



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

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A History of Lepidoptera Recording in Gwent

This article is an updated version of the section *A History of Lepidoptera Recording in Monmouthshire* published in Neil Horton's 1994 book *Monmouthshire Lepidoptera*.

(a) Resident Lepidopterists

Resident entomologists have always been few in Monmouthshire and they still remain so, though the twenty years since Neil Horton's book appeared have seen a welcome increase in the number of local recorders.

Charles Conway (ca.1797-1860), owner of a tin-plate works and a keen naturalist who lived at Pontrhydyryn, is best remembered as a botanist rather than an entomologist and the herbarium he formed in the 1830s is now in the Welsh National Herbarium. In 1833 he published a list of the butterflies found in the district which now embraces the new post-war town of Cwmbran in Gwent's Eastern Valley. This was the first local list of the county's Lepidoptera to be produced.

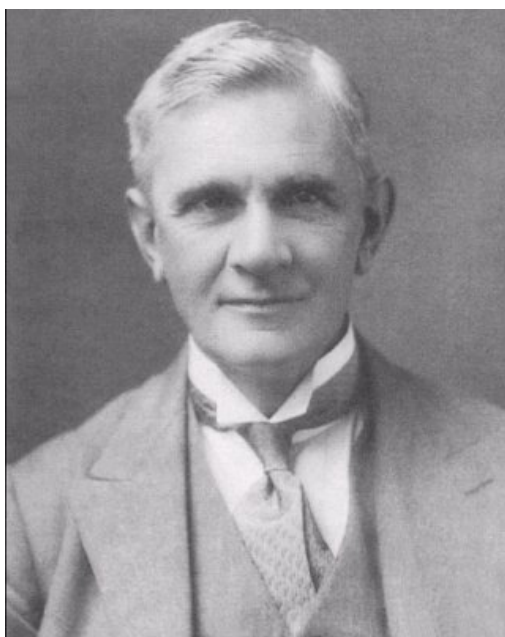
Edward Newman's *The Natural History of British Butterflies* (1871) contains a number of Monmouthshire records supplied by George Lock who, it would seem, lived in or near Newport. Although his Monmouthshire records are of great interest unfortunately one or two of them are rather suspect, especially that of the Black Hairstreak in St. Julian's Wood. Neither has it always been possible to recognise with certainty the localities he named. Neil Horton was unable to obtain any information about George Lock, but a recent internet search of census data (see MMBG newsletter number 40, October 2006) produced only one likely candidate, a 27-year-old bath attendant, George Lock, living in St Woollos, Newport, with his wife and two children. Born in Devon in 1844, he moved to Newport in the 1860s. This George Lock died in Dec 1871 and his widow and children moved away to Bristol. Perhaps this explains why there was only one set of records known from George Lock: before his early death, aged 27, he would have lived in Newport for less than ten years. The evidence fits with this being the George Lock mentioned by Newman, who produced the second published list of butterflies for the county.

William Rait-Smith, a Kentish man and noted lepidopterist, was a mining surveyor who between 1905 and 1914 worked at Abertillery in north-west Monmouthshire. Whilst living there he published many local moth and butterfly records in the *Ent. Rec. J. Var.*

In the early 1930s the late G.F. Crowther arrived from Cheshire, living first at Bettws Newydd near Usk, and latterly in Monmouth until his death shortly after the last war. Some of his records appear in the literature but, as far as his son was aware, his father left no written records of his entomological activities.

Neil Horton's good friend, the late Lieut.-Col. R.B. Humphreys (1914-1989), who as a boy had collected with Crowther, lived at Usk in his youth and throughout his life frequently returned here to visit his family and "run his moth-trap" at Usk Castle. He had a number of new Monmouthshire records to his credit including Chocolate Tip and Double Line. Since the last war Neil and he often hunted moths and butterflies together from Cornwall to Cumbria and Northumberland but mostly in Monmouthshire.

Colin Titcombe, previously of Caerwent in the south-east of the county but now residing at Llandogo, a most observant and knowledgeable local naturalist, has made many interesting records of Lepidoptera (and other insects) which appeared in Neil's book.



William Rait-Smith



Neil Horton

Special pride of place in the history of Lepidoptera recording in Gwent must go to Neil Horton himself. Born (1915) and bred in the Newport area, he had personal records for butterflies and day-flying moths dating back to the 1920s, and had light-trapped moths since ca.1966. He studied Natural Sciences (botany) at Christ's College, Cambridge, but after taking his degree decided to change to medicine. He was a medical officer in the R.A.F. during the war and took up general practice in Usk at the end of hostilities where he remained for nearly forty years until he retired at the age of seventy in 1985. Since his early teens he travelled a good deal on the Continent and collected insects in many European countries as well as in India, Burma, Sri Lanka and in East Africa in Tanzania and Kenya. He was a Member of the *British Entomological and Natural History Society* and a Fellow of the *Linnean Society* and of the *Royal Entomological Society*, publishing many entomological papers. In 1968 John Heath asked him to become the Monmouthshire County Recorder for Lepidoptera, a post he held until 1995. Neil continued recording until ca.1993. After several years in a nursing home, he died in 2005. He is best known for his discovery in Britain of *Eriopygodes imbecilla*, the Silurian moth, in 1972.

In his book, Neil Horton stated "A recent and welcome addition to our resident Gwent lepidopterists is Dr Martin Anthoney who some years ago moved here from Essex where he had made several notable discoveries of rare moths. Residing in Risca since 1976 he has greatly extended our knowledge of the macrolepidoptera in the west of the county and has added a number of species to the county list. He is a keen conservationist and non-collector." I will add nothing to Neil's kind words other than that, after 38 years living and recording in Gwent, the word "recent" is probably redundant, and that I took over from Neil as County Recorder for butterflies and macromoths in 1995 and still hold the post. I should also explain that my contribution to recording micromoths has been limited since I will not kill or dissect specimens and personal circumstances have not allowed me to breed larvae through to identify them.

The last 20 years have seen a welcome increase in the number of resident recorders, but Gwent has suffered more than most counties from the number of enthusiastic people who learn their recording in Gwent before moving away from the county. In recent years, people such as Sally Brown (Abergavenny), Luke

Phillips (Ebbw Vale) and Adrian Hickman (Usk) spring to mind, but the most notable example is Sam Bosanquet. Sam started recording moths at Dingestow Court, the family home, in 1993 when he borrowed a light trap from school and developed a particular penchant for micromoths. Over the last 20 years he has added numerous micros to Neil Horton's county list. Unfortunately, university, work and a young family have limited the time Sam could spend recording in Gwent. He is now resident in Carmarthenshire and has become an expert in other orders such as bryophytes. Occasional visits to the family home produce some records, and Sam still acts as the Monmouthshire County Recorder for micromoths, but we live in hope that one day he might return to his native county.

At the end of the 1990s two important milestones in Gwent Lepidoptera recording occurred. In 1998 the charity Butterfly Conservation employed its first full-time member of staff to cover Wales. The establishment of a Wales Office played an important part in promoting butterfly and moth recording and in organising projects, including Gwent projects such as the Silurian larval searches. The staff have also submitted important personal records. Russel Hobson, Clare Williams, George Tordoff and their predecessors have played a significant role in developing Lepidoptera recording in Wales, including Gwent.

The second milestone came in 1999, out of the C.A.W.N. (Community Action for Wildlife in Newport) project. Kevin Dupé and Roger James, who were both important in monitoring the return of Small Ranunculus (*Hecatera dysodea*) to Wales, were instrumental in setting up the Newport Moth Recording Group, which quickly became the Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group, a loose affiliation of people interested in recording Lepidoptera in Gwent, with *The Silurian* as its newsletter. Fourteen years later it is going from strength to strength; the newsletter is now circulated to about a hundred people, Kevin Dupé is Manager of Newport Wetlands National Nature Reserve, where he has added several new moth species to the county list, and Roger James is President of the Gwent Wildlife Trust. The original suggestion to form the group came from Chris Renshaw. Born in Kent, where he started trapping and recording at a very early age before moving to Gwent, Chris sadly died in 2001 at the young age of 47 without seeing his idea come to fruition.

(b) Visiting Lepidopterists

Over the years, the county has had many visiting lepidopterists, both amateur and professional, at times far outnumbering the resident entomologists. Until recent years, almost without exception, they concentrated their efforts on the Wye Valley which is the most scenically attractive and debatably the most entomologically rewarding part of Gwent. However for the lepidopterist there is far more to Gwent than the Wye Valley.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and in the earlier years of the last century, many moth-hunters came to the Wye Valley and their records are to be found scattered through the contemporary zoological and entomological journals. Perhaps the earliest such arrival was Parry who in 1839 recorded the Lappet Moth (*Gastropacha quercifolia*) from Monmouth town. Palmer in 1890 gave records from Monmouth itself and also from Cwmcarnan in the nearby hills. In the same year Patten recorded insects on the banks of the Wye. In 1904 Thornewill reported that the Striped Hawk-moth (*Hyles lineata livornica*) had been captured in Monmouth.

Among the many visiting lepidopterists who came to the lower part of the Wye Valley were Piffard who in 1859 worked the Tintern area and Goss who noted the Scarlet Tiger (*Callimorpha dominula*) at Tintern in 1867 and again in 1890. A.H. Jones gave Tintern records for 1876 and the following year Ince worked the Tintern district but also moved westwards into the neighbouring region referring in his records to "Monmouthshire in every part" and visiting Wentwood and the area between Chepstow and Usk where he recorded the High Brown Fritillary. Nesbitt visited the Llandogo district in 1892 and 1893 while Bird worked the Tintern area in 1905, 1906, 1907 and again in 1912. Barraud also visited the Wye Valley in 1906 and again in 1907 when he recorded the Conformist (*Lithophane furcifera suffusa*) on sallow at Bigsweir but on the

Gloucestershire bank of the Wye.

Since the 1939-45 war many professional and notable amateur field lepidopterists have worked the lower Wye Valley and include such well-known names as R.A. Jackson, Blathwayt, J.M. Chalmers-Hunt, Charles de Worms, J.L. Messenger, Austin Richardson, G.M. Haggett, R.M. Mere, J.D. Bradley, D.S. Fletcher, R.W.J. Uffen, R.E.M. Pilcher, M.J. Leech, E.C. Pelham-Clinton, A. Maitland Emmet, M.W. Harper, J.R. Langmaid, D.J.L. Agassiz, Bernard Skinner and numerous others.

The discovery in this area in the 1960s of *Salebriopsis albicilla* and Fletcher's Pug (*Eupithecia egeneria*) together with the rediscovery of the Scarce Hook-tip (*Sabra harpagula*), which was thought to be extinct in Britain, has led to a large increase in the numbers of lepidopterists visiting the area in recent years. The discovery of *Eriopygodes imbecilla*, The Silurian moth, in 1972 has similarly led to an increase in visitors to the more mountainous north and west of Gwent.

Since Neil Horton's day there has been a welcome growth in organisations generating funds to allow experts from outside Gwent to help with targeted recording. The most important example is again The Silurian moth. Support from Butterfly Conservation, Countryside Council for Wales and the Monmouthshire Moth and Butterfly Group enabled Dr Paul Waring, in 1996 and subsequently, to establish the range of the moth in Blaenau Gwent, and in 2005 to lead the team which first discovered larvae in the wild. More recently, Dave Grundy has worked on the moth and organised the expedition which discovered a new colony on Hatterrall Ridge in 2011. Other Gwent species which have benefitted from funded work include Waved Carpet (*Hydrelia sylvata*), Drab Looper (*Minoa murinata*), Scarce Hook-tip (*Sabra harpagula*) and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*).

What then of the future? The increased interest in butterfly and moth recording, in Gwent and elsewhere, is welcome, but youngsters today lack the identification skills of some of their predecessors and a way must be found of filling this gap. The internet opens up enormous possibilities, with digital photography greatly assisting identification and verification of records. On-line recording via "apps" will be embraced by some, though for others of us who already use computers a lot, fieldwork is regarded as an opportunity to get away from them! The main dangers could be the fragmentation of data sets, with records spread more widely and difficult to collect, and the risk of unverified, incorrect records proliferating. I firmly believe the way forward is a strong local Gwent network, with key websites and personnel widely publicised and linked to our local record centre (SEWBReC). Personally, I have grave doubts that national systems such as NBN (National Biodiversity Network) will ever achieve what is expected from them. A lot of work remains to be done: we are still discovering unrecorded Gwent sites which look excellent for Lepidoptera, and who knows what we might find there? Gwent is an exciting county to be a lepidopterist.

Martin Anthony

Monmouthshire Moth & Butterfly Group Winter Meeting and AGM

Report of the AGM and Winter Indoor Meeting held 7th March 2014 at the British Legion, Usk.

Nine members attended the meeting with three apologies. The minutes of the last AGM were approved. The meeting heard that the production of polo-shirts with the Silurian logo had only made £10 profit. Only seven had been sold; if ten or more had been ordered, profits would have been three times as much.

The group's treasurer, Sheila Dupe, gave a finance report. The balance was £356.

Martin Anthony informed the meeting that the 100th edition of the Silurian was due out at the end of April and he intended to produce a special edition.

Richard Clarke proposed that MMBG adopt the “Gwent Mothing” Blog as its official website. This was agreed unanimously by the meeting, with members feeling it was an excellent place to publicise moth trapping events and to provide links to distribution maps etc. Richard Clarke, who had set up the Blog, agreed to continue to run the website on behalf of the group.

National Moth Night: suggested sites to trap were Caerwent, Llantarnam Abbey and Silent Valley.

Martin Anthony gave an excellent presentation entitled “Highlights of 2013 and targets for 2014”. With Butterfly Conservation planning to publish a full moth Atlas towards the end of 2018, and 2014 being the final year in the current five-year cycle (2010-2014) of butterfly records, the next two seasons will be important in “filling in the gaps”. Suggested target areas will be listed in the next issue of the Silurian.

Kevin Dupé

Recent Highlights

March 2014 was drier, warmer and sunnier than average, but rather less so than March 2012 which was a truly exceptional month. But with memories still fresh of the dreadfully cold March 2013, this last month brought welcome weather and plenty of spring butterflies and moths.

25 th Feb	Red Admiral butterfly at Bedwas	(Mike Pointon)
2 nd March	Clouded Drab at Melbourne Way, Newport	(Roger James)
5 th March	Pale Pinion and Brindled Pug at Melbourne Way, Newport	(Roger James)
6 th March	March Moth to light at Risca. Shoulder Stripe to light at Ochryth	(Martin Anthony) (Richard Clarke)
7 th March	Brimstone Butterfly at Penallt Peacock Butterfly at Penallt Another Peacock at Newport Wetlands Reserve	(Stephanie Tyler) (Ian Rabjohns) (Kevin Dupé)
8 th March	Engrailed to light at Llantarnam Abbey woodlands Red Chestnut to light at Penallt Yellow Horned, Oak Nycteoline, Twin-spotted Quaker and Small Quaker moths at Melbourne Way, Newport Comma butterfly at Chepstow	(Bob Roome) (Stephanie Tyler) (Roger James) (Nick Felstead)
11 th March	Tawny Pinion and Satellite at Melbourne Way, Newport	(Roger James)
15 th March	Tawny Pinion on a gatepost at St Mellons Double-striped Pug to light at Haisbro Ave., Newport Early Thorn to light at Risca	(Nick Sharp) (Sheila Dupé) (Martin Anthony)
17 th March	Mottled Grey and Streamer to light at Risca Brindled Beauty at Llantarnam Abbey woodlands	(Martin Anthony) (Bob Roome)
19 th March	Early Tooth-striped moth to light at Risca	(Martin Anthony)



Dotted Chestnut
(Richard Clarke)

- 29th March Dotted Chestnuts to light at both Ochryth and at Llandogo (Richard Clarke)
Only the eleventh and twelfth county records. (Gail Reynolds)
- 29th March Other records for a very productive day (and night) were:
Nut-tree Tussock to light at Cwmcarn (Rob Coles & Anna Gambarini)
Powdered Quaker to light at Newport Wetlands Reserve (Kevin Dupé)
White-marked to light at Penallt (Stephanie Tyler)
Herald moth and Water Carpet to light at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)
Orange-tip butterfly at Penallt (Stephanie Tyler)

Dates for your Diary 2014

- Tuesday 6th May A light trapping event in Pontypool Park. Meet at Pontypool Leisure Centre car park, Trosnant Street, Pontypool NP4 8AT (grid ref SO285007) at 8.15pm. If you intend coming or require further information, please contact Kevin Dupé:
(mobile phone 07818097621, phone 01633 216599 or e-mail the.dupes@virginmedia.com)
- Saturday 14th June *Go Wild* Show, this year at Parc Bryn Bach, Tredegar, 10am -3pm. South Wales' biggest wildlife event, a good day out for the family.
- Friday 4th July National Moth Night. Courtesy of the MoD DTE(Wales & West), a light trapping event will be held at the Caerwent Training Area. Meet at 9.30pm at the West Gate entrance to the site, off the A48 at ST466909. For further details contact Martin Anthoney:
(01633612272 or martin@chemlep.demon.co.uk).
Advance booking is essential for this event.

Saturday 5th July

National Moth Night. Courtesy of the Sisters, a light trapping event will be held at Llantarnam Abbey woodlands, Cwmbran, Torfaen, NP44 3YJ.

Grid Reference: ST312929. Meet at 9.30pm at the car park.

For further details contact Martin Anthoney (as above).

[Junction 26 off the M4, head north (signposted Cwmbran) and travel up Malpas Road (A4051). Nb. you will need to move out of the left lane!

At roundabout take 2nd exit onto Newport Road. Drive along this road and turn right into the Abbey once you see the rather grand gateway on your right hand side (sign outside the entrance says 'Sisters of St Joseph, Llantarnam Abbey, Tŷ-Croeso Centre'). Nb. If you reach another roundabout you have gone too far, so turn back around! Drive up the long drive and follow signs for car park.]

Saturday 18th October

Butterfly Conservation (S. Wales Branch) Members' Day and AGM.
at Kenfig.

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