



ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2020

AGM 2020

**SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER
THERFIELD,
NEAR ROYSTON**

Please put the date in your diaries and keep fingers crossed that Covid-19 lockdown restrictions will have eased !

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Hello members

I hope you are all keeping well in these very weird times. It has been a strange time for the committee which has been unable to meet as we “stay at home”, but a couple of us caught up recently with a three-way call. The situation has inevitably slowed down some activities.

For my part, I have been walking locally more than I usually do as, at the end of the working day, my wife Bridget has told me that it is now time for my exercise – whether I like it or not! The paths around Toddington have not ever seen so much usage! Our local council rights-of-way officer commented that no one has complained about the vegetation growth so far this year. That must be because paths are being walked so well that vegetation has not been able to get established.

Having said that, as we are now allowed to do more exercise, we went out today (16th May) to cut back the overgrowth on the Icknield Way near Chalgrave church – it was passable, but cutting it makes it more enjoyable.

Returning to Icknield Way matters, guidebook sales have been good in recent years, but so far this year they are well down—not helped by the Covid-19 lockdown and closed bookshops. With overseas holidays seeming unlikely this year I would like to think that folk are going to start buying the guidebook in massive numbers (!) as they seek out exercise within England.

The other aspect I got sorted before the lockdown was signing the revised route for the Icknield Way through Houghton Regis. Elsewhere in this edition you will find further details.

Finally, I hope you and your families keep well and keep walking.

Tom

Left: The stunning view from Therfield Heath at Royston across part of south Cambridgeshire

THE AGM WALK AT GAZELEY

Gazeley is quite a small village, three miles or so to the east of Newmarket and sits in a hollow in the gently rolling Suffolk countryside about 250 feet above sea level. The Icknield Way Path passes through the village and, of the route chosen for our 4 ½ mile walk, all but a mile of it along the Gazeley to Ashley road, follows the IWP and, indeed, the popular Three Churches Walk, which also visits Moulton.

Just five hardy walkers set off from Gazeley Village Hall in miserable conditions, getting the non-IWP downhill road section over with first. Fortunately, by the time Catford Bridge was reached, the rain had stopped and there was a pause to note the dry bed of the River Kennett. Only a few paces beyond the bridge, the IWP comes in from Ashley so we joined it here and then left the road to follow a wide field margin, parallel to the river, towards Dalham. On the approach to the village, we encountered the only stile on our walk but this was bypassed, as has been the custom in recent years.

Dalham was almost entirely an estate village until the 1950s, by which time the need for agricultural labour had diminished and many of the thatched cottages, which now give the village its 'chocolate box' image, were sold to be restored by their new owners.

Moving on, our route climbed from the valley bottom towards Dalham Hall and its near neighbour, St Mary's Church. The Hall was built by a Bishop of Ely in the early 1700s, reputedly at a height from which he could see his cathedral. However, following a major fire in 1954, the Hall was reduced in height by the simple expedient of not replacing the upper storey. The Dalham Hall estate was acquired by Sheik Mohammed in 2009 but, unlike some other of his acquisitions along the IWP route, it remains in arable use.

After a stroll along an estate road, we entered Dalham Woods (a host of bluebells in the spring) and followed the perimeter path with occasional glimpses of 'The Lawns', a large cross shaped feature, now arable, no doubt a remnant of an earlier landscaping scheme. Emerging onto a field-edge path, we found ourselves, not only with Gazeley Church in sight, but also with long views northwards to the distant Brecks.

Our route then took us along a grassy strip between fields, across a paddock and through a small housing development, to return to the Village Hall.

Phil Prigg



Four stalwart members prepare to set off in the rain from Gazeley at the start of the AGM morning walk



This sign used to hang at the start of the path to Dalham Hall but has since disappeared. (Photo: John Andrews)
The attractive path between the trees is shown below



AGM REPORT

Our Chairman, Tom Chevalier began his report with warm thanks to the committee for their support during the year. In particular he welcomed the fresh ideas and enthusiasm of Doug Landman in his role as Publicity Officer.

During the year, Tom had created an interactive Google-based map of the Icknield Way with several layers showing car parks, railways stations, places of interest, camp sites. At the time of the AGM, it had already received 15,000 hits. This was demonstrated to members later in the meeting.

Tom reported that building development following on from the opening of the new A5 north of Houghton Regis is requiring ongoing path diversions, all of which are being shown on the website. The Icknield Way now crosses the A5 on a new bridge. Tom now believes that the path should be moved more permanently to a more rural route that will avoid the new housing development. He suggested that there was also potential for re-aligning the route through Letchworth so that it joined the Green Way around the town. Tom and Doug will investigate these ideas during 2020.

Tom, Doug and Clive Beckett had attended further meetings with Friends of the Ridgeway to discuss the Great Chalk Way project.

Changing hats, Tom then gave a report about the association's finances which remain in a healthy position with £9,300.75 held in the combined accounts (at 31.8.2019). Net income from guidebook sales was £482.88, with other income (from subscriptions and bank interest) totalling £183.66. During 2019, the committee had purchased waymarking discs and promotional fridge magnets totalling £609.00. Committee and AGM expenses were £60.00, maintenance of the website cost £60.00 and newsletter postage was £13.92. All this resulted in a small operating surplus of £76.38.

Tom reminded the meeting that the healthy balance in the account was intended to support shared initiatives in the development of a Great Chalk Way.

There was discussion about the increased cost of postage for the guidebook and about selling it through Amazon. Both these matters will be reviewed by the committee in 2020.

Membership is slowly declining. Currently the IWA has

69 paying subscribers, down from 71 in the previous year. Increasing membership support remains a matter of concern and it is hoped that some of the new Publicity Officer's ideas will gradually attract new members.

Doug wished to encourage existing members to renew contacts with their community newsletters. Sue Prigg can add these contact details to her newsletter mailings. Doug will be creating a standard promotional message that can be sent to all community 'outlets' during the year. He also hoped that the IWA committee can reinvigorate contacts with county Local Access Forums along the route. He, Tom and Clive Beckett (Development Officer) are already members of Central Bedfordshire's LAF. It was agreed that Doug will investigate the promotion of the Icknield Way Trail on a postcard, similar to the one produced for the Dales Way by the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The publicity discussion prompted James Quantrill to mention that he had asked Tring Brewery if they might create a beer called 'Icknield Way'! There had been no interest at the time but Doug thought it worth pursuing again. He will also contact the Royston Cave shop and Letchworth Tourist Information Centre about selling guide books again, as they had in the past.

The discussion about publicity and promotion was brought to a close by a reminder from the chairman that there needed to be an election. Since all the officers and committee members were willing to stand again, the meeting agreed to elect them *en bloc*. (Committee list is shown on last page of the Newsletter). Unfortunately, there is still a vacancy on the committee for a Treasurer and Tom appealed for help for this as he had now been 'acting' for three years! David Allard was re-elected as Accounts Examiner.

As usual, the meeting was concluded with tea and cakes.



The view from Dalham Hall—on a sunny day!

ROUTE CHALLENGES AT HOUGHTON REGIS / A5

Tom Chevalier writes:

The Icknield Way path in Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire (north of Dunstable) has some extended path closures to allow for building work. Central Bedfordshire Council recognised the potential problem for long distance walkers, so have ensured that the developers establish an alternative walkers route.

However, I received a report from a member before Christmas that the permissive path created by the developer was very muddy. I did not then have an opportunity to inspect it for myself, but managed to get out there during late January. The mud is a clay slurry which went over our boots by some distance and was very difficult to remove.

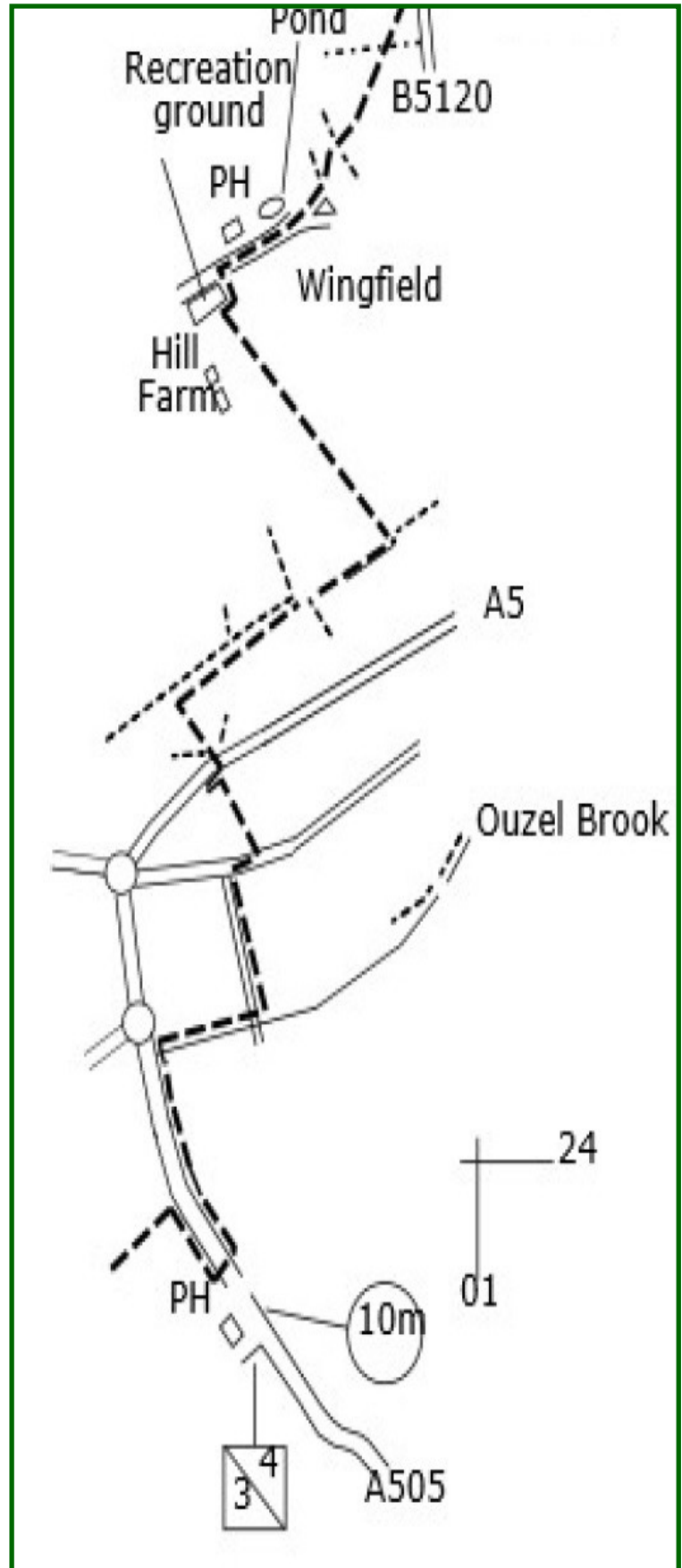


There is nothing quite as adhesive as chalky-clay slurry!
Photo: with thanks to Anne Phillips

I have now waymarked a revised alternative and removed all old waymarks.

The 'current official' IW route will be subject to building work for the next few years, but this revised route takes walkers away from nearly all the building work.

The revised alternative replaces , for the time being, the route shown on page 24 of the Walkers' Guidebook

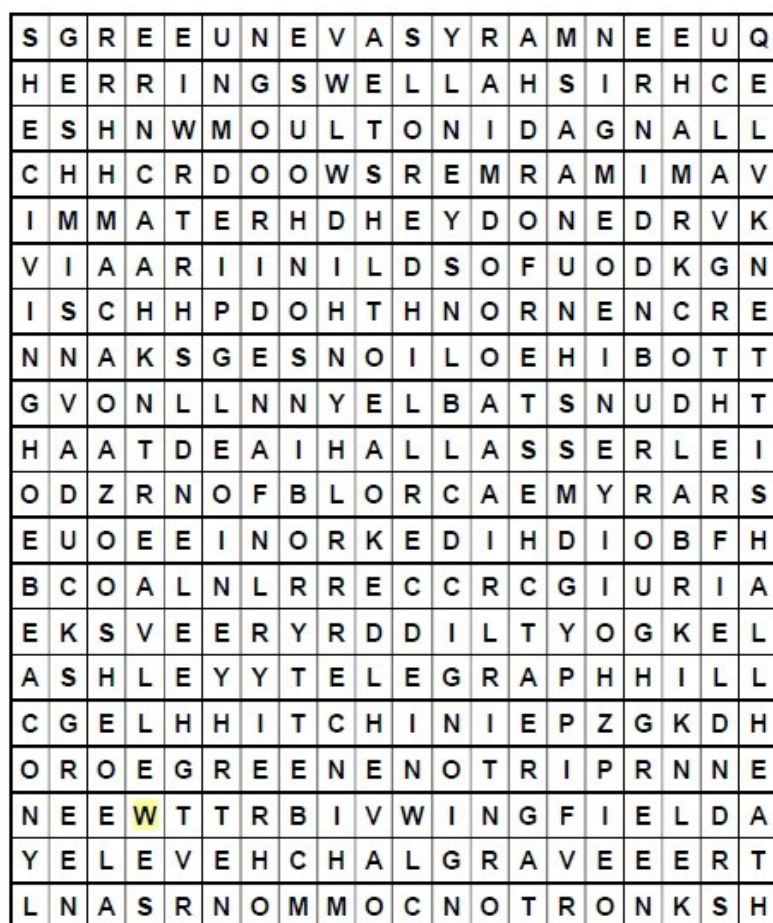


Above: the revised route of the Icknield Way between Chalk Hill and Wingfield (Map 4—Walker's Guidebook)

Please check www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk for updates

WORDSEARCH CHALLENGE!

Very kindly provided after hours of effort by Helen Smith!



The places or features listed below can be found along the Icknield Way and also in the grid on the left. Words can appear horizontally, vertically or diagonally, forwards or backwards.

After you have found all of the words in the grid, the letters left will form twelve more words, which when paired together, will give six linear features which would be crossed at points along the Icknield Way.

ASHLEY	IVINGHOE BEACON
BALDOCK	KNETTISHALL HEATH
BALSHAM	LINTON
BETTY ROBINSON HOUSE	LION
BURROUGH GREEN	MARMERS WOOD
CHALGRAVE	MOULTON
CHEVELEY	NORTON COMMON
CHRISHALL	PIRTON
DAGNALL	QUEEN MARYS AVENUE
DRAYS DITCHES	REDHILL
DUCKS GREEN	ROE GREEN
DUNSTABLE	ROYSTON
ELMDON	SANDON
GAZELEY	SEWELL
GREAT CHESTERFORD	SHARPENHOE CLAPPERS
HERRINGSWELL	TELEGRAPH HILL
HEYDON	THERFIELD
HITCHIN	TREE CATHEDRAL
HOG HALL	WHIPSNAD
ICKLEFORD	WINGFIELD
ICKLINGHAM	ZOOS

GREAT CHALK WAY



Presenting the split of The Ridgeway



Tom Chevalier, Doug Landsman and Clive Beckett have continued to attend meetings of the steering group of the Great Chalk Way Project, discussing with Friends of the Ridgeway the wide ranging possibilities of a route linking the coasts of south-west England and East Anglia. As a concept, it is attracting the support of Natural England (who are of course developing the National Coast Path around England and Wales) but there is a long way to go before signing any agreements! The IWA tends to believe that the best solution would be to have alternative routes at the western end that would include both the Great Stones Way and the Wessex Ridgeway. The steering group includes representatives of cyclists and horse-riders. A stronger case could be made for National Trail status for the whole route if the trail was accessible to as wide a range of appropriate users as possible.