced [Feb. 2023] an ambitious target to create or restore 30,000 miles of hedgerows by 2037, and 45,000-miles of hedgerows by 2050. However, this requires adding over 4,000 miles of new and restored hedgerows per year, starting now. Whilst this is obviously excellent news, we wait to see whether it will be implemented – something for which governments do not have a good record.

In the meantime, it seems obvious that huge benefits could be obtained by nurturing the hedges we already have and one clear way to start would be to be less ruthless when hedge cutting. Leaving an extra foot on top of a hedge and perhaps the same on each side would greatly help. Hedging is rather similar to pollarding – which, if done too often, kills the tree. So, might I suggest a much less heavy hand when “tidying” up the hedges next year?

# Thornapple

Author: Haylor Lass

On a sunny mid-august afternoon, when we had some friends staying, one of them fancied a dip in the sea. So we went to Budleigh Salterton, where the bather had a 'wonderful time' and the others walked around the LORP scheme, northwards along the river bank path to White Bridge, a look at all the construction and planting around South Farm Road, and back along the much-improved west side path to the Lime Kiln car park.



In the area where a new woodland has been planted over the old tip, two of our keen wildflower party found a drift of plants with white trumpet-shaped flowers which they could not name, so a specimen was brought home for further investigation. It turned out to be Thornapple, *Datura stramonium*, a member of the nightshade family, colloquially named as Jimsonweed or Devil's Trumpet. This last name is most appropriate as all parts of the plant are poisonous, particularly the seeds, as the fruits are sufficiently like the cases of conkers to attract children, though there have been very few cases reported of serious illness or death.

The plant particularly flourishes in warmer climes, and waste land, so it may occur more often with climate change. It could have arrived here with imported bird-feeding seed, or within some of the imported stone brought in for bank protection on the project area.

Sam Bridgewater from Clinton Devon Estates reported that the area had been strimmed the day after our visit, as part of the scheduled grass-cutting to assist the growth of the new trees. But just in case some have escaped, you now know what you might be looking at. Just don't take the fruits home for supper!





Richard Mabey, author of 'Flora Britannica', reports that, "Thornapple was used by herbal 'wizards' and perhaps 'witches', too. At the end of the seventeenth century John Pechey maintained that 'Wenches give half a dram of it to their Lovers, in beer or wine. Some are so skill'd in dosing of it, that they can make men mad for as many hours as they please.

"And 'stramonium' extracted from the flowers and leaves (again, a mixture of nightshade family alkaloids such as atropine and hyoscyne) had an honourable place in the treatment of asthma up to the end of the Second World War. Although some was grown commercially in this country, the bulk of our supplies had been imported from eastern Europe and were cut off in 1939. Wild specimens became valuable then, and the County Herb Committees were asked to gather leaves and flowers to augment the increased production from farms.

"These days many thornapples originate from impurities in bags of South American fertiliser. But some could be relics of the days when the plant was more widely grown in this country. The 500 or so seeds which are scattered when the spiny capsule breaks open can stay dormant for exceptionally long periods. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, occasional plants were seen at Woolwich Arsenal in London. When the eastern end was demolished before the building of Thamesmead in 1969, hundreds of thornapples reappeared in the churned-up soil. And when a local botanist found a plant on Wimbledon Common in 1935, he dismissed it as a casual, but it had been seen near the windmill on the same site a century before. Hot summers (like 1975 and 1976) always produce a rash of records, often from suburban gardens.

"A rich hunting ground for all manner of *Datura* species and other *Solanaceae* is proving to be the campus of Nottingham University. Here the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences has for some years been investigating the medicinal properties of alkaloids from the nightshade family, which has involved the cultivation of live plant material for analysis and breeding. Over the past few years a remarkable number of these species have found their way into waste ground and cultivated beds on the campus, including six exotic *Solanum* species, five *Datura* species (and some spontaneous hybrids)."

# Protecting Pollinators

Author: Geoff Porter, OVA Natural Environment Committee

When we think of insect pollinators, bees probably come to mind. Supping coffee in our garden recently, it was good to see insects feasting on the Michaelmas daisies. Whilst from a distance, they appeared to be bees, closer inspection revealed that all but one were hoverflies. Wasps, beetles, butterflies, moths and flies are all important pollinators. In the UK, honeybee hives have declined by 50% since 1985, thirteen native bees have become extinct and a further 35 are at risk. In Europe, 1 in 10 bee species are also facing extinction. It's estimated that in the UK, insects have declined by 60% in the past 20 years.

The reduction in bee numbers has resulted in more attention being paid to hoverflies. Research has found that they visit 72% of global food-crops and 70% of wildflowers and the larval stage of some species also consume aphids and other small insects. Bees, being communal insects have a limited home range whilst solitary



hoverflies can travel large distances, carrying pollen on their hair. Bees feed nectar to their larvae whilst it's consumed by some adult hoverflies. It's estimated that butterflies and moths visit 54% of flowering plants.

Hoverflies are 'true flies', belonging to the family Syrphidae in the order Diptera. There are over 200 members in this family in the UK. Adults are very varied in appearance but most are black and yellow, often resembling wasps and bees. All are harmless. Whilst some adults survive the winter, most are short-lived. The lives of larvae are diverse; whilst most eat nectar or pollen, others feast on aphids, (a bonus for arable farmers), some rotten wood, a few in wasp and bee nests where they eat dead adults and other detritus. A few live in water. Whilst the majority are natives, others, like the aptly named marmalade hoverfly, migrate with southerly winds from Europe, often in large numbers. Many species don't have common names.

The continuing decline of pollinating insects is of great concern. Their demise is due to habitat loss, intensive farming, climate change and pesticides, especially

systemic products that contain neonicotinoid, (neonics for short), identified as being especially toxic to insects. This chemical enters all parts of treated plants; leaves, flowers, roots, stems, pollen and nectar. The poison attacks insects' central nervous systems. It's not selective; it doesn't just kill 'pests'. Its use is banned across Europe but it is contained in 36 pesticides still available in the UK. The Government has granted annual exceptions for sugar-beet growers to use thiamethoxam, to prevent yellows virus which is spread by aphids, by coating seeds with the chemical. The Government is about to decide whether to extend its use for a fourth year.

As well as entering the sugarbeet plant, the poison leaches into and contaminates the soil, wetlands and water-courses. It's active in soil for some 3 years, so any flowering plant taking up this systemic insecticide could poison their pollinators. The Rivers Trust and Wildlife and Country Link have both found one or more neonicotinoids in 10% of English rivers tested by the Environment Agency. At 55% of those sites, neonicotinoids were found at levels deemed by the EU to be unsafe for aquatic life.

Barnaby Coupe, manager with the Wildlife Trusts voiced serious concern that despite growing evidence, the continued use of neonicotinoid is increasingly polluting the environment whilst Gareth Morgan, policy head of the Soil Association pointed out that organic and agroecological farmers manage to produce food without the use of these pesticides. The chemical is also found in acetamiprid, used to treat cereal seed crops and in products used on both fruit trees and in commercial glasshouses. Garden products such as Bugclear Ultra and Rose Clear have been identified as highly toxic to pollinators. In Response, DEFRA has stated that they are tackling every source of water pollution while ensuring pesticides do not harm 'people' or pose unacceptable risks to rivers.

### **What you can do to help:**

All pollinators are precious, not just bees! So, please value them all. You can play your part by avoiding pesticides and providing a variety of habitats for insects in your garden.

Sources:

- Proceedings of the Royal Society, Biological Sciences: 'Pollination by hoverflies in the Anthropocene'.- (current geological age).
- The Bee Keepers Association.
- Article 'Bee-killing pesticides found at high levels in English rivers.'
- The Guardian. 23rd Sept.2023.

# River Otter Himalayan Balsam Initiative

Author: Kate Ponting, Community Engagement & Countryside Learning, Clinton Devon Estates

With autumn here, the River Otter Himalayan Balsam Initiative has finished for another year. A significant part of this long running project remains the contribution volunteers make each season. Since early June, local volunteers have contributed over 500 hours to restrict the progress of this invasive, non-native plant.

Walking along the banks of the Otter it is easy to believe that nothing is being done to tackle this alien invader. Away from the main river thankfully it is a different story. On

each of the streams, the balsam is being systematically driven down from the highest incidence, reclaiming many kilometres for native flora once more. To see success ideally three sweeps are needed each summer to prevent this annual, setting seed. Return visits and a diligent approach will see efforts rewarded but it will take many years.



The legacy of a decade of work put in by OVA volunteers on the Colaton Brook, as part of the OVA Himalayan Balsam Project means it is now possible for a single contractor to follow the route from heaths to the flood plain during the

season and find very few plants, although “the swamp” holds onto a few!



Long stretches of the Back, Budleigh and Knowle Brooks are also showing pleasing improvement season on season. Over time, large expanses becoming clumps, clumps eventually becoming single plants and the volunteers range over much larger areas in a single

session. Because they return year on year, volunteers also enjoy watching the expansion of beaver habitat in the upper catchments, even though it can make access more of a challenge!

Of some concern to local people has been the proliferation of Himalayan balsam plants appearing on the margins of the new wetlands during the last stages of the Lower Otter Restoration Project. With tidal inundation, the vegetation across the whole site will change considerably, with saline conditions expected to significantly reduce the number of balsam plants next year.

With project construction complete, the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust will have full access to manage the Otter Reserve and will work with other land managers in the valley to continue to respond to the threat of invasive species in future years.

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## **Waterways & Water Quality**

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Author: Geoff Porter, OVA Natural Environment Committee

Recently we joined an East Devon AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) meeting with South West Water (SWW) to discuss water management plans and we wanted to share some information with you all which we hope you will find informative:

South West Water's (SWW) parent group is the Pennon Group. The company has 24,000 km of sewer pipes, 25,000 km of water pipes, 58 treatment works, 65 sewage treatment works and 1,350 storm overflows. People living in the Otter Valley receive most of their water from ground water (Dotton is the main local underground source for this). Other water comes from sources such as the River Exe which SWW are obliged to maintain at a high level (i.e., they can't over-extract). It is anticipated the climate change will result in a 19% reduction in the Otters' flow.

Surface water and sewage are collected in underground storage tanks which are insufficient when there is a downpour – and hence resulting in discharges when these tanks are full. An area of contention with all water companies is that discharges are being made at other times. This situation is made even more difficult since building developers are not required to put in separate piping for

run-off water and waste (sewage). Further, SWW have no say in where building development takes place – even if there are water shortages or problems with sewage disposal in a particular area. Nonetheless they are legally required to provide these services. SWW also have no say in the wastewater disposal from caravan sites – regardless of how many caravans are on-site.

SWW is, of course, responsible for preventing pollution from its own operations. Other pollution risks such as those from farmland comes under the responsibility of the Environment Agency (E.A.). SWW, the E.A. and West Country Rivers Trust all work with farmers and other organisations to provide guidance, should they wish to take it up.



Fly-fishing on the River Otter

### **Tracking wastewater discharges around the region and UK:**

SWW provide a website showing wastewater discharges - you can access it by clicking [here](https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/rivers-and-bathing-waters/waterfitlive). [https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/rivers-and-bathing-waters/waterfitlive]. You can also access the Environment Agency website showing bathing water quality around the UK [here](https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/) [https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/]. For those of you on mobile

phones with access to “Apps”, you can also download an app called SSRS (“Safer Seas & Rivers Service”). Regarding storm surges, SWW are only required to collect information on (a) when spills occur and (b) for how long. They are **not** required to collect data on (c) *how much* waste is being discharged, nor (d) *what percentage is sewage* rather than storm water or a combination of both.

The Environment Agency monitor all local catchment areas for pollution and other factors but, due to funding reductions, these have been reduced over recent years by about 75-80%. Indeed, some of the detailed information previously available is no longer shared. The next public report with full details of river quality is currently scheduled for 2025 release. The public should contact the Environment Agency to report pollution incidents. The river regularly breaches at the low-point just above Clamour bridge and the agencies involved do not have the resources to permanently repair that section of the bank. The current environmental policy is generally to let rivers be as natural as possible - rivers will naturally try to meander in their lower reaches. The banks are the responsibility of the ‘riparian’ owner - the landowner.

### **Water Testing Programs**

Water testing is organised locally by the Westcountry Rivers Trust (W.R.T.), and is undertaken by Citizen Scientists. This started 5 years ago and was, in part introduced to fill the vacuum left by the reduced scientific testing service provided by the Environment Agency. To-date, over 1,000 citizen scientists have undertaken 14,000 surveys. This work is done alongside Devon Wildlife Trust. The OVA participate in this program by funding equipment for a citizen scientist who undertakes a monthly test of water in 4 locations along the river Otter and brooks (opposite Otterton mill, below the farm in Colaton Raleigh, where Colaton Brook and Bicton Brooks join the Otter, and also the Otterton brook). This person is an OVA member. Numerous measurements are made including nitrate levels, solids within the water, water temperature, water levels and river width. In addition, any obstacles in the river courses are noted, a list of any invasive plants are documented (Himalayan Balsam, Ragwort, Giant Hogwood and so on) and any wildlife observed (such as Otters, Beavers, Kingfishers, Wagtails etc).

The tests currently being done are used to monitor changes in levels (such as phosphate or nitrates) within the water courses. Most of the time, results remain constant. However, we see a significant amount of nitrates and top-soil go down the river after heavy rainfalls. In Otterton Brook in particular, the nitrates are noticeably more concentrated during the summer when water-levels are lower. This is made obvious in the summer by the high levels of Algal growth – which

then leads into the main river Otter. These higher nitrate levels come from increased top-soil runoff and various other sources such as SWW discharges or animal waste. The cumulative effect of changes in these levels can cause increased water temperatures, riverbed silting and algal growth which then reduces oxygen levels in water courses which is detrimental to fish life.

**What you can do to help:**

Pollution of our waterways has become a major talking point in the national press. You can contact your local MP and ask them to take action. You can also take care in what detergents you use – since low phosphate washing powders have a big impact in reducing phosphate levels in our rivers.

## **Stop Press – Observation areas on the Lower Otter**

The "Island" observation area and view within the Lower Otter habitat area





# Fairlynch Museum

## Coffee Morning Talks

Author: Phil Ashworth

*The talk series organiser Phil Ashworth extends a warm welcome to OVA members and hopes to entice some of you along to the St Peter's Hall*

The Fairlynch Museums Coffee morning talks are well underway again for the 2023/24 season. We've already heard the story of Roger Conant, the East Budleigh man who went onto found the town of Salem in Massachusetts and is now regarded as



one of the great peacemakers of his time. That's quite a contrast with East Budleigh's other famous son Sir Walter Raleigh. Then maritime archaeologist Peter Marsden told the fascinating story of the sinking of Henry VIII's naval flagship the Mary Rose. Those lucky enough to have been there will now know who really did sink the ship!

So, looking ahead this is what the line-up looks like.

### **8th Nov.            *RAF Exeter and it's vital role in winning WW2.***

As Remembrance Sunday approaches *Chris Wiseman* explains the unique part a local airfield played in the battle for the skies. What we now know as Exeter Airport was first opened by Exeter Corporation in May 1937 when two airlines opened their routes from there. It was well placed to take on many crucial roles when war broke out. Chris Wiseman was brought up in the area. After joining his school's air cadets, like so many frustrated scholars (and I should know) he realised his eyesight would prevent him from becoming an RAF flyer. He joined the ambulance

service and, later, his interests combined when he took on an important role with the Devon Air Ambulance.

**6<sup>th</sup> Dec.            *B Movies.***

Do you remember when cinema was king and many people went to the “pictures” several times a week? Those black and white images still enthral eighty or ninety years after they were made. *Martin Fisher* is a former BBC Light Entertainment chief. When he retired to Devon he swapped the contemporary comedy greats for the heroes of the British cinema industry and researched the images that defined an era.. In his talk he’ll explore the halcyon days of British cinema, days that paved the way for modern entertainment.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2024    *Wildlife on the Otter.***

By popular request local wildlife photographer *David White* returns to reveal more glimpses of the amazing Otter Valley and estuary. David and his photos were one of the big hits of the Fairlynch coffee morning talks a year or so ago. He has a real gift, not only for taking stunning photos of the wildlife all around us in Budleigh Salterton but a great knack of explaining the subject to his audience. The River Otter is constantly changing and it’s lucky for us all that David is there to record the changing scene.

**7<sup>th</sup> Feb.            *Guilty as charged?***

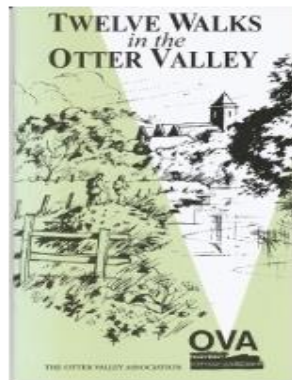
Former High Court judge *Sir Richard Gibbs* provides an insight into the dilemmas faced by defence counsel in criminal cases. We only need to pick up the Radio Times (other listing publications are available) to know what a hold crime, the police and the law have over us all. Have you ever watched a popular series and wondered how accurate it all is? I’m sure the wheels of justice run a lot more carefully and cautiously than a 60-minute drama can allow. So, what really goes on in a real court, when real people and real lives are involved?

I hope I’ve whetted your appetite. Why not come and join us!

All talks are at 1030 for tea & coffee before starting at 11. Everyone is welcome. £4 for Friends of the Fairlynch and £5 for non-members. A bargain!

# Walk Programme November - January

We are delighted the new Otter Estuary Ranger will be leading a bird watching walk assisted by Colin Randall – many thanks to them both. If you have a copy of ‘Twelve walks in the Otter Valley’ dig it out as Iain and Dee are leading a selection of walks all starting from Otterton Green. We have also included two walks around the Sid Valley Ring plus a lovely selection of local walks from our great walk leaders.



Come along and try one out, we always welcome new faces and you can find out where that footpath leads – you will not be disappointed.

## 1. *“Here’s one for Eeyore”*

Wednesday 1 November – 10.00am - 4.6 miles. 2.5 hours.

Meet: Donkey Sanctuary car park.

One strenuous and one moderate climb (1,013ft of ascent). Lots of gates; 2 stiles. Starting from the Donkey Sanctuary car park, we head for Weston and down into Weston Combe. From there a stiff climb brings us to Dunscombe Cliff, where we will stop for coffee. Following the coast path, we head down to Salcombe Mouth and then a steady climb up to Salcombe Regis, where we can stop for a restful few moments in Salcombe’s tranquil churchyard. Then it is back to the Donkey Sanctuary where those that wish can avail themselves of the café for a bite of lunch.

**Walk Leaders:** David and Rose  
Conner. 07831 406959



## 2. *“Around the Commons”*

Friday 3 November – 10.00am – 5.8 miles.

Meet: Wheathill car park (OS 115, SY 041 847)

We will head out from Wheathill and go to Dalditch, Squabmoor Reservoir and Bystock Ponds with a stop for coffee.

**Walk Leader:** Sarah Westacott 0770 6078143

## 3. *“Sid Valley Ring West”*

Friday 10 November - 10.15am – about 7 miles. About 3.5 hours.

Meet: Sidbury Church (OS 115, SY 129 917) Park in the car park behind the village hall (OS 115, SY 128 919) or take Stagecoach bus 9 from Sidmouth arriving 10.04am

We will walk the western half of the Sid Valley Ring which uses quiet lanes and footpaths to take us from the lovely village of Sidbury westwards and then down to the seafront at Sidmouth. Bring a flask for a coffee break. We should arrive in time for a picnic lunch on the seafront or you can find something at one of the many eateries in Sidmouth. Buses return hourly to Sidbury for those who left a car there.

If you plan to arrive by bus, please let **walk leaders Penny and Paul Kurowski** know, and we will wait for the bus! 01395 742942 or 07792 619748 or [pandp@kurowski.me.uk](mailto:pandp@kurowski.me.uk)

4. **“Walk 1: Twelve walks in the Otter Valley”**

Tuesday 14 November – 10.00am – 6.5 miles. About 4 hours.

Meet: Otterton Green (OS 115, SY 081 852)

Monks Walk, Otter Head, White Bridge, Lime Kiln, Clamour Bridge, Colliver Cross. Bring packed lunch

**Walk Leader:** Iain Ure and Dee Woods 01395 568822 / 07597 921007

5. **“Bird Watching around the Otter Estuary”**

Tuesday 21 November – 10.00am – 2 / 2.5 hours.

Meet: Lime Kiln CP, Budleigh Salterton, by the new bridge.



Led by the Otter Estuary Ranger, Rick Lockwood and assisted by Colin Randall, local resident, and Devon Birds member.

Binoculars useful if you have them, but definitely not necessary.

Warm clothing as lots of stopping. Finish 12 – 12.30pm.

6. **“Woodbury & Woodbury Salterton”**

Friday 1 December – 10.00am – 5.3 miles

Meet: Woodbury Village car park (free)

We will walk from Woodbury village on a circular route via Woodbury Salterton with a stop for coffee.

**Walk Leader:** Sarah Westacott 0770 6078143

7. **“Sid Valley Ring East”**

Friday 8 December – about 7 miles. About 3.5 hours

Meet: Sidbury Church (OS 115, SY 129 917) Park in the car park behind the village hall (OS 115, SY 128 919) or take Stagecoach bus 9 from Sidmouth arriving 10.04am

We will walk the eastern half of the Sid Valley Ring, which uses quiet lanes and footpaths to take us from the lovely village of Sidbury eastwards and visits Dunscombe and Salcombe Regis with a couple of coast path sections before arriving at the seafront at Sidmouth. Bring a flask for a coffee break. We should arrive in time for a picnic lunch on the seafront or you can find something at one of the many eateries in Sidmouth. Buses return hourly to Sidbury for those who left a car there.

If you plan to arrive by bus, please let **walk leaders Penny and Paul Kurowski** know, and we will wait for the bus! 01395 742942 or 07792 619748 or [pandp@kurowski.me.uk](mailto:pandp@kurowski.me.uk)

### 8. “Walk 12 from Twelve walks in the Otter Valley”

Tuesday 12 December – 10.00am – 9 miles. About 5 hours

Meet: Otterton Green (OS 115, SY 081 852)

Otterton, Colaton Raleigh, Northmostown via Dotton, Mutters Moor, Peak Hill, Ladram. Bring packed lunch.

**Walk Leaders:** Iain Ure and Dee Woods 01395 568822 / 07597 921007

### 9. “Walk 2 from Twelve walks in the Otter Valley”

Tuesday 19 December – 10.00am – 5 miles. About 3 hours.

Meet: Otterton Green (OS 115, SY 081 852)

Otterton, White Bridge, Lime Kiln, Budleigh, Old Railway, Clamour Bridge.

Bring a packed lunch.

**Walk Leaders:** Iain Ure and Dee Woods 01395 568822 / 07597 921007

### 10. “A New Year Walk”

Tuesday 2 January – 10.00am – 6 miles. 3 hours.

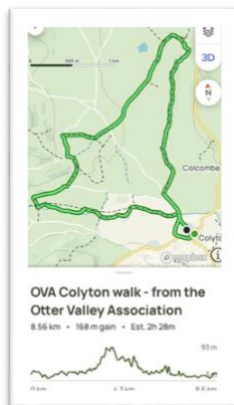
Meet: The shelter beside the Longboat Café, Budleigh Salterton promenade (OS 115, SY 0691 8192)

Start the year as you mean to carry on with a good walk! We shall wend our way through the backstreets of Budleigh Salterton and come out onto West Down and the golf course. Then we head north to the old railway cycle track, which takes us to Littleham. After passing through the caravan park, we can enjoy the delights of the coast path on our way back to the start. Optional lunch at the Brook Kitchen.

**Walk Leader:** Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 07887 936280

# Walk Report – Sept 5<sup>th</sup> Colyton loop

It was a wonderful day for the OVA walk from Colyton on a circular route along the Coly river and back across fields to a welcoming lunch at the Kingfisher pub. Led by Jon Roseway, we departed in the bright September sunshine (yes, summer did make an appearance!).



This was a lovely walk, starting in the delightful village of Colyton, ablaze with flags flying from the buildings. We set off following the river Coly stopping halfway around for a coffee break. The views were spectacular and the insights to local places were appreciated. It was great to meet people new to the walking program and learning about the local area while enjoying fabulous scenery. For example:

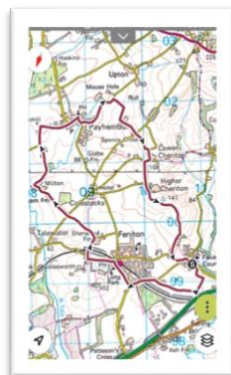
1. Who knew that Colyton has an amazing history as a “rebel town” by supplying more men to the Monmouth’s rebellion of 1685 than any other town?
2. Who knew that most of the maize grown around here is used in “Anorobic Digesters” to deliver energy to the electricity grid?

This is the beauty of OVA walks - walking at your pace with knowledgeable walkers in a friendly environment. Think of it as “enrichment walking”!

Thankyou to Jon for leading the walk.

# Walk Report – Sept 12<sup>th</sup> Feniton

Six walkers and one very well behaved dog, Jasper, joined Fran & Paul on this delightful walk. We were promised wonderful views and no great hills, both promises were kept and the sun shone.



The village of Feniton where we started consists of two related communities - the original village of Feniton, known as old Feniton, and the newer part which is centred around the railway station. The old part contains the 13th Century church of St Andrews and a number of thatched cottages. The local river is called the Vine Water and is a tributary of our very own River Otter and is believed to have given the village its name.

Our coffee stop was in the grounds of one of the cider orchards we passed. We passed horses and some very well groomed sheep. We saw a very rare sight, - some council workers filling in a very large pot hole! A shame it was on a rather remote road in the sticks.



We stopped for lunch in the little village of Payhembury which is dedicated to St Mary and was mostly built in the 15th Century. It includes a stone arcade made of Beer stone and has several shields including the arms of the Courtenay family, a coloured roof and altar rails from the reign of Queen Anne. The only downside to stopping here for lunch was a tractor also stopped nearby and was laden with farmyard manure.

A delightful walk along quiet country lanes with some great views. Thank you, Paul & Fran.

# Communication

Author: Chris Boorman

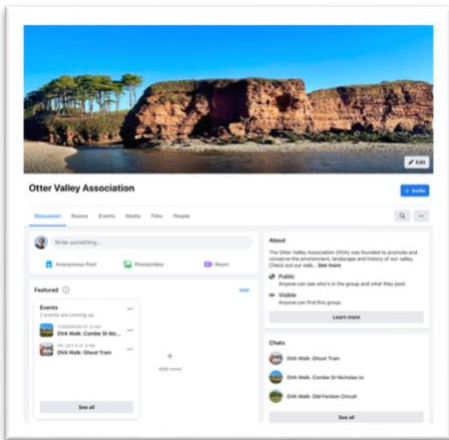
The OVA is now using a combination of printed newsletter, online websites, Facebook groups and Whatsapp to help ensure everyone knows what is going on.

## Website:

Here we maintain all information and ensure that everything is available for you to view. As you can see from the screenshot, easy viewing of our walks program, searching of the OVAPedia and many other useful elements are available to view and use.



## Facebook:



We have created a [facebook group](#) to help members share their own experiences and comment on articles. We will provide updates to this whenever anything happens – but we encourage everyone to engage, add their own posts and comment on others. You can find this by searching for “Otter Valley Association” when inside Facebook.

Our walkers have also created a WhatsApp group to help coordinate and share information about their walks. So if you are interested in joining a walk, please ask the walk leader to add you to the Whatsapp group.



# The Ghost Train

Author: Tony Venning

Our OVA walkers arrived at Tipton St. Johns 56 years too late to catch the 5.50 pm train to Newton Poppleford, a 1 ¼ mile journey that would have taken three minutes and cost 4 (old) pence for a second-class single ticket in the days of steam. Passenger services were withdrawn on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1967, and today only the station building survives as a private dwelling; a solitary ivy-clad concrete gate post is all that remains to remind us of the level crossing gates that protected road users between the garage and Golden Lion Inn.

The railways first reached Exeter in 1844 with a line from Bristol, and in 1860 a second route into the city from Waterloo via Salisbury was opened, with an



Credit: L. F. Folkard, from 'Steam on West Country Branch Lines' by Peter Gray

intermediate station at Feniton. It was not until 1874, when Feniton was renamed Sidmouth Junction, that services connecting Sidmouth to the main line commenced. The 8 ¼ mile single track branch line had two intermediate stations and passing points at Ottery St. Mary and – less importantly – Tipton St. Johns.

Sidmouth's first railway was constructed to convey stone 1 ¾ miles from Hook Ebb at the base of Dunscombe Cliff through a tunnel beneath Salcombe Hill to facilitate construction of two jetties. A steam engine, delivered to the site in

1837, proved too large for the tunnel so it was employed instead giving pleasure rides along the sea front before the project was abandoned.

Twenty-five years later, the 1862 Sidmouth Railway & Harbour Company's Act failed to attract sufficient investment, so it was not until 6<sup>th</sup> July 1874 that the branch line finally opened with the customary celebrations. It was operated by the London and South Western Railway on behalf of the Sidmouth Railway Company until both were subsumed into the Southern Railway 49 years later. The Beeching report of 1963 recommended closure, and despite vigorous opposition from Sidmouth's commercial interests the line closed on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1967 after 93 years of operation. In May 1971 Sidmouth Junction station resumed its original identity as Feniton.

Initially simply named Tipton, the suffix 'St. Johns' was added in 1881 to avoid confusion with Tipton in Staffordshire. The station's importance increased dramatically in 1897 when it became the junction for the Budleigh Salterton Railway with intermediate stations at East Budleigh (and later Newton Poppleford), and even more so in 1903 when the line was extended from Budleigh through to Exmouth. In 1928 10,500 tickets were issued and a similar number collected. Through coaches to and from Waterloo would be split from or connected to express trains at Tipton and at peak times 28 to 30 trains each day passed through in each direction; double-headed trains of ten or eleven coaches were not uncommon during the peak summer months. Tipton's enhanced status as a junction resulted in significant improvements; an enlarged 33-lever signal box was installed with a handwheel to operate the level crossing gates, and an enclosed pedestrian overbridge erected to replace the original wooden boarded crossing at rail level. The station became a locomotive watering point with a large steel tank mounted on a brick base just south of the crossing, supplied by water from a stream which can still be seen next to the garage.

Approaching Tipton from the north, the line descended gently along the Otter Valley to cross a five-arch, 55-yard brick viaduct which crossed the river on a slight skew. This structure remains today and was inspected by Haylor's team before they set out to explore the track bed south of the village. The line continued into the station, passing three sidings where the cricket field is today, and where camping coaches were stabled. Here, for £9 a family of up to six persons could enjoy an inexpensive holiday for a week. Closer to the station with its 250-foot-long platforms were coal staithe and a cattle dock. Beyond the station, heading south across the level crossing, the junction to Budleigh and Exmouth turned off to the right to follow the valley floor, but the track bed here is lost forever beneath housing development and the pub car park.

The Sidmouth line steepened dramatically away from the village at an incline of 1 in 45, curving through the woods for 1 ¾ miles to Bowd summit before descending at 1 in 54 into Sidmouth. Such was the severity of incline(s) that special regulations were in place to govern the safety of trains, imposing limits on the loading of different classes of locomotives and specifying the braking capacity of trains. The walkers followed the track formation for ½ mile or so from Hayne Hill overbridge, before turning off to Newton Poppleford through Harpford.

Newton Poppleford station was almost an afterthought, as it was not opened until just over two years after services began on the Budleigh Salterton railway. It comprised a single 184-foot platform and single storey building on the downside, of which no traces remain. Like Tipton St. Johns it had two camping coaches located in a single siding, but there was no level crossing here – the main road crossed by an overbridge also long gone. In 1928 7,850 passengers bought tickets to travel from here, but eight years later the writing was already on the wall for the railways as this number had diminished to 4,300. Originally staffed by a station master and porter, this was later reduced to only a station master and subsequently only a porter. In 1965 the station became an unstaffed halt before it closed with the rest of the line in 1967.

The walkers returned to Tipton through fields where the track bed has been ploughed in. Perhaps we should leave them with the thoughts of Patricia Beer in an extract from her poem ‘The Branch Line’, written to mark the closure of the railway between Sidmouth Junction and Exmouth...

The level crossing gates  
Guard passers-by from nothing  
Now. The railway’s bite  
Is dislocated by time,  
Too out-of-date to harm  
Like a gummy old cat’s.  
The road is the frightening  
Power, the current favourite...

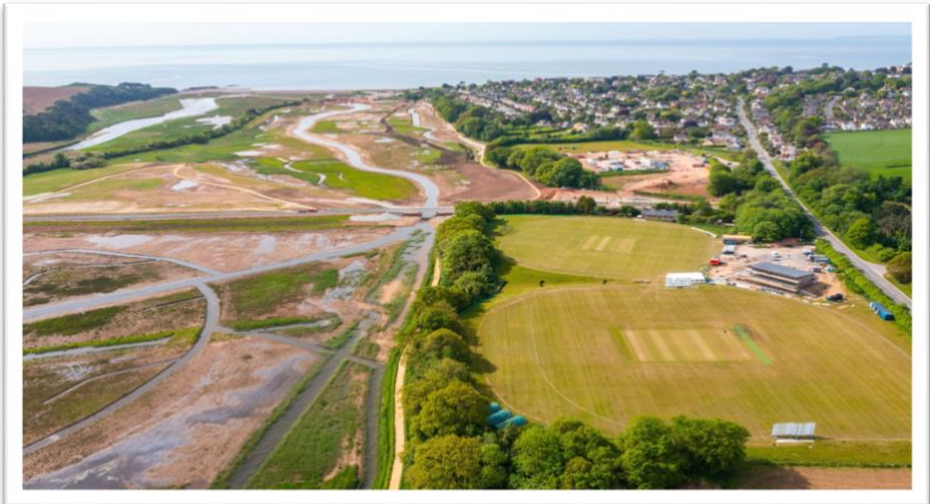
# Lower Otter Restoration Project

Author: Chris Boorman

Progress continues apace for the restoration project. In early September, a huge crane was installed to move the new footbridge in-place. The monumental undertaking was quite a sight to behold – with a large crane being used to build the main crane!



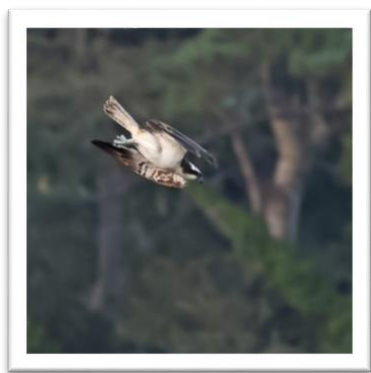
Meanwhile, the cricket pitches have enjoyed their first taste of summer, with the new clubhouse nearing completion.



Footpaths have been constructed on the East side of the project. Following completion of the new footbridge section and the opening of the project beneath it, it now provides wonderful walks up and down each side of the area. It should be noted that the east footpath is designed to flood a number of times each year on particularly high tides.

One of the aims of the project is to enhance the lower Otter area in order to adapt and enhance the downstream part of the River Otter, its estuary, and its immediate surroundings for future generations in the face of a rapidly changing climate. The project is being delivered because the existing 200-year-old sea defences are now starting to fail and are becoming increasingly hard to maintain. This is already impacting on public infrastructure, local businesses and homes, and recreational facilities.

The Lower Otter also provides habitat for a wide variety of breeding and wintering bird species, and it is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each year. There was significant buzz recently when Osprey's were spotted catching fish in the Lower Otter. We all believe that this is a sign of great things to come in the area.



Credit: Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust

# Government Consultation on Development Changes

Author: Dee Woods

The government has been consulting on additional flexibilities to support housing delivery, the agricultural sector, businesses, high streets and open prisons; and a call for evidence on nature-based solutions, farm efficiency projects and diversification. You can find information about this on the government website [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/permitted-development-rights) [https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/permitted-development-rights]. The closing date for submissions was 25 September 2023. The consultation was seeking views on proposals relating to permitted development rights, that is development or changes of use that do not need specific planning permissions.

They were seeking views on proposed changes to a number of permitted development rights that allow certain existing buildings to change to residential use. This includes the rights that allow the change of use of buildings within the Commercial, Business, and Service use class and of agricultural buildings to dwellinghouses (up from 5 to 10 homes on an agricultural unit - Class Q - existing floor space must be 37 sq m to benefit).

They were also seeking to apply this right to other rural buildings, eg equestrian or forestry etc. Currently this Right does not apply to agricultural buildings outside a village not part of a working farm, nor to AONBs or National Parks or Conservation Areas, but permitting changes in these circumstances is being consulted on. Any building must have existing suitable access to a public highway.

The consultation was also seeking views on changes to the rights that allow for agricultural diversification and development on agricultural units. (New buildings from 1000 to 1500 sq m if holding large than 5 hectares)

They are proposing amendments to certain rights that allow for non-domestic extensions, including the right that allows for extensions to commercial business and service premises and the right that allows for extensions to and the erection of industrial and warehouse buildings. The consultation also includes an amendment to the temporary use of that would allow markets to operate for 28 days per calendar year rather than 14 as at present.

The consultation also includes an amendment to the right that allows the erection, extension or alteration of schools, colleges, universities, hospital and closed prisons to also apply it to open prisons. The government is consulting on the

application of local design codes to certain permitted development rights to support the delivery of well-designed development.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, any changes would be brought forward via secondary legislation as an amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, as amended, when parliamentary time allows.

Finally, this consultation also contains a call for evidence led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The call for evidence seeks views on nature-based solutions, farm efficiency projects and diversification.

For information the government extended camping permitted development rights from 28 days to 60 days in July 2023 on agricultural units over 5 hectares, subject to a maximum of 50 units.

### **What you can do to help:**

If you would like to understand more, please visit the government web shown above.

## **Donations**

The OVA always welcomes donations to help fund its projects and meet its aims. If you wish to make a donation to the OVA please credit our bank account:

Account Name: Otter Valley Association,

Sort Code: 30-98-75,

Account No.: 49855168;

or send a cheque to:

OVA, PO Box 70, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 6WN

Please add a Reference of “Donation” or your name.

Thank you.

# The Otter Valley Association

## Trustees (and Executive Committee)

Haylor Lass	Chairman, Newton Poppleford	01395 568786
Bob Wiltshire	Vice-chair, Budleigh Salterton	01395 444395
Jane Kewley	Secretary	01395 445598
Martin Smith	Treasurer, Membership, Web	01395 442333
Chris Hodgson	Natural Environment	01404 815604
Geoff Porter	Natural Environment	01395 567055
Dee Woods	Built Environment, Otterton	01395 568822

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Chris Boorman	Newsletter Editor	07517 137050
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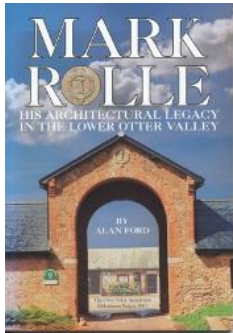
OVA PO BOX 70

Budleigh Salterton

EX9 6WN



# OVA Publications



## Mark Rolle

### His Architectural Legacy in the Lower Otter Valley

Ever wondered about the many improved farm buildings and cottages in this area? This lavishly illustrated book gives a very readable overview of how a large landed estate was managed in the last 40 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

£4.95 from Budleigh Salterton Tourist Information Centre

Or visit [www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)

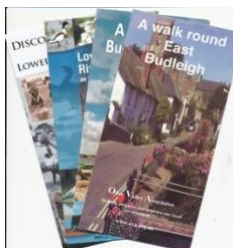


## Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from Budleigh Salterton Tourist Information Centre

Or visit [www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)



## Leaflets

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley.

They can usually be found in the Tourist Information Centre and in other outlets around the valley.