



Edition: July 2000

## Gilchrist Field - A Special Place

**W**E HAD A FINE MORNING on May 9 when our President, Colin Jeary, and Chairman, Fred Davis, planted the final two Lombardy Poplars on the Association's Gilchrist Field nature reserve in The Byes, to mark Millennium Year 2000. As members know, this 8-acre field was purchased in 1996, the year the Association celebrated its 150th anniversary.

With our long history we wanted to commemorate the Millennium year with something appropriate and enduring. Previous owners have left their mark on this part of the Sid Valley landscape by the trees they have planted. The reserve has a number of majestic native trees, including Ash, Oak, Beech, Lime, Sycamore, Alder and Willow, as well as several exotic conifer species around the Victorian pond. However, it is the stand of tall columnar Lombardy Poplars which is such a dominant feature of the reserve, particularly when seen from The Byes footpath. These trees are unlikely to survive another hundred years, so we decided to commemorate The Millennium by planting their successors for the twenty-second century.

Gilchrist Field is a special place: its position on the River Sid, the variety and splendour of its trees and the Victorian pond, all add to its landscape charm. However, most people looking at the field would say: 'It's just a piece of grassland, what's special about that?' For many decades this field has not been ploughed, and is described in conservation terms as 'unimproved'. As fields like these are rare, the mix of their grasses needs to be managed to maintain continuity, otherwise the grassland will give way in time to scrubland and then woodland.

We intend to manage the grass to encourage tussocks and a deep thick sward. This will also provide the ideal environment for invertebrates, small mammals and birds. I felt that the field could provide the type of food-sources needed by Barn Owls, and this was confirmed by the wardens from the Barn Owl Trust on a visit in the winter. We have recently erected a Barn-Owl box, built by Jack Wickings, in one of the large trees on the reserve. Let us hope that a pair will soon take up residence, since several have been seen in the valley. It will be a fine sight to see these lovely birds flying over the field.

Hay meadows with their wild-flowers were also a feature from the days of traditional farming. In previous articles I have written of our intention to sow a wild-flower and grasses mixture, on the 2-acre-plus area used by South West Water to lay their sewage pipeline across the field. This was finally sown on May 23 and we have to thank Phil Lavers for preparing the seed bed, and Tony Bengier for sowing the mixture. After such a wet and disturbed April and May, I'm relieved to have this development completed. It marks the end of South West Water's constructional activities and the start of the creation of the wild-flower meadow.

We are also protecting two of our most endangered native tree species. This winter we have planted two groups of Black Poplars; fewer than 2000 remain in the whole of the UK. We have also planted a group of 3 Devon Whitebeams, which are now almost confined to gardens, so there are very few still growing in the wild.

Those of you who regularly walk through the Byes, and walk around the reserve, will know that the stile has been replaced by a 'kissing gate' entrance. This installation, donated by Mrs. Olive Greenslade, is a memorial to Harold Sidney Greenslade, who loved the Sid valley.

*Brian Callaway*

*Chairman of the Woodlands and Estates Sub-Committee in 2000.*

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## Sidmouth – a Place Remembered

A Memento Of Bygone Days

ONE MISERABLE MORNING in November the post arrived and there on the mat was my copy of the Sid Vale Association Newsletter. And suddenly the memories came flooding back . . .

My husband had been a regular visitor to Sidmouth since a child. In very early days as a day visitor, while staying with his grandmother in Ottery St. Mary; and in later years staying with his Aunt Leila, who lived in a house called 'Sunnyside' either in, or just off, Malvern Road. It was in Aunt Leila's front room that he proposed to me.

Well, since then we have spent many very happy holidays in Sidmouth, and never a year went by that we didn't at least spend a day there. One year, I remember, we left our home in Surrey at six in the morning with our three children, and were ensconced on the beach at Jacob's Ladder by 9.30. Then, in more recent years, we found ourselves staying at the Riviera Hotel on the front - something we had always aspired to when young! We always maintained that if we could still walk up Peak Hill and Salcombe Hill (not necessarily on the same day!) we had passed our M.O.Ts and were good for another year.

Sadly, my husband died early this year and I haven't been back to Sidmouth. However, I shall come back, probably with my children - who now bring their children! Sidmouth will always have a special place in my heart, and I would just like to say thank you to the SVA for their hard work in protecting the amenities of this lovely little town.

