

# British Arachnological Society



**The Newsletter**

**No. 40**

**July 1984**

## ARACHNOLOGICAL HISTORY

### The Field Studies Council and the British Arachnological Society

by J. R. Parker

#### PART 1

Last year the Field Studies Council celebrated its 40th anniversary at the British Museum (Natural History) in London where it was founded in 1943 and at the same time the British Arachnological Society reached the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the first of its parent groups at Flatford Mill Field Centre in 1958. A celebration week-end will be held at Flatford Mill next September.

There was no wine and supplies of beer were all too often available only at week-ends. In fact meat rationing was to continue for another 11 years and clothing and soap for 6 years! But there was an unflagging spirit of determination towards victory and freedom for the oppressed. The enemy had been vanquished in North Africa and halted at Stalingrad. Italy was being invaded by allied forces and on the point of capitulation following the Fascist collapse; but most of the rest of Europe was occupied by the enemy. England was yet to be subjected to devastation by flying bombs and rocket missiles and the war was to go on and on for another two years.



*Flatford Mill, by J. R. Parker*

It is very remarkable that an organisation such as the F.S.C. should have been founded in the middle of a world war when the people of Britain were, with their Allies, fighting for the continuance of their existence against what, only a year or two earlier, seemed unsurmountable odds. In 1943 almost every kind of food was stringently rationed including meat, bacon, bread, butter, cheese, cooking fat, coffee, tea, milk, margarine and eggs as well as clothing, shoes and soap.

When I started to write this article I could not recall where I was in 1943 until my records reminded me I was on operational duties with the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy in the English Channel. Life was not without interest and excitement, but there were weeks and weeks without any leave for relaxation with one's family. I was quite oblivious to the fact that I would soon be promoted to commissioned rank and sent to the Far East where, 2 years later, the war ended.

I was released from national service early in 1946, more fortunate than some of my good companions who did not come home and are often remembered.

Even before the Allies landed in Normandy, Prime Minister Churchill was convinced that "We had reached the end of the beginning" and as early as the 19th October, 1943 he had issued a Six point Memorandum listing "The tasks which will fall upon us at the end of the war" and included gradual demobilisation, peace-time employment, reconstruction of bombed homes and an improvement in food supplies (Churchill, 1952).

In the middle of the turmoil someone had been thinking about education and the inadequate way in which Biology was being taught in schools and colleges. He was Francis Butler. Before the war, with a degree in Chemistry, Butler became a teacher at Dulwich College and there took a further degree in the History of Science with emphasis on the history of Biology. In 1930 he became Inspector of Schools for London County Council and found the teaching of Biology was almost entirely from text books and that there was a great need for tuition in the field. Even at universities, those reading Zoology rarely did any field work in those days unless it was done alone during vacations. Francis Butler wanted to change this, but very little progress was made by the time World War II commenced.

During the 1940 air raids the Butlers were living in Kent and during one air raid a very large bomb fell close to their house. All the ceilings fell and window glass was blown in all directions. Mrs. Eleanor Butler emerged from their internal make-shift shelter to find Francis badly hurt with a completely shattered arm. But the broken bones were set in the hospital where he spent many weeks, necessitating several operations, and a long convalescence which gave him time to think about the provision of facilities for field studies by students. It was during this time that he was introduced to Dr. Eric Ennion who was equally keen about plans to provide field study centres. Other prominent people such as Dr. Godwin of the Botany Department at Cambridge and Professors A. G. Tansley and A. R. Clapham at Oxford were made aware of Butler's ideas and gave their support.

On the 11th September, 1943 Francis Butler wrote to Dr. Herbert Smith, Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves explaining his project with enthusiasm and the fact that he had interested the National Trust in the possibility of using some of their properties as field study hostels. A meeting was convened at the British Museum (Natural History) in London on 10th December, 1943 when about 40 people prominent in the field of natural science at universities and museums attended. An organising committee under the chairmanship of Professor Godwin was constituted for this new Society for the Promotion of Field Studies. Later, Professor W. H. Pearsall became Chairman and the National Trust offered the use of Flatford Mill as a field centre where Dr. Ennion came as Warden. The Mill existed in Tudor times and, in or about 1689, was restored by the Constable family to its present appearance although now without its milling machinery (Constable, 1975). The Council was given some financial support by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust and later, by a grant from the Ministry of Education. Dr. Ennion, who worked for the first year without any salary, made a wonderful success of the field centre. At that time Flatford Mill had no mains water, no mains drainage and no electricity until a generator was obtained and installed by volunteers. As facilities were provided and improved the centre became so popular with students that other centres were planned.

Again with the help of the National Trust, Malham Tarn House in Yorkshire and Juniper Hall in Surrey became field centres, followed by the opening of others elsewhere and there are now 10 Centres in England and Wales. The name of the Society was changed to The Field Studies Council with a head office in London. The Council provided for membership by subscription, published an *Annual Report* and produced its own scientific journal *Field Studies* as a medium for the publication of research work in the natural sciences, archaeology and the arts.

Dr. Ennion eventually left the F.S.C. to found a centre of his own at Monks' House near to Seahouses on the Northumberland coast where he could provide courses in his special subjects; ornithology and painting. The Farne Islands sea bird sanctuary was near at hand. I visited Monks' House in 1951 when the fee for one week's residential course was £5 and Eric Ennion showed to me some of his coloured pastel drawings of wolf spiders and asked my opinion about them. They were quite admirable. Ennion was an excellent artist and his unique style could usually be recognised without any signature to his work, much of which was used to illustrate books on natural history.

In 1949 Jim Bingley had succeeded Ennion at Flatford Mill where he was held in high regard and affection for 35 years until he and his wife Monica retired in 1983 and left Valley Farm, to live at Balsham, near Cambridge.

Part II will conclude this article in *Newsletter 41*.

#### References

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Stone Raise, 42, Lakeland Park, KESWICK, Cumbria CA12 4AT

#### A further discovery of the harvestman *Sabacon* in Glamorgan

by Cynthia M. Merrett

During fieldwork in August 1983 at a small wooded reserve near Taff's Well in Mid Glamorgan, a harvestman with very prominent palps was collected by one of the party—Julie Broadbent. The previous article in *Newsletter No. 30*, March 1981 and the Martens publication *Die Tierwelt Deutschlands 64* indicated a further discovery of a *Sabacon* species and Mr. John Sankey identified the specimen as a male *Sabacon viscayanum ramblaianum* Martens.

In November, I was fortunate to collect a female of the species, and the two specimens are now in the Department of Zoology reference collection at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. Unlike the Gower specimen, which was discovered in deep leaf litter, the harvestmen here were found under debris, the habitat being more open and near the woodland fringe. They lie flat with legs extended and can easily be overlooked due to their dark greyish hue, and even when disturbed will curl up and feign death. However, they can move very rapidly and it is then the curiously-shaped pedipalps show up to the naked eye. As this must be a very small colony, proving very difficult to re-discover, it was thought wiser not to over-work the area, particularly as it is a Nature Reserve, and until the colony proves to be well-established.

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