



BOURNEMOUTH NATURAL SCIENCE SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Share our love of science

Winter 2025

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Mass Stranding of By-The-Wind Sailors

Paul Godier

On Tuesday 9th December 2025, Storm Bram led to an unusual mass stranding of By-the-wind sailors (*Valella valella*) along the Hampshire and Dorset coasts. Hundreds of thousands were washed ashore and stranded at the tide line, joining cuttlefish skeletons, whelk egg cases and the occasional starfish.

They were especially numerous to the east of Boscombe pier. The tide line and promenade had both the freshly beached dark blue specimens, along with many white skeletons as the jelly-like bodies had decomposed.

The event was reported by the Bournemouth *Daily Echo* and the BBC. The Dorset Wildlife Trust's Wild Seas Centre at Kimmeridge was informed and in order to map the scale of the event they appealed on social media for sightings. *Valella valella* are described here by Sarah Hodgson, the Centre Manager:

"By-the-wind sailors are usually found out in the open ocean. They live on the surface of the sea, travelling with the currents and using their sail-like structure to drift with the wind. It's not unusual for mass strandings to occur after rough and stormy weather, where the strong

winds push them closer towards the coast.

"They look a lot like jellyfish, but they are actually a type of siphonophore, a colony of tiny individual animals all working together. They have short, blue tentacles that dangle beneath the float to catch their prey. Although they only have a very mild sting, we would still recommend that people just look but don't touch if they find any." The stranding was considered "unusual", according to BNSS member Paul Godier, more commonly seen in the USA or occasionally Cornwall, not Bournemouth.

All images P Godier, 2025



In Memoriam

Dr Allan Chapman FRAS, Honorary Member of BNSS,
died on 21st January 2026, aged 80.

A member since 2004, a well-known historian, with special interests in astronomy and scientific biography.

Sydney Renoden Wycherley, F.R.M.S., F.L.S. (1879-1950)

Tony Grant

In our Library there are three bound volumes of microscopic photographs and drawings by Mr. S. R. Wycherley. A fine addition to our collection – but who was the man?

Sydney Renoden Wycherley was born in Cheltenham in 1879. Early in life he was employed by Spicer & Co., paper manufacturers, eventually becoming Managing Director of the London factory.

When his firm took an interest in Dufay-Chromex Ltd., colour film and scientific material



manufacturers, Mr Wycherley became both Manager and Director.

During the Second World War he was adviser to the Government on colour photography and kindred matters. In 1946 he retired from active work and became Honorary Treasurer of the Royal

Microscopical Society of which he was a fellow. He also joined BNSS.

His wide interests included Art, Literature, Science, Astronomy, Microscopy and Photography.

His chief love, perhaps, was Microscopy. He had a comprehensive array of instruments and a collection of 5,000 micro-slides, many of which he had prepared himself. These were always available to the Society and formed the basis of the 'Microscope Afternoons', which grew to become a feature in our past programmes.

For five years up until his death on December 20th, 1950, Mr. Wycherley was one of the most active members of the Society.

Shortly after joining in 1946, he became Chairman of the Microscopical Section.

Three years later, in January 1949, he became Deputy Chairman of Council, and in March 1950 he became Chairman of Council.

Whilst a member, Mr Wycherley presented many lectures, mostly, but certainly not exclusively,

about microscopy. These are just a few of many:

- April 1948: 'Leisure and Pleasure with a Microscope'.
- October 1948: 'The Physicist's Approach to Astronomy' (with Mr H. E. Clarke).
- December 1948: 'Diatoms, Polycistina and Foraminifera: some account of their structure'.
- October 1949: 'The Glories of Venice Today'.
- November 1949: 'A Discussion on the Nebulae' (with H.E. Clarke).
- Feb 1950: 'The Moon' (with H.E. Clarke). Feb 1950: 'The River Avon from mouth to source'.

After his death in December 1950 his widow, Mrs L. Wycherley, added over 1,500 lantern slides to the collection at the Society, together with many of his scientific drawings. Mrs Wycherley was a member from 1946 until early 1971.

Members' Library

Just a reminder that our Library is available to Members during the days that we are open. Please take the opportunity to browse or borrow from over 2,500 books.



Photography Competition

The deadline is approaching. Please submit your entries to Tony Grant at photo@bnss.org.uk by Saturday 14th March 2026.

There will be Gift Tokens awarded for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in each category for adults; one prize for a young person across all three categories, and a new prize for the best entry from a BNSS Member across all three categories. Highly Commended certificates may be awarded at the judges' discretion.

Please read the full terms and conditions on the BNSS website: <https://bnss.org.uk/photography/>

Doctor Crallan's Marbles

Jacque Bainbridge

With thanks to Sally Grant for her research.

Some of you may have noticed the name 'Crallan' on BNSS cabinets and documents. These include butterflies and shells.



Italian Statuary on display in Geology

Doctor George Edward Crallan, born 1853 in Newick, Sussex, joined the Society in 1904 as an original member and became our second President.

Lesser known are his geological collections, including a well-labelled and classified collection of minerals (unusual for the time). In 1939 he donated a collection of many polished samples of decorative marbles from around Europe. The value of this collection is enhanced as they all have labels attached. These are from Walton, Goody and Cripps.



The firm was established in London as WGC in 1900 from the amalgamation of many businesses, trading well into the late 20th century. These were probably travellers' samples, much as today you would go to a showroom to pick a worktop.

Some are "classic" marbles such as the famous Carrara Marble – metamorphosed limestones – but some are just harder limestones that can take a polish and are known by masons as 'marbles' too. The obvious giveaway is the presence of fossils.



Left: Derbyshire crinoidal 'marble' & Right: Torquay 'marble' with coral

Now it is possible to look up building stones online at StoneContact.com, which has a stone library that is interesting, but nothing is quite like actually handling these 'treasures'.

Saturday Opening

Sally Grant

Thanks to our willing Volunteers, the Saturday opening in November and on the 24th January went very well.

On the 24th we welcomed 400 visitors and received a huge response on social media as a result, not least with regard to the **2025 RSPB Garden Birdwatch**. Some 50-60 visitors took part on the day.



Visitors and members were busy for the 2025 RSPB Birdwatch

We recorded:

5x Long-tailed Tits; 2x Blue Tits; 2x Coal Tits; 2x Great Tits; 1x Robin; 1x Blackbird; 3x Magpies and 13x Wood Pigeons.

Jim Gardner spotted a Sparrowhawk flying over, which in theory doesn't count as it didn't land, but we made an exception.

BNSS Volunteers

The Editorial Team

It is well known that without the help of Members and Volunteers, the Society could not function and the Museum could not open to the public. Many have been actively volunteering for years, so this is just a nod to a few of those that have been lending a hand in more recent months.

Sally Eyre can regularly be found in the Museum Room telling visitors about our shell collection, and encouraging visitors to join her in sketching these beautiful objects. Sally has studied art up to MA level - her work leaning towards her interest in natural history.

Her interest in shells began as a child when her father, a scientist himself, would take her along the beach telling her the names of the different species.

Sally then discovered that seashells were made by animals and she describes herself as being obsessed ever since.

In the future, Sally aims to create artwork that can be used in support of the natural world, both by raising money and awareness of issues facing it.

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Usually tucked away up in our Botany room you will find **Dorothy Gill**.

Formerly enjoying a nursing career, working as a Ships Officer in the Merchant Navy; and on a Greek Mediterranean Cruise Ship, Dorothy has also volunteered with Bournemouth Ballet Club, Dorset Arts & Crafts Association; Oxfam, and as an archivist at Bournemouth Heritage Library.



More recently Dorothy, to the Society's benefit, has been inspired by the botanical specimens in our herbarium and across the Museum, to create the most beautiful nature journals for our visitors to enjoy.

She has also delivered a workshop to our Young Explorers to help them create their own journals, which was very well received by all.

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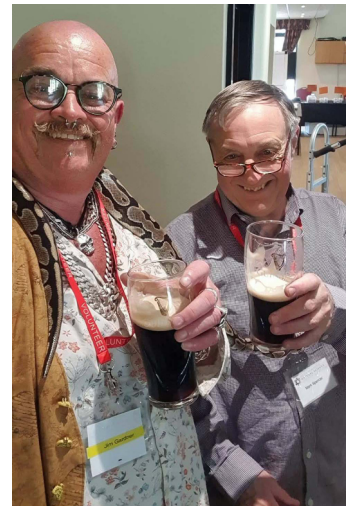
Bringing the exhibits to life are **Mark Spencer**, Entomology Chair and former BNSS President, and **Jim Gardner**. These two delight in introducing visitors to their growing collection of spiders, reptiles and invertebrates.

Mark said, *"I want people to have close encounters with insects, to learn how to handle them, 'but I also want them to understand how to care for insects and create habitats in their own gardens."*

Jim's love of wildlife and nature began at age 14 and is self-taught in the care of snakes and lizards. He said, *"I love having them around, the snakes sit around my neck, it's like a neck massage."*

"My aim is to teach people how to handle and respect these creatures, and to educate them about their lifestyle and habitats – and their personalities!"

He added a reassuring note for the faint-hearted, *"People love it and very quickly lose their fear."*



Thank You!

Our thanks go to N. 'Tex' Swann for his valuable work on the Newsletter over several years.

Regrettably Tex is unable to continue due to an injury, but his contribution continues to be recognised.

We send him our very best wishes for his recovery and his future. His role with the Newsletter has been assumed by Tom Blyth, a new member of the Society.