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## HERTFORDSHIRE AND MIDDLESEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER.

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ISSUE 8

DECEMBER 1996



### Time to Plan Ahead By Malcolm Newland

The drought seems to be well and truly broken for the time being. Dark evenings and dropping temperatures mean that once again we will be relying on the slides and prints to cheer us up until the first warm days of spring bring the hibernating butterflies out and the whole cycle starts again.

We have the 1996 Butterfly Report to look forward to and compare with the previous year.

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Our dedicated band of conservation workers will be improving habitats in various parts of our area and members will be meeting socially at events in our winter programme.

The A.G. M. was poorly attended. I know that the official business is not everyone's cup of tea but the members's slides were well worth seeing with some outstanding ones on view.

With best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

### Winter Social

A members and guests social evening, offering wine and "nibbles", will be held on Friday 17th January 1997, at 7.30pm. It will take place in the "cosy" upstairs function room at The Silver Cup Pub, Harpenden (the first pub on the left before entering Harpenden from St Albans).

This new event in our calender is aimed to bring together as many members of the branch as possible. In this relatively quite period of the year, it provides an enjoyable opportunity to "catch up" with members seen on field trips or other events and to look forward to 1997. There will be a sales and membership table at the event, so please consider introducing a friend to Butterfly Conservation.

It would be appreciated, if you could let Malcolm Newland or myself know if you can attend. We hope that you can support this event and look forward to telling as many members as possible.

Terry Rodbard

## Butterfly in the Spotlight

*A new series of articles giving detailed information on a particular species of butterfly. For this, the first in the series, the Wall Brown has been selected, which has been particularly scarce in our branch region in recent years. Many thanks to Brian Sawford who gave permission for the article to be adapted from a chapter in his book, "The Butterflies of Hertfordshire".*

### **No.1 The Wall Brown by Brian Sawford**

As with all the "browns", Walls form discrete colonies. Their preferred habitat is warm, open, unimproved, flowery grasslands, especially the Chalk downs, with plenty of bare patches amongst the vegetation, but they may be encountered along hedges, road verges, railway embankments and cuttings, on wasteland and around the margins and rides of woodlands. Numbers are seldom high, with usually only a few that consort to feed with the more numerous Ringlets, Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns.

In flight a Wall might be mistaken for one of the small fritillaries or a Comma, but when basking on sunny brickwork, patches of bare ground or low vegetation, it is much easier to identify. Upperwings are dusky-brown near the body, brighter orange on their outer two-thirds, and are crossed by dark brown veins and several wavy lines; they have brown margins. Most conspicuous are the white-pupilled black eyespots, four along the margin of each hindwing and one, quite large, near the apex of each forewing. The underwings are beautifully patterned to provide superb camouflage when the butterfly is at rest.

The first generation, on the wing from May to early June, is often in noticeably lower numbers than the second, which flies from late July to early September. A partial third generation may occur in October during warm seasons.

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Males may spend long periods perched on patches of bare ground between patrolling flights in search of females. After mating eggs are deposited, singly or in small batches, low down in sunny sheltered clumps of various grasses including Yorkshire Fog, Cockfoot, Tor Grass (rare in Hertfordshire), Slender False Brome and Wavy Hair Grass.

Sites for laying eggs are carefully selected and are usually adjacent to open ground, for example, tracksides or Rabbit scrapes. The well camouflaged green larvae feed nocturnally and finally pupate amongst grass stems. Hibernation normally occurs in the larval stage, although some authorities consider that some may overwinter as pupae.

The Wall Brown has been particularly scarce in the branch region this year and in last years branch report the decline of this butterfly was also highlighted. This may give cause for concern, but it should also be noted that fluctuations have historically occurred in the size and range of Wall Brown populations in Hertfordshire.

Heath, Pollard and Thomas (1984) point out that there is a northern climatic limit to the range of Wall in Britain and that poor summers of the late 19th and early part of this century caused population reductions and retractions of this range. Indeed, during the first two decades of this century the Wall was sufficiently scarce in south Hertfordshire for any sightings to excite entomologists.

Throughout the 1940s, related to the series of fine summers, there was an easterly expansion of the Wall in Britain and the species became 'widespread and plentiful' in Hertfordshire, although the loss of some of the Chalk downs and former unimproved pastures to wartime ploughing presumably limited its abundance.

Poor weather in the 1950s and 1960s, coupled with environmental factors - intensification of agriculture, improvement of grasslands,

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and the scrub encroachment of downs and commons following the demise of Rabbits - caused a marked decrease in the abundance of the Wall and it went from a number of its former locations. A revival, which started in the early 1970s, was temporarily halted by the drought of 1976, when foodplants of the summer larvae were desiccated. Numbers built up again slowly to peak in 1983, fell dramatically in 1985, and were quite reasonable in 1986, illustrating the dramatic fluctuations that can be effected upon our butterfly population by even short-term changes in the weather.

In the 1995 branch report John Murray points out the previous fluctuations of this butterfly and how foodplant dessication may have explained why it had a poor year during the magnificent summer of 1995. He also highlights the drastic reduction in habitat since the war and whilst it is possible that the current downward trend in numbers is due to climatic variations, this butterfly's ability to recover when favourable conditions return may be hindered by the loss of habitat.

In fine seasons the Wall should still be seen, sometimes in good numbers, in Hertfordshire, especially on the Chalk downs, but there are substantial areas of the county, mainly arable and urban, where it is absent or scarce and its future will be very much governed by the vagaries of our climate.

**Newsletter**

Articles are needed, please send them to the editor.  
Deadline for the March issue is 3rd February 1997.

What would you like to see in the newsletter? Let the editor know. Address and phone number are on the back page.

## Field Trip Reports

### 12/5/96 Kensal Green Cemetery - John Hollingdale

I joined a group of about twenty people gathered inside the main gate of the cemetery on a day that proved to be unusual for May this year, in that the sun shone most of the time. A member of the London Wildlife Trust introduced Tim Freed; our guide for the day. The visitors included members of Butterfly Conservation, London Wildlife Trust and Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery.

Tim first showed us the butterfly garden that the cemetery company had agreed could be planted. It was here that we saw the first of many Holly Blues and Orange Tips, together with a Small White.

We then set off on a tour of the 77 acre site. More Orange Tips and Holly Blues were soon spotted. Tim pointed out an area of Cow Parsley that marked the edge of an old meadow that existed before the cemetery was created. We had to be careful in the parts of the site, that were marked by red danger notices, as the old vaults, that had been dug up to twenty feet deep by the Victorians, were now in a state of collapse.

We didn't see any of the small colony of Wall Browns that exist here because the sun disappeared as we were passing by the area where they are usually found. Later Tim showed the party the difference between female Orange Tips, Green-Veined and Small Whites.

A couple of Small Tortoiseshells were found along the North Wall as we walked back to the entrance and shortly before the walk ended a Brimstone flew towards us. Tim chased after it, but toppled over on to some small Sycamore stumps. He told me later that he need five stitches in the wound!

I enjoyed my first visit to the site for a variety of reasons; the rich flora, the richly decorated tombs of many famous people and the expertise of several people who had given up some of their time to show us around. Thanks to you all.

There are obviously conflicts of interest between nature conservation and the primary use of the site ( burials will continue for a further fifty years), so the future of this site seems to depend on the continuing good relationship between the cemetery company and the local group of the London Wildlife Trust.

### **9/6/96 Pitstone Hill/ Ivinghoe Beacon by Malcolm Newland**

We set off from the car park shortly after 10 a.m. with our leader Nick Bowles setting a cracking pace having stated that his main intention was to show us the various types of habitat to be found on the site. The weather was glorious sunshine which seemed to make the miserably cold temperatures of the preceding weeks but a distant memory.

We moved through unimproved then improved grassland up and down some very steep slopes before finally passing an area of woodland back to the car park and encountered numerous butterflies and day flying moths. Green Hairstreak, Orange Tip, Small White, Red Admiral, Small Heath, Brimstone, Brown Argus which Nick showed the difference between it and the Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell which looked fresh, Speckled Wood, Common Blue, the ubiquitous Painted Lady, Peacock, Clouded Yellow which was probably the highlight of the day, Small Copper, Duke of Burgundy, Holly Blue, Wall Brown (nice to see this local rarity is holding on here). Identified moths were Cinnabar, Burnet Companion, Mother Shipton, Cistus Forester, Footman, and Latticed Heath. A most enjoyable trip which confirmed the value of chalk downland as a prime butterfly, moth and wildflower habitat.

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### **23/6/96 Monks Wood by John Hollingdale**

After experiencing various adventures on the journey to the site, fifteen people arrived at the entrance to Monks Wood. Nobody had visited there before and we were not quite certain where to start searching for the Black Hairstreak and were relieved to meet another enthusiast who directed us to a small clearing.

Along the path we saw many Large skippers, Speckled Woods and Meadow Browns. We also noted several Painted Ladies, a Green Veined White, a Large Yellow underwing moth and possibly a Wall Brown. We explored the small open area, but could not find any blackthorn, let alone a Hairstreak. We therefore turned on to another path and came to a large open area where two Muntjac and a Buzzard were seen. A hedge of Blackthorn was examined without success, although Small Heath and a Red Admiral were found. Later on we also saw a Hare and the following moths; Mother Shipton, Cinnabar and Large Emerald.

We then made our way back to the entrance, as some people had to leave and saw both a Hornet and Hornet Moth. The rest of the party remained to continue the search, eventually the elusive Black Hairstreak was found in the clearing originally described. I was relieved the journey had not been in vain.

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**Butterfly Line**  
**0891 884505**

Regular updates. Latest News.

Profits are used for the conservation of butterflies and their habitats. Calls cost 49p/minute peak rate and 39p/minute at other times.

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## 1997 Programme

**Friday January 17th** - Winter Social, see page 2 for details.

**Saturday April 26th 2.30pm** - Visit to Mole Hall Wildlife Park, Widdington, Saffron Walden, Essex, where Phillip Jenner will give a talk "Butterflies of the Tropical House". (If more than twelve members book we can get discount on the price of admission to the Butterfly House so we will need firm numbers. Less than twelve and the fee is £4.00. Directions will appear in the March newsletter.

**Wednesday 21st May 8.p.m.** Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street St Albans. Illustrated talk by Steve Cham "An introduction to Dragonflies".

**Wednesday 15th October 8p.m.** Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street, St Albans. Annual General Meeting followed by member's slides.

**Saturday 15th November 2.30pm** Harpenden Conservative club. "Preparing for 1998, Gardening for butterflies" - an illustrated talk by Malcolm Newland.



Purple Emperor

## **Field Trips**

Everyone is welcome, just turn up on the day at the location given. Any queries contact John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077

### **18 May 1997 - Codicote/Brides Hall Wood**

Our first trip of the year with Terry Rodbard for spring butterflies including Orange Tips and Holly Blues. This woodland is between Welwyn and Hitchin. Further details in the next newsletter.

### **25 May 1997 - Tring Park**

Meet at 10.00 am by the museum to search for Green Hairstreak. Led by Brian Jessop. Further details in the next edition.

### **8 June 1997 - Waterford Pits TL 317150**

Come and see the nature reserve that is being created that supports strong colonies of Grizzled Skipper, Wall and Common Blue. All should be on the wing at this time. Meet Alan Downie at Vicarage Lane in Waterford Village, near Hertford at 11.00 am.

### **15 June 1997 - Lee Valley Park TL 365038**

Come and see the Orchids and Butterflies of the Lee Valley Park. Meet at 10.00am at Turnford Brook Car Park, half mile before East Herts College, on the high road coming north from Cheshunt.

### **29 June 1997 - Thursley Common SU 90-39**

A car trip to Surrey, to this National Nature Reserve, that is renowned for its Dragonflies and other Heathland specialists including Sundews, Hobbies and Sand Lizards. We may be lucky and see Silver Studded Blue or Grayling. Meet at Thursley Car Park at 10.00 am for a joint trip with RSPB local group and the Cheshunt Natural History Society. Leader on this occasion will be Ted Bell.

**6 July 1997 - Sharpenhoe Clappers TL 065296**

A trip in to Bedfordshire just north of Luton. Meet at the reserve car park just south of Sharpenhoe village at 10.00am where we hope to see Marbled White.

**13 July 1997 - Balls Wood TL 352018**

Meet at 11.00 am outside the India College Arms Pub in Hertford Heath village. The target species is White Admiral, although a number of other butterflies should also be seen.

**26 July 1997 - Bayfordbury**

A saturday morning trip where Rob Souter will be emptying a Moth Trap run the previous night and then leading a walk around the site to see the large number of Ringlets present. Meet at the University Field Staion car park at 9.30 am.

**2 August 1997 - Rowley Green Moth Evening TQ 216960**

Meet in the layby opposite this Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust nature reserve near Barnet at 8pm.

**10 August 1997 - Poors Field TQ 086893**

Meet John Hollingdale at the end of Reservoir Road at 10.00 am to look for Butterflies at this reserve near Ruislip in Middlesex.

**17 August 1997 - Patmore Heath TL 443257**

A walk round an acid Grassland Heath to look for Small Copper and Small Heath. Coming north from Little Hadham, turn right at the Catherine Wheel Pub and park on the edge of the reserve 200 yards up the lane. Meet at 11.00am.

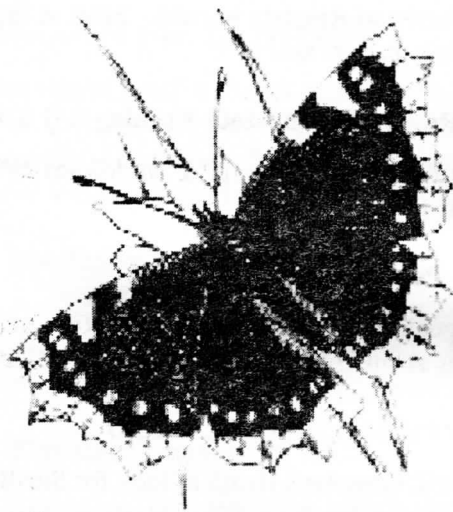
**Porton Down - To be announced.**

### Quiz Night

The last branch event of 1996. A quiz night with the Letchworth Naturalists on 10th December.

Meet at the Letchworth Settlement, Nevells Road, Letchworth for a 7.30pm start.

Please bring food, drink and a prize for the raffle.



Camberwell Beauty

## **Moths - A Beginners Summer**

### **by John Hollingdale**

It was Colin Plant's talk about moths to the branch at Harrow Arts Centre that started it all. He said there was no difference between moths and butterflies and that some languages don't even have separate words to describe the various families of Lepidoptera. Colin described what was needed to construct a home-made moth trap without having to spend hundreds of pounds on a commercial one. As I already had a copy of "Moths of the British Isles" by Skinner, I decided to have a go.

I purchased a bulb for £23 from a Watkins and Doncaster catalogue and made up a lead and socket from my box of spares. The bulb was suspended over an old white sheet behind the garage and I went out to examine the sheet every 15 minutes or so and later on that evening there was great excitement when the moth turned up. I turned to Skinner and about thirty minutes later and by that time exhausted, managed to identify it. It was a Seraphim.

After the third or fourth session and as the number of moths increased, I realised that by only visiting the light every fifteen minutes I was missing moths that were only temporarily attracted by the light. I decided to sit beside the light waiting for "customers". At About midnight I would turn the light off and go to bed.

After about a month of this I began to feel that I was missing the best part of the night by not having the stamina to stay up all night. I decided to make a moth trap. MKI was a large planter with a cone made out of cartridge paper, but this, although successful, was not big enough and difficult to unload. Mk II, made a month later, vastly increased the catch both in numbers and species. It was a plastic dustbin with a circular hole cut in the lid. A cone was made out of plastic sheeting purchased from a local model shop. I sealed

the imperfections in the cut with window sealant. To suspend the light above the cone I bought an old lamp shade from Oxfam and removed the fabric. Egg boxes (scrounged from friends and neighbours) were carefully arranged inside. Now the whole of the night could be covered and I could get some sleep.

The first few times, to my children's delight, the trap was emptied in the kitchen. However on taking the lid off the trap some moths made an immediate bolt for freedom and we were still removing the stragglers from the house a couple of days later. Now I am banished to the greenhouse. I drape a bit of net curtaining over the bin to keep some control but this is not entirely successful. The egg boxes are removed, one by one, and slipped into butterfly netting. Anything of interest is teased out with an artists brush and boxed to be examined later at my leisure. All the moths are eventually released in to the thicket at the bottom of the garden.

To date I have recorded 121 species in the garden. Identification for a beginner can be difficult and I would like to thank Martin Hough, Mark Stirling and particularly Colin Plant for all their help over the past four months.

Although the butterfly year finishes in September, the moth season never ends. Over forty common species of moth will emerge between September and March in Middlesex and I will be waiting to see how many appear in the trap.

### **Lost Slide**

Would members who showed slides at the A.G.M. please check their collection. Terry Rodbard lost a slide of two Damselflies mating and is anxious for it to be returned.

## **A. G. M. Report**

### **By Norma Dean**

#### **Present**

Alan Downie, Michael Healey, Rob Souter, Dennis Dean, Terry Rodbard, Malcolm Newland (Chairman), John Whiteman, Mick (not sure of surname - sorry), John Stevens, Yvonne Mansurgh, Ian Small, Brian Jessop, Ann Piper, Enid Lumsden, Ewan Lumsden, Gavin Vicary, Norma Dean, Gerry Rirsch.

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

Margaret Noakes, John Hollingdale, Phil Mac Murdie, John Murray, Brian Sawford

#### **2. Minutes of 1995 AGM**

Malcolm welcomed everyone. The minutes of last year's AGM were read, proposed by Alan Downie and seconded by Ian Small.

#### **3. Matters arising - none on this occasion**

#### **4. Chairman's Report**

Malcolm reported that the 10 Field Trips had been successful and fairly well attended. However, the visit to Porton Down had been a great disappointment due to the pouring rain. The Moth Evening at Marhalls Heath had also gone well. Much interest in moths has been shown by members and John Hollingdale identified over 125 species during the summer.

The butterfly of the year was undoubtedly the Painted Lady which was featured in the press and TV.

The Indoor Meetings - roughly the same number of members attended as last year. Two more meetings are coming up: Saturday 23rd November 2.30 pm - Harpenden Conservative Club Dr Andy Barker slide/talk Butterflies and Habitats of Europe and Tuesday 10th December 8.00 pm - Letchworth Settlement - joint

meeting with Letchworth Naturalists Soc. Quiz Night. Members to bring a prize and food/drink donation.

Winter Social - members were asked if they were interested in attending a social evening in January. Some interest was shown. Details are given on page 2.

Events - The Branch were invited to be present at various outdoor events during the summer. We had sales tables at Capel Manor, Hatfield House, Horsenden Hill and St Albans. As well as the sale items, plants were also sold and these went well. Malcolm thanked all members who helped and especially Terry Rodbard, our Sales Officer, and Gerry Rirsch, The Education Advisor who organised activities for the children. We now have good display boards which draw attention of public to butterflies and conservation work.

Conservation details of dates and venues appear on page 18 of Newsletter. Thanks to all the un-sung heroes who do conservation work. Some members might prefer Saturdays to Sunday mornings.

Recording - Malcolm thanked John Murray for producing the Butterfly Report and Michael Healey for helping him. The report will help when compiling the Millennium Atlas. Please send in any butterfly records to John Murray and moths ones to Rob Souter.

Newsletters - articles, letters, members views - please send them in to Gavin Vicary. There is a need to cater for ordinary people as well as the more scientific members and try to get the right balance.

Proposed Expenditure - It has been decided to purchase a Moth Trap and generator in the near future.

### **5. Treasurer's Report**

Copies of the financial Report were given to members. In John



Hollingdale's absence, Malcolm went through the various items, the benefits of joining BCTV were pointed out - namely the training courses, use of equipment and insurance. One member asked for a copy of the Butterfly Report (Gavin to send one).

#### **6. Membership Secretary's Report**

Malcolm read Margaret Noake's report regarding membership. Numbers now stand at 265, although this does vary from month to month. Some members fail to renew their membership and others may join another branch. A breakdown of members shows 20% of members are senior citizens, 4% life members, 3.3% are unwaged and we have 1 student and 1 junior member. Male members outnumber females by 2-1. To be a life benefactor now cost £1,000.

#### **7. Election of Branch Officers / Committee**

All the present members were willing to continue on the committee. Three members - Malcolm Newland (Chairman), John Hollingdale (Field Trip Officer and Treasurer) and Norma Dean (Secretary) were duly re-elected.

#### **8. Any Other Business**

Michael Healey asked for any records to be sent to him. Malcolm thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was followed by a most enjoyable show of members slides.

### **Junior Members**

At the moment we have one junior member. however it may be that other members have children who would like to see a section in the newsletter for younger members.

If this is the case please let Gerry Rirsch know. if enough people are keen it is hoped to start this in future editions.

## Conservation Dates

Conservation work is one of the most important activities of the society as loss or neglect of suitable habitats is one of the major reasons for the decline in many of our butterflies as well as other wildlife.

Below are a series of dates across Herts and Middlesex where you can help with essential management that maintains the correct conditions on these sites for the wildlife that inhabits them. Several of the dates are run by the HMWT on their nature reserves

1. **Therfield Heath TL335400.** First Sunday of each month from 10.00 a.m. - 1 p.m. Details from Vincent Thompson 01763 241443
2. **Duchies Piece (Aldbury Nowers) SP952131.** Third Sunday of each month. Meet 10.00 a.m. in the lay-by, near Tring Station.
3. **Hertford Heath TL 354111.** For details ring Anthony Oliver on 01992 583404.
4. **Fryent Country Park** - Details from Leslie Williams at the Brent Ecology Unit on 0181 206 0492.
5. **Stanmore Country Park TQ 172927.** Meet at Dennis Lane car park at 10.00 am on 26th January or 9th February. Further details from John Hollingdale on 0181 863 2077.
6. **Hillingdon Area** - Several sites require volunteers. Details from Dr Taylor on 0181 868 0207.

## Membership

By Margaret Noakes

Now that things have settled down after the division of the old London Branch we have seen a slight increase in membership. This has probably been due to new members joining us and those on the periphery of Hertfordshire and Middlesex deciding to join a more local branch to their home.

Membership currently stands at 268 and we would like to extend a warm welcome to the new members listed below. If you know of anyone who would like to join Butterfly Conservation please write to the Head Office of the national society at PO Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6EY. Membership fees are as follows;

Ordinary Membership    £14.00 plus £5 for each branch joined.

Concessionary rate        £9.00.

Joining Fee                £6.00 (waived when paying by direct debit)

New Members over the past year;

Mr T Austin, Mrs M Allan, Mrs A Bantock, Mrs M Barnes, Mr K. Brazier, Mrs A. E. Brown, Mr F Brundle, Dr Ann Brooks, Mr R Bigg, Miss B Chant, Mr P Clarke, Mr Mike Cleasor, Mrs G Coetzee, Mr D Cooling, Mrs S Davies, Mr D Dell, Mr D Dennis, Mr C. Doncaster, Mr E. Elcombe, Mr J Farr, Mrs E. Goodyear, Mr J Grayley, Miss Gree, Miss H Howard, Mr K Hornsey, Mr A Hulme, Mr & Mrs Jardine, Mr J Jessup, Miss Kenyan, Mr J King, Miss S Loach, Mrs Y Mansergh, Mr S Miller., Mr S Murray, Mrs W Nottingham, Mr M Oliver, Miss H Packer, Mr B Page, Miss L Porter, Mr B Price, Mr L Pusras, Miss A Rirsch (Junior), Mr C Rountree, Mr R Router, Mr Sealy-Bell, Mrs J Silvester, Mr C Smith, Mr W Stevens, Mr D Swift, Mrs J Thring, Mr J. Thurtell, Mrs V Tomlinson, Mr C Veale, Miss A. Watson, Mr W Whittles, Mrs G De Winter, Mr A Wiseman, Mr & Mrs A Wood, Mr J Inyatt.

## **Hertfordshire and Middlesex**

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### **Committee Members**

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**Records Collator: John Murray**

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**Sales Officer: Terence Rodbard**

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**Publicity Officer: Phil MacMurdie**

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**Moth Recorder: Rob Souter**

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**Education Officer: Gerry Rirsch**

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**Ian Small** 59 Penn Way, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 2SH..... 01462 677654

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