



# NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER 2012

### ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

During the last six years the Icknield Way Path has not changed dramatically! However, a significant number of stiles have been replaced with kissing gates (always good news!) and red ink was beginning to appear on Sue Prigg's guide book update pages!

After the AGM last year, all the voluntary wardens were provided with a copy of the pages covering their patch. The route was 'ground-truthed', any changes and suggested text improvements incorporated into Sue's new version and all necessary alterations were made to the maps.

## WALKERS' GUIDE BOOK—6TH EDITION

Some clarification or slight alteration has been made to the route at the west end, at Ickleford and at the end of the Thetford Link. Now that digital printing is the norm we can order a print run of 5, 50 or 500 copies – whatever is required. We can also make small changes to the guide as needed for each print run so there is no risk of having a stockpile of out-of-date guidebooks!

We searched for a new image for the cover that everyone liked – email is a great tool when your committee live up to 100 miles apart! John & Gil Boardman suggested the wonderful painting of the Icknield Way by Spencer Gore, painted in 1912, held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. When approached they were happy to supply us with a licence for its use on the front page of our guide book. Once again, electronic communication has been to our advantage!

Huge thanks are due to Sue for all her hard work on our new edition, due out now and available via our website.

### The Icknield Way Path

#### A Walkers' Guide

Sixth Edition



110 miles along the 'oldest road in Britain' linking the Ridgeway Path to the Pedlars Way following footpaths close to the ancient route

The Icknield Way Association

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## NEW COMMITTEE SAVES THE DAY!

Fears that the Icknield Way Association might have to fold have proved themselves groundless. Fortunately, at the 2011 AGM held at Wallington last October, several enthusiastic members stepped forward to offer their help in continuing the good work of the Association in promoting one of England's best lowland trails.

Tom Chevalier of Toddington and John Boardman of Sawtry were elected as Chairman and Treasurer respectively. Although not finally agreed at the AGM, the post of Secretary has now been filled by Lesley Blundell of Shillington in Bedfordshire.

Former acting Chairman and Secretary, Chris James, stepping down from this combined role after many years said she was absolutely delighted that she could now step down from the leadership role sure that the Association will continue to thrive.

Warm thanks were extended to David Northrop for taking care of the Association's finances for more than twenty years.

A further development since the AGM is that Chris (who thought she could get away with complete retirement from the committee!) has agreed to take over as Newsletter Editor from Peter Baker who has been doing a sterling job for years. Peter has been telling the committee that he is now too old to learn new tricks and hoped that someone could be found to do a better job than him. So this is Chris's first effort and she hopes that members and friends alike will enjoy the new presentation. She also hopes that she will be forgiven for the inevitable glitches and errors which will be all hers.

An account of the traditional AGM walk can be found within.

## TOM CHEVALIER—CHAIRMAN

I was born in Sevenoaks, Kent and moved to Toddington, Bedfordshire, in 1989 where I have been active in protection of rights of way for nearly 20 years. I walk my dog on the paths locally, whenever possible with my wife and children, but always with a pair of secateurs handy!

I run my own company which calculates the energy used by street lights for four of the six local authorities along the route, as well as about 100 authorities across England, Scotland & Wales. My family commitments and community activity have to be balanced with keeping the business financially supporting my family!

I have taken an interest in the Icknield Way Path and have ensured that the route in my locality has been way-marked. When the fifth edition of the guide book was being prepared, I challenged Tony Northwood when he wished to take the route away from Toddington – the compromise was the Toddington alternative route!

More recently, I have worked closely with Central Bedfordshire Council trying to ensure that way-marking along other sections of the Icknield Way in Bedfordshire are correctly marked because I think this is essential to anyone following a long-distance path.

Through the Central Bedfordshire & Luton Local Access Forum, I have pursued the cause of 'least restrictive' access. This has resulted in a structures policy being adopted and a steady reduction in the number of stiles across the county. There are now just two stiles between Dunstable Downs and Sundon Hills along the Icknield Way Path (and that landowner refuses all requests to replace them with gates!) However, the overall situation is a marked improvement allowing much easier access for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

So, although I have been local eyes and ears along the Way for quite a while, keeping in touch with Tony Northwood, it wasn't until last year's

plea from Chris for new committee members that I offered to help. Before I knew it, Chris had persuaded me to consider being the new chairman and I was elected at the 2011 AGM held at Wallingford!

I believe the IWA has a challenge to maintain the active involvement of highway authorities during these tight financial times, but the enthusiasm and effort of its members will ensure that the Icknield Way continues to retain its recognition as an established long distance route.



## LESLEY BLUNDELL—SECRETARY

I was born in Manchester and trained originally as a librarian. Except for 3 years as a Government policy adviser on libraries and archives, I spent my whole career working in local government.

For 25 years I worked at Directorial level, managing a range of services



A wind-blown Lesley—  
no prizes for guessing where!

including public libraries, archives, museums, information and advice offices and the provision of interpreters. That was the day-job, which I enjoyed thoroughly and from which I retired in 2007.

My real passion, though, was always history and in 1979 I obtained an external degree in mediaeval history from London University. Gradually, my historical interests moved backwards in time until I arrived at the Iron Age and prehistory.

It was at this point that I discovered first archaeology and then palaeo-anthropology, the study of human origins, and during retirement this led me to an MSc in palaeo-anthropology and palaeolithic archaeology.

I am a long-standing member of the Prehistoric Society and secretary of the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society.

My other historical interests include Richard III (I'm an ardent Ricardian) and the myths and reality behind the Arthurian legends. When not absorbed in the past I'm a keen gardener and animal lover with a menagerie of dogs, cats and fish. Last but not least I'm a devoted great-aunt to Isabella, Jack, Ethan and Sam.

My interest in the Icknield Way was first sparked when I came across the route-markers at various points while walking my dogs in the Chilterns and I got involved with the IWA to help sustain and promote the Path both for historical reasons and as a keen walker.

# KNETTISHALL HEATH—SAVED FOR THE NATION!



**Following overwhelming and generous support by members of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and other local people, including the Icknield Way Association, the Trust is now the proud custodian of Knettishall Heath. Very few places are this special.**

Knettishall Heath is an ancient place and echoes of the past are etched into the landscape. The Bronze Age round barrow, Hut Hill dates from 2400-1500BC and (our) Icknield Way, which links to the Peddars Way at Knettishall Heath, is possibly the oldest route in Britain, dating back to 4000BC.

Breckland is one of the UK's biodiversity hotspots and the designation of much of Knettishall Heath as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) reflects this. Indeed Knettishall Heath is one of Suffolk's largest surviving areas of Breckland heath, extending to more than 180 Hectares (434 acres).

The local geological conditions at Knettishall Heath have created a mix of sandy and chalk soils which have given rise to an especially rich plant community.

Swathes of heather and tufted hair-grass mingle with sheep's sorrel and harebell on the acid soils, with quaking grass and dropwort on chalk. Of the more than 12,500 species living in the Brecks, 30% are nationally rare. Some, like grey carpet moth and maiden pink, found at Knettishall Heath, are a speciality of the Brecks.

For centuries, rabbits have maintained the short species-rich turf and patches of bare ground which many Breckland plants and animals depend on. The remains of an 18th century rabbit warren at Knettishall Heath are a reminder of a time when rabbits were an important part of the Breckland economy.

The impact of myxomatosis, introduced in the 1950's, was catastrophic and rabbit numbers here have never recovered. Over the past 60 years, without rabbits to keep them in check, birch scrub and bracken have spread into the open heath. The aerial photographs of Knettishall Heath record this marked increase in scrub cover. If this trend continues there is a risk many of the more specialist Breckland species will be lost.

As the Trust has already done on their Sandlings nature reserves, they plan to introduce a herd of Exmoor

ponies to Knettishall Heath to help maintain the more open landscape of Breck Heath and scattered trees which are needed by so many unique Breckland species.



Maiden Pink *Dianthus deltooides*  
(Photo: Peter Wakeley, Natural England)

#### **Grid reference**

TL956807 (car park, reserve entrance)

#### **Parking**

3 car parks. £1 charge for main car park by toilets

#### **Local Facilities**

Toilets open from April to October.  
Ice cream van most days during school holidays and Spring/Summer weekends

#### **Access**

There are four trails around the reserve between 1 and 2.5 miles in length including an all access trail around the river. Paths are generally good but can occasionally be muddy in winter.

#### **Dogs**

Dogs are welcome but must be kept on a lead during the bird nesting season from 1st March to 31st July.

*With thanks to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust for the information contained in this article.*



Plan of Knettishall Heath. The Icknield Way Path follows the western boundary southwards from the car park

## A CENTENARY OR TWO FOR THE PATH

A few years ago I saw an article in *The Australian* newspaper. It caught my eye for two reasons: firstly, the person writing was a friend of mine, Kitty Hauser; secondly, as you can see, it was an eye-catching and colourful work. The English painter, Spencer Gore (1878–1914), was the son of a Wimbledon tennis champion and he studied painting at the Slade. His painting 'The Icknield Way' now hangs in the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

I liked the painting very much. Kitty's article told me that the Way was one of the oldest paths in Britain. I already had plans to spend three months in Cambridge, so I joined the Association. I did come to England but, alas, never got a chance to see the Icknield Way, and my ambition to walk along it faded.

Three years later, in December 2011, I was in my father's second-hand bookshop in central Victoria, Australia. My father, who is 85, opens his shop every day, and never fails to remark that not enough people come in to buy books from him.

In the shop there was a book with a title in gold on its blue cover — *The Icknield Way* — by Edward Thomas, published in 1913. Thomas, who had a wife and three children, died in action in the Battle of Arras in 1917, at the age of 39.

His 1915 poem *In Memoriam* reads:

*The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into mind the men,  
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should  
Have gathered them and will do never again.*

The find rekindled my interest in the Icknield Way. I could walk it and read his book, I thought, as a way of celebrating these centenaries. I now plan to do just this in 2012, in early June, carrying Thomas's *The Icknield Way*, a guidebook, and not very much else if I can help it. I have enlisted friends to join me, so that indolence doesn't change my mind again.

Readers are very welcome to join my small celebrations. We could share a meal in a pub along the way, or gather at the beginning or end of the walk. I fancy raising a glass of ale to the ancient Way and to two men who never had the chance to become old themselves — writer and poet Edward Thomas, and painter Spencer Gore, who died of pneumonia in 1914, age 36. I hope he didn't get it sitting there painting the Icknield Way in the rain!

Bernadette Hince  
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AUSTRALIA  
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## FANCY A WALK?

The following are a selection of walks in Icknield Way country being arranged by different groups:

**Sunday June 24th 10am**  
Borough Green

Info@newmarketramblers.co.uk

**Sunday June 24th 10am**  
Ivinghoe Beacon



Eric 01582 535515  
(Lea & Icknield RA Gp)

**Sunday July 22nd 10am**  
Icknield Way—Knettishall Heath  
11 miles



Mike 01953 994931  
(Newmarket RA Gp)

**Sunday August 12th 10am**  
West Wrattling, Cambs



Jim 01638 780415  
(East Cambs RA Gp)

**Sunday September 30th  
10am**  
Icknield Way—Shelterhouse  
Corner



Richard 01284 755744  
(Newmarket RA Gp)

**Tuesday December 11th  
10am**  
Woodditton, Cambs



Jim 01638 780415  
(East Cambs RA Gp)



Spencer Gore's painting : The Icknield Way 1912

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011

The twenty-seventh annual meeting of the Association was held at Wallington, a small village just east of Baldock. This is the second settlement encountered (going east) on the Icknield Way Path as it follows a meandering route south of, and avoiding, the busy A505 dual carriageway between Baldock and Royston.

A group of about ten members met for the traditional morning walk at the village hall (see photo, right!) which was led by David Allard. Wallington has achieved an element of fame as being a former home of the writer Eric Blair, better known as George Orwell, so David included Mr Blair's shop and the church where Blair was married on his route!

Leaving the village on the Icknield Way Path leading south-west towards Clothall, the group enjoyed wonderful views across the open and rolling arable landscape below the boulder-clay plateau. This area was once unenclosed common, part of the much more extensive chalk 'heath' that extended from Baldock to Royston.

Crossing the A507 with care we soon began to climb (very gently) Ashanger Hill into Clothall. Clothall is a very small settlement so it didn't take long to pass through it and on to the Hertfordshire Way. This follows attractive footpaths north-eastwards through ash/maple woodlands. Although no deer were seen, the woods are popular resting places for fallow and muntjac deer—a challenge for the owners trying to grow and harvest crops of wood-fuel from coppice.

Nearing Wallington once again, our route passed through Bury Farm, the setting for George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'. It is now a beautifully kept mixed arable farm with a suckler beef herd. Sadly, Wallington no longer has a pub so, on our return, those wishing to quench their thirst found their way to the 'Moon and Stars' at Rushden, not far away!

With several more members turning up, the afternoon meeting was a happy and relaxed occasion with a positive feeling as new people were elected on to the committee. Useful discussions helped to focus the Association on the way forward and some of the gaps in the wardening network were filled. Tom Chevalier and John Boardman introduced themselves and thanks were extended to Chris James and David Northrop for their long years of support.

Finally, members enjoyed a good tea!



## IWA ACCOUNTS

At the end of the financial year, the Association's finances stood in a healthy position with a combined balance in both accounts of almost **£5, 430.00**, thus providing a safe amount for embarking on another edition of the guide book.

Combined income from subscriptions (£257.50), book sales (£405.96) and a very modest bank interest (£1.84!) totalled £665.30. Against this income, expenditure totalled £141.24 comprising committee expenses (£57.77), AGM expenses (£43.50) and website expenses (£39.97). However, if the cost of printing and distribution of newsletters had been included in this year's accounts, there would have been an operating deficit instead of a surplus. (These expenses had not yet been re-claimed.)

David Northrop suggested that this situation might indicate the need to consider an increase in subscription rates to be proposed at the next AGM. The committee agreed to look into this, along with ways of reducing costs of the newsletter.

## AGM 2012

**Burrough Green,  
south of Newmarket**

**Saturday 13th October**

**Meet at the 'Reading Room'  
(between parish church and  
school) at 10.15am for a walk  
along the Icknield Way  
commencing at 10.30am.  
Back at the hall at 2pm  
for the meeting.**

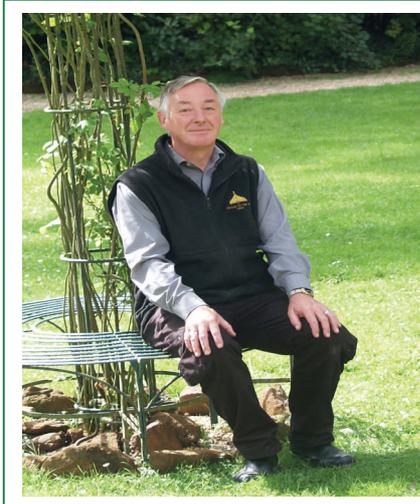
## JOHN BOARDMAN—TREASURER

I first started walking the Icknield Way in 1975 when, as a result of work, I moved from Manchester to Hitchin. A backpack, a baby daughter and the chalk paths proved perfect relaxation for all. Of course there was no guidebook then; it was a matter of finding tracks marked with 'olde' lettering on the OS maps. We gradually managed to get from the edges of Luton to Ashwell and in 1985 caught up with the second edition of the official guide and became members around 1990, over 20 years ago. Mainly by courtesy of grandparents, we had fitted in some good walks – the Dales Way, the Cleveland Way, and much of the Ridgeway, but the increase in the numbers of children to four restricted the walking options! So I did other stuff, such as flying small aeroplanes and studying photography, helping my wife Gil with her kit car and, of course earning money! Gil's first home, after university, was on the Icknield Way in Letchworth.

As the children left home (officially) we started to get out more. We finished the Icknield Way and the Peddars Way and then the Thames Path. We used the opportunity of early retirement and a move to Buxton to be able to support the older part of the family. Here we made the most of the walking potential over the next few years – the Cheshire Ring, the Trans Pennine Trail, the Gritstone Trail, the White Peak Way, the Staffordshire Way, most of the Midshires Way and so on – up to 400 miles of trails a year.

And one of these was the result of an article in an IWA newsletter which described a charity walk for the Keech Hospice in Luton. The walkers said that having completed the Icknield Way, they planned to go all the way to Lyme Regis so we contacted Robin Radford the organiser and joined their small group for the final link, the Wessex Ridgeway. This completed our walk from Holme-next-the-Sea to Lyme Regis, over 400 miles from coast to coast. It was a lovely walk with wonderful people and we owe a great deal to the IWA newsletter and that little article.

While in Buxton, as well as lecturing in business management, I also managed the finances of the Buxton Civic Association, a charity owning almost 200 acres of woodlands around Buxton. It also owned and ran the Poole's Cavern show cave. It was good experience managing a £500,000 redevelopment project and helping double annual income to the same figure. Gil and I devised a ten mile circular walk round Buxton through the different woods owned by the association. We called it the "Ring of Trees" and you can access it from the BCA website if you are ever in the High Peak.



Family changes brought us south once more, this time to Sawtry and a new range of rather flatter walks! We completed the Hereward Way last year, and are well established on the Ouse Valley Way and enjoying fortnightly walks with the Stilton Stumblers! And, of course, we were able to re-establish our links with the IWA. Pending other volunteers, we are looking after the last 16 miles of the Way as wardens which fits well with our plans for the round Norfolk walk from Kings Lynn via a bit of Icen Way, North Norfolk Coast Path, Weavers Way, and Angles Way back to Knettishall Heath once more!

Meanwhile, this year is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the Boardman-Tasker Charitable Trust so there is a commemorative calendar to be designed, a big event at the Kendal Mountain Festival in November to sort out, and all this walking to enjoy!

## SNIPPETS

### THE IWP ON FILM . . .

The Association has been approached by film-maker Luisetta Mudie who is planning a brief film on the Icknield Way based around a range of interviews focusing on why the Way inspires the individual concerned, and to be filmed "on site".

Her aim is to create a short film for showing in a community context and to use this to gain funding for something longer.

Some of the committee have had an initial meeting and offered support and we are awaiting Luisetta's detailed plans.

### . . . AND TV?

Flame TV (who have produced such BBC programmes as Heir Hunters, and Saints and Scroungers) got in touch with us as part of their research for developing a series of programmes on "the oldest roads", exploring what has changed and what has remained the same for centuries.

They intend using a mix of well-known faces and specialists in history and archaeology.

The IWA has provided them with some ideas and look forward to hearing how their design develops.

### A CENTENARY CELEBRATION

In 2013 it will be 100 years since the first publication of *The Icknield Way* by Edward Thomas, a favourite book of many IWA members.

The IWA has been in touch with The Edward Thomas Fellowship with a view to exploring ideas and opportunities for joint activities, such as guided walks and permanent celebratory memorials. They are keen to work with us to develop events and, perhaps, information boards at suitable places on the route.

Other ideas would be very welcome.



## VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A5	Helen Fletcher-Rogers	hfrogers@dial.pipex.com
Maps 4, 33-34	A5 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	tom@chevalier.me.uk
Maps 5,6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd	Carol Bond	carol.bond@hotmail.com
Maps 7-10	Hexton-Lilley Road to Baldock	Liz Hunter	elizabethhunter671@btinternet.com
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	David Allard	david.allard@ntlworld.com
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	James Quantrill	01279 653899
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	Roger & Janet Moreton	roger.janet@care4free.net
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	<i>Vacant</i>	
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Edward Wortley	ewortley@tiscali.co.uk
Maps 35-36	Barrows Corner to Thetford (Thetford Link)	<i>Vacant</i>	

## IWA COMMITTEE

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# HITCHIN RAIL LINK (a.k.a. The Hitchin Swerve!)

Network Rail is building a new flyover at Hitchin to prepare for increased demand on the East Coast Main Line. The new flyover will create a link between the East Coast Main Line and Cambridge which will:

- Allow more services per hour to and from London
- Reduce delays by nearly 30,000 minutes each year, making the railway more punctual and reliable
- Allow Network Rail to keep a Hitchin-Cambridge line open during essential maintenance to the other line

By taking the Cambridge line over the East Coast Main Line, rather than across it, Hitchin - Cambridge trains will no longer have to cross three other lines. This will increase capacity and make the railway more reliable.

The flyover will change the view for walkers and riders using the route between Ickleford and Wilbury Hill, although the route itself will not be directly affected.



Artist's impression of the view from footbridge at Ickleford before completion of the flyover (top) and after (below).  
(Photo: Network Rail)

## GUIDE BOOK

*New 6th edition  
now available from  
the Icknield Way  
website*

*A5 spiral bound and  
laminated*

*Detailed maps for each  
section of the route*

*Descriptive sections on  
geology, landform,  
archaeology, flora and  
ornithology*

*Fascinating snippets on local  
history*

*Important information about  
route changes*

## WEB-SITE

*IWA website newly  
revised and updated*

*Field Notes  
Guide book  
(you can buy your new  
walker's guide here!)*

*Getting around  
Useful links and updates  
Membership  
(you can join the IWA here!)*

*Photo Gallery  
Contact page  
(you can tell us about your  
walking experiences and  
send us photos here!)*

***[icknieldwaypath.co.uk](http://icknieldwaypath.co.uk)***

## ROUTE WARDENS

***HELP!  
THE ICKNIELD WAY  
PATH NEEDS YOU!***

*Do you have a few hours to  
spare about twice a year?*

*Would you like to explore  
new territory?*

*Newly retired and need  
something different to do?*

*Do you live near Thetford?*

*Please help us by becoming  
a route warden*

***Contact secretary for  
further information***