



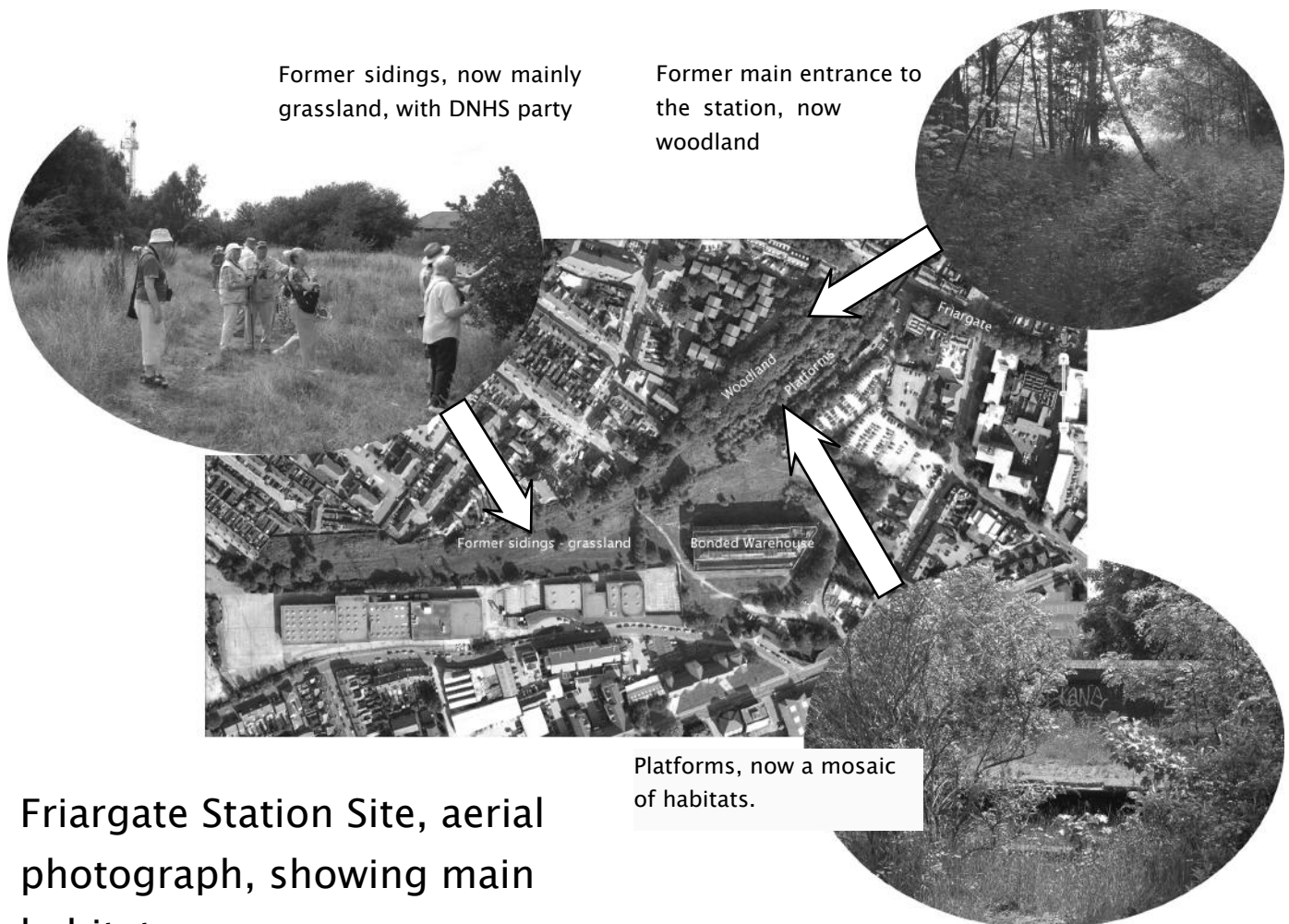
Friargate Station Site, Derby

by Bill Grange

Several years ago I attended an exhibition in Derby which promoted ideas for the 'development' of several sites in the city centre as part of the 'Cityscape' initiative then being promoted by the City Council. One member of a local environmental protest group re-christened it 'Cityscape', as the programme involved the loss of several green areas and trees and the emphasis was very much on economic regeneration and definitely not on the 'natural' environment and wildlife. Each proposed area for development was covered in the exhibition by a display panel which included an aerial

so-called 'brownfield' site and not the green oasis in the heart of the city that it undoubtedly was – and still is. As it happens, the City Council previously had acknowledged that the site had some wildlife value and mention of this did appear in various reports and strategies.

Yes, 'brownfield'. What a misleading term! One definition is 'A piece of industrial or commercial property that is abandoned or underused and often environmentally contaminated, especially one considered as a potential site for redevelopment'. Yet, as many of us know, such sites are often far richer in wildlife than the 'green deserts' of intensively agricultural land which lie outside our towns and cities.



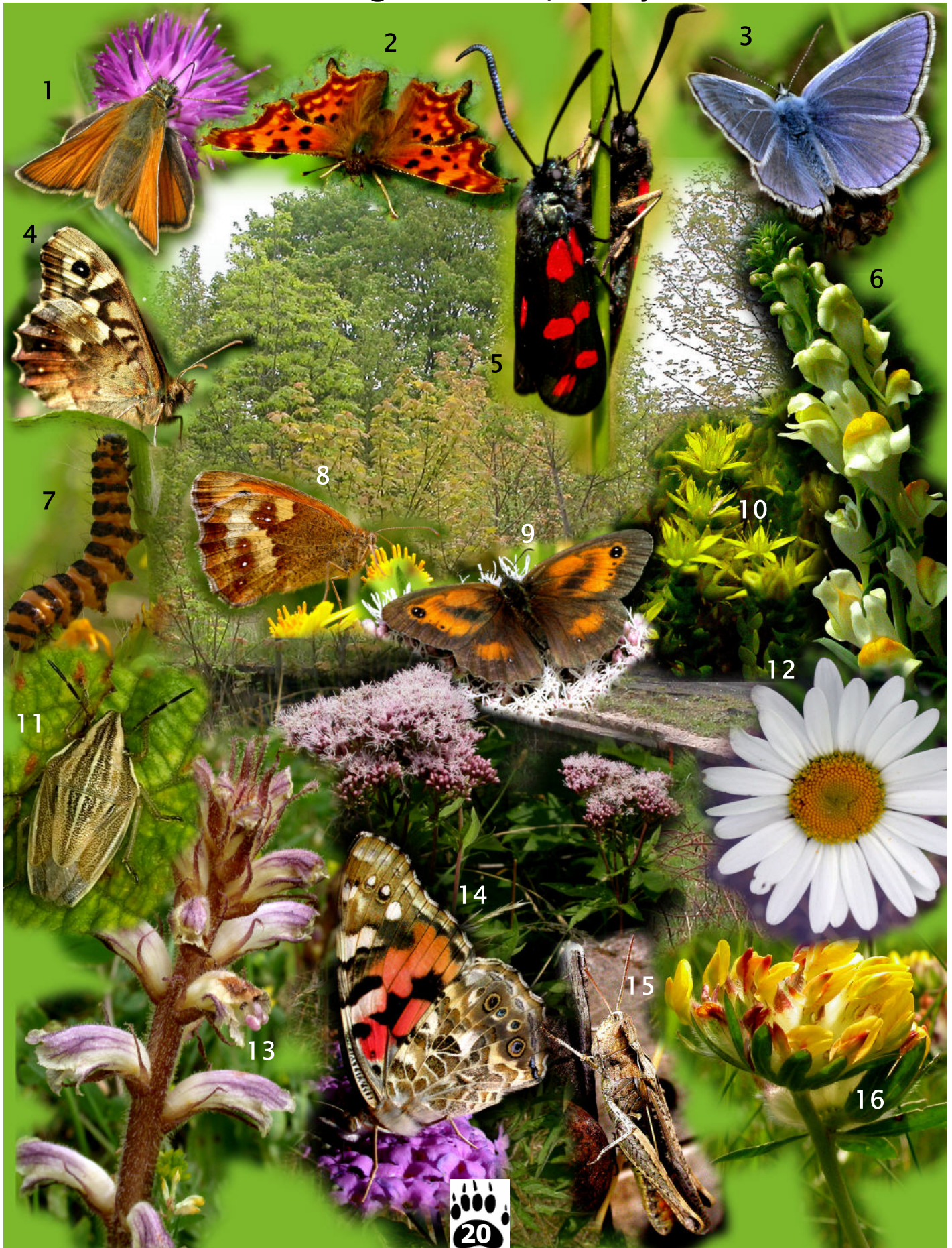
Friargate Station Site, aerial photograph, showing main habitat areas

photograph of the site as it stood, contrasted with what was being proposed. There was one such dealing with the long-abandoned Friargate Railway Station and adjacent sidings, by then long returned to nature with an amazing array of wildlife. However, I was incensed to see that the whole site had been blocked out crudely with what appeared to be a brown felt-tip marker, totally obliterating the site's trees and open grassland areas. I can only think that this bit of subterfuge was to emphasise that the old station was a

Politicians love to go on about 'developing' brownfield sites in preference to building in the open countryside, which puts sites like Friargate Station, despite their wildlife interest, at great risk. I think people are put off protesting about the building on brownfield sites because of the risk of appearing cranks and 'nutters' and of being accused of being more interested in wildlife than the people who might benefit economically from development. Job creation is often put forward by politicians as part of their argument.



Friargate Station, Derby





However, the realisation is growing that, with careful and imaginative planning, we can have both building development and conservation of wildlife habitats in the heart of towns.

The Friargate Station site as a wildlife habitat has escaped obliteration mainly because planners were waiting for the completion of Derby's inner ring road for many years, before giving permission, as traffic access was difficult. The ring road was finished in 2010, when many of us were expecting the site's fate to be sealed but the economic down-turn has been a blessing in disguise and we still await a planning application. Over the years there have been many proposals put forward including light industry, housing and a supermarket with associated entertainment venues such as bars and restaurants. In the meantime, I and many others have obtained entertainment and enjoyment from observing and photographing the tremendous wealth of wildlife supported by the site.

In habitat terms, Friargate Station site consists of three main areas: The main approach, off Friargate itself, immediately to the west of the wonderful double bridge, goes through a small woodland of sycamore and the occasional ash. The path opens out at the former platforms, now heavily grown over with sapling sycamores and tall herbaceous vegetation, especially in the former track bed between the two platforms. Open areas where mats of mosses and sedums grow directly on the bare concrete of the former platform surface also support stands of buddleia. The third and largest habitat area is at the eastern side of the site where an extensive swathe of grassland, with stands of goat willow and bramble, is the site of the former sidings. The woodland, if out in the countryside, would be of limited wildlife value but in the context of this site, provides a contrasting habitat. Ironically, in one development scheme, it was proposed to leave the woodland, presumably as a token conservation measure. As it happens, the platforms and sidings areas are of much greater conservation value, their varied sub-habitats supporting a huge number of plant and animal species. Here are found two rare plants for Derby, kidney vetch and the lesser broomrape, the latter a parasite on clover and found at only two other sites in the whole of Derbyshire.

The site is locally famous for the number of butterflies that have been recorded on the site. Credit for this must largely go to Ken Orpe, who has been recording these insects for well over the last quarter of a century. The accompanying table shows what species he has recorded, some of them nationally scarce and including some unusual aberrations. Admittedly, several of the species recorded do not breed on the site and would be just passing through. However, such sites where adult butterflies can feed and find shelter are becoming rarer all the time, especially in city centres.

Also on the site is the huge Bonded Warehouse of 1878, a beautifully built brick structure now, after a series of fires started by vandals over the years, a roofless empty shell. Believe it or not, however, the building is Grade 2 listed. It amazes me that buildings can be so listed, but also allowed to deteriorate so badly. The warehouse is, however, to be retained and incorporated into any development of the site, whatever scheme eventually goes ahead.

2011 Outline proposals for a supermarket complex for the site were submitted to Derby City council and the local press, but no actual planning application has been submitted. Since then the site has remained undisturbed, apart from sycamore sapling clearance from the platforms and track bed, as a preliminary for a temporary private but abortive initiative to raise potted Christmas trees on the site! Unfortunately, it has also been subjected to occasional rubbish dumping and sporadic fires lit by children. Also, recently, a homeless man has erected a shanty dwelling on the site. More seriously, the (also listed) engine house, until recently used as a fireplace showroom, was burnt down by vandals, with a homeless man sleeping inside who, sadly, died in the blaze. All this hasn't helped the site's 'profile' with both the public and the City Council and has hastened calls for it to be 'developed'.

On the afternoon of 27th July 2013 led a party of DNHS members around the site and, thankfully, the warm dry conditions enabled everyone to get a good impression of the site, with some of its butterflies, small skipper, gatekeeper, meadow brown, peacock, comma, green-veined white and speckled wood, putting on a show, attracted to the bramble flowers, buddleia and hemp agrimony. On the sidings area, six-spot burnet moths were present in some numbers, together with their empty papery cocoons attached to grass stems. In addition there was a selection of other insects – two species of meadow grasshopper, *Chorthippus brunneus* and *C. parallus*. A brood of green shield bugs just emerging from their eggs made for an interesting photograph. The botanical star of the site, the lesser broomrape, had finished flowering, but we did find the dried seed-heads in the sidings area. On the platforms we also saw a white variety of herb Robert. This is the only location where I have found it.

I and several others will keep making representations to our local council to at least save some of this remarkable site's wildlife. The present political climate doesn't augur well for the butterflies of Friargate Station but to see the whole site covered in concrete is an awful prospect.



A Potted History of the Friargate Station Site

1872: Great Northern Railway Act enabled the GNR to construct railways within the region. They sought to provide a link between the industrial midlands, the northern region and the coastal ports of the North West. The line was to run from Nottingham to Burton on Trent through the centre of Derby with links to all the major coalfields within the region.

1877-88: Friargate passenger station, goods yard, warehouse and sidings were built. In succeeding years further buildings and infrastructure were added, including the elegant iron bridge over Friargate itself, built by the famous Handyside & Co.

1900-1930: The goods yard handled a whole range of produce including coal, steel, timber, tin and livestock. Eventually passenger and then goods services began to decline and the station buildings were neglected.

Late 1950s and early 1960s: The station operated only at peak times.



1964: The station was closed to passengers. Goods traffic continued until the line was fully closed to all traffic in 1968, following publication of Dr. Beeching's report.

1971: Land and buildings used by the research division of British Rail

1974: Derby City Wildlife Survey. Friargate Station not thought to be interesting.

Early 1980s: British Rail research ceased on site.

1981 Sept: The Local Plan Proposals Map shows Friar Gate Station as a development site, including accommodating the proposed completed section of the inner ring road.

1981 Oct: Ken Orpe commences his butterfly survey of the site and writes to the City Council pointing out the wildlife value of the land.

1981 Nov: Friargate Railway Land Planning brief produced by Derby City Council with no mention of its nature conservation interest.

1982: DWT wrote to British Rail suggesting short-term nature reserve. British Rail said they were in the middle of selling property to Clowes Associates. BR concerned about trespass and health and safety.

1983: Ken Orpe wrote to Derby City about possibility of wildlife interests being taken into consideration in 'Conservation Area'. City Council replied – landscaping may well include 'best of existing vegetation'.

1984: Outline Planning Application submitted for Friargate Station Area. Proposal included a sports complex, DIY store, garden centre, residential development with associated parking, servicing and landscaping.

DWT and Derbys. & Notts. Entomological Society object to application.

Application refused on grounds of access problems. Went against Structure Plan (zoned for commercial development, not shopping).

1985: Revised application was submitted which was very similar to previous one.

Outline permission granted by City Council.

Lots of press coverage on development proposals shows much public feeling over site.

Ken Orpe met with Clowes Associates, regarding setting up an urban nature reserve as part of development.

Derby city 'morally' support a nature reserve around the platforms area.

1986: Both railway warehouse and engine house on the site were designated as listed buildings and therefore made previous permission unviable.

1987: Derby City Wildlife project of DWT and City Council recognises site for its high nature conservation value.

1992: Planning Application submitted by Clowes Associates for a supermarket complex and associated car parking for the site.

Opposition mounted by DWT, Friends of the Earth, Derbyshire Entomological Society and Derby Natural History Society.

Derby City Council pressed developer to ensure conservation of some wildlife areas within the development.

1993: Meeting held to discuss Friargate between City Council, DWT and local groups. The result was to consolidate information and ensuring all groups standing together.

City Council granted planning permission, subject to revised plans indicating a repositioning of the proposed roundabout and to a legal agreement between the Council and the Developer, including an environmental scheme.

DWT and English Nature develop a brief for the Environmental Study.

Clowes Associates appoint David Tyldesley and Associates to undertake an Environmental Study of the site.

1994: Ken Orpe and Sandra Heard mounted a campaign to save the site. The planning application eventually lapsed.

2001: First deposit of Derby City Local Plan: Friar Gate Station is zoned for a mixture of industry and housing, also mention of link along old railway line for buses to Mickleover. Policy mentioned preserving some of nature conservation aspects of site.

OBSERVATIONS 2014



DWT object to the policy, along with other local groups. DWT also object to the site not being shown on Policy map as a Wildlife Site.

Ecological Appraisal for Friargate produced by FPRC.

2002: DWT given permission by Clowes Associates to gain access site to assess their Ecological Appraisal.



'Butterfly' Protest against supermarket plans for the station site in 1992

2009: Derby inner ring road completed, including a short spur road approaching one of the entrances to Friargate Station site, meant to facilitate any future development.

2010: Some clearance of sycamore saplings carried out in the platforms area, as a preliminary to a private, short-term scheme to raise Christmas trees on the site which failed to materialise.

2011: Outline plans for a supermarket for the site submitted by Clowes Associates. Press report carried by the Derby Telegraph. No full planning application submitted, however.



SPECIES	YEARS RECORDED	MAXIMUM COUNT	CURRENT STATUS
1. Small Skipper	1981 – 2011	119 no. - 1994	Resident
2. Essex Skipper	2005 – 2011	12 no. - 2006	Increasing
3. Large Skipper	1983 – 2011	20 no. - 1994	Resident
4. Clouded Yellow	1983/84/92/94/96-98/2000/04/08	12 no. - 1983	Rare Migrant
5. Brimstone	1983/84/88/90/92/96-98 2000/2002-2007/2010	2 no. - 2002	Rare
6. Large White	1981 – 2011	42 no - 2005	Resident
7. Small White	1981 – 2011	31 no - 2005	Resident
8. Green Veined White	1981 – 2011	8 no. - 2009	Resident
9. Orange Tip	1982/86 – 87/91 – 2002/2004-2010	12 no. - 1997	Resident
10. Small Copper	1981 – 2011	10 no-1991/04/09	Scarce
11. Brown Argus	2004 / 2006 /2008-2011	5 no. - 2006	Increasing
12. Common blue	1981 – 2011	92 no. - 1991	Resident
13. Holly Blue	1990-94/96 – 2011	12 no.- 1998	Resident
14. Red Admiral	1981 – 2007; 2009; 2011	14 no.- 1992	Migrant
15. Painted Lady	1981-83/85-86/88-92/94/96 98/2000/2002-2004/2006/2009	46 no.- 1996	Migrant
16. Small Tortoiseshell	1981 – 2011	606 no. - 1984	Resident
17. Peacock	1981 – 2011	92 no. - 1982	Resident
18. Comma	1982-87/89-93/95/97-2011	7 no. - 2003	Resident
19. Silver Washed Fritillary	1995	1 no. - 1995	Rare Vagrant
20. Speckled Wood	1983-84/89/92 – 2011	21 no. - 2009	Resident
21. Wall Brown	1981-1999/2002	45 no. - 1984	Rare
22. Gatekeeper	1984/1991 – 2011	146 no. - 2005	Resident
23. Meadow Brown	1981 – 2011	115 no - 1992	Resident
24. Ringlet	2004 – 2011	120 no.- 2010	Increasing
RARE VARIETIES			
1. Clouded Yellow – Helice	1983	1 no. - 1983	Rare
2. Small Copper – Schmidt	1989/1995	1 no.-1989/95	Rare

Butterfly species recorded by Ken Orpe on the Friargate Station Site

KEY TO COLLAGE ON PAGE 20

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|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Small Skipper Butterfly | 9. Gatekeeper Butterfly (underside) |
| 2. Comma Butterfly | 10. Biting Stonecrop |
| 3. Common Blue Butterfly | 11. Bishop's Mitre |
| 4. Speckled wood Butterfly | Shield-bug – Steve Plant |
| 5. Six-spot Burnet Moth | 12. Ox-eye Daisy |
| 6. Yellow Toadflax | 13. Lesser Bromrape |
| 7. Cinnabar Caterpillar | |
| 8. Gatekeeper Butterfly | |



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|----------------------------|
| 14. Painted Lady Butterfly |
| 15. Meadow Grasshopper |
| 16. Kidney Vetch |

The photographs were all taken on the Friargate Station site over the past 13 years by the author, except where indicated



The iron bridge over Friar Gate, leading to the derelict station