



# ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

### SPRING 2023

#### AGM 2023

*Advance Notice!*

**SATURDAY 14TH OCTOBER**

*Herringswell, Suffolk*

#### *Welcome to the Spring newsletter !*

The first item of good news to report is the arrival, at last, of a new Treasurer. We are delighted that Tim has joined the Executive Committee and is relieving Tom of the financial load he had been carrying for some time. You can read more about Tim on the next page.

As Publicity Officer, Doug has been busy making lots of contacts with people that might help the Association achieve its objectives—but has also found time to write a poem for this issue.

Ever on the trail of features of interest along the Way, your Editor has investigated two locations. Firstly in the Bedfordshire Chilterns is an intriguing Tree Cathedral and in Cambridgeshire, linking the low-lying Fens and the higher ground on the clay via the chalk, is the so-called Via Devana.

There is a further selection of walks to help you explore unfamiliar stretches of Icknield Way country. It is a rather geographically-restricted selection this time so if any members would like to send details of walks along or near the Icknield Way in their area, please do so and we can help publicise them.

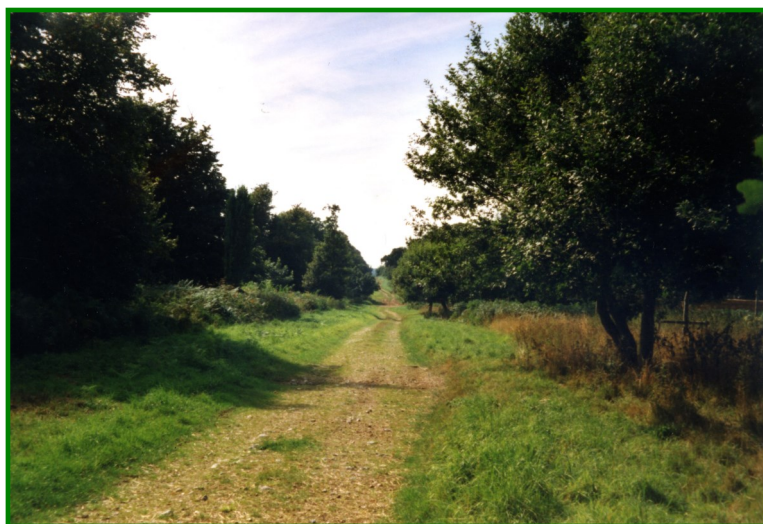
More good news is that we have also attracted a new route warden who has offered to help us keep an eye on the long stretches of the Way at the east end, despite living near the west end! Thank you, Lawrence!

As always, I welcome contributions to the newsletter. Deadline for the next issue is mid-August!

*Chris James*

<http://icknieldwaypath.co.uk/>

<http://icknieldwaytrail.org.uk/>



The Duke's Ride, Euston Estate, Suffolk  
(Photo: the late Professor Thurstan Shaw)

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEW TREASURER!

*Tim Johnson writes:*

I was born in the Epping Forest District of Essex, grew up in Manchester, studied at university in Bristol and lived in London and Oxfordshire the last fifteen years. My wife is from New Zealand and we were delighted to buy our own home in Great Chesterford in the summer last year. As keen path walkers will know, Great Chesterford is an ancient village on the border of Cambridgeshire and Essex, and the modern Icknield Way Path runs right through it, including a bridleway bridge over the local M11. We simply love the views of the local landscape. Whenever possible I walk or cycle the path up onto the ridges of the Cam Valley for the peace and stillness it gives me. I am tempted to copy Tom, our chair, and travel with a pair of secateurs.

I work for Aviva, a pension, investment and insurance company, where I measure the impact of their marketing on customers. My professional background includes psychology, market research, marketing analytics, data science and econometrics. I have always been interested in history, and most recently the Iron Age people, the history of East Anglia and the conflict with the Romans. I joined the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, and have been learning about modern archaeology methods like LIDAR. I also joined the Great Chesterford Local History Society and I have been learning about the remains of the local Roman camp. Historical records suggest the camp was built around the time of the Boudicca uprising, and closed shortly afterwards.

I quickly became fascinated by the Icknield Way and Great Chalk Way as a set of ancient routes walked throughout history. Aviva encourage staff volunteering to support communities and the environment and I chose to help the IWA. I was elected as Treasurer at the 2022 AGM. I want to help the IWA to protect and promote the Icknield Way, and achieve the National Trail status it deserves as a historical long distance route. This means I will work for you and the executive committee to manage our finances and prepare the information for our annual accounts. The IWA 40th anniversary is next year and I hope to serve for many years to come.



## WELCOME TO OTHER NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to our other new members who have joined the Association since the autumn:

Elaine Curley—Stotfold, Bedfordshire

Maggie Herod & her husband—Silsoe, Bedfordshire

Colin Muskett—Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Jenny Pearce—Tibshelf, Derbyshire

John Simmons—Morecambe, Lancashire

Neil Summers—Brinkley, Cambridgeshire

Both Maggie and John have expressed a firm intention to walk the whole route in the near future, one to raise funds for a local food bank and the other to celebrate a special birthday in 2024. We look forward to receiving updates in due course!

## GREAT CHALK WAY

It is good to report that plans for shared information boards for the Great Chalk Way are nearing completion. Doug Landman has been investigating possible funding from various National Lottery pots for production and installation costs. The Friends of the Ridgeway and the Icknield Way Association are having discussions with various landowners along the entire route to agree suitable sites to install the information boards.

The launch of the combined route is being planned for sometime in 2024, hopefully at Dunstable Downs.

## UPON THE ICKNIELD WAY

The air is thick with catkins against the blue and grey  
of skies of early Imbolc upon the Icknield Way.

The hazel trees - so high - with boughs extending swaying sprays  
above the restless traveller upon the Icknield Way.

Half a million years have passed, with Ice Age, night and day,  
with remnants of our ancestors upon the Icknield Way.

In Graves of Grime our families crept to mine prime flint that lay  
deep within our Mother Earth upon the Icknield Way.

The Bronze Age saw the barrows formed from soil, sand and clay,  
constructed - high and mighty – upon the Icknield Way.

The hillforts of the Iron Age – from Ashwell to Lyme Bay –  
remind us of the test of time upon the Icknield Way.

The Iceni – led by Boudicca – were often heard to say,  
“We want no ruddy Romans upon our Icknield Way!”

The language of the Fries was heard (Olde English – here to stay)  
with Angles, Saxons, Fries and Jutes upon the Icknield Way.

Upon the Icknield Way I tread, as oft I have before.

Tails of lambs in air and fields. Me – smiling, all the more.

*Doug Landman*

*March 2023*

## CONGRATULATIONS!

We extend our heartiest congratulations to the Friends of the Ridgeway  
on reaching the fiftieth anniversary of the recognition of the **Ridgeway  
National Trail**. The Friends have planned a variety of events during the  
coming year and have already launched a new Trail leaflet which will  
appeal to young and old alike. For a download, go to:

[12882 OCC Ridgeway Leaflet 2022-1.pdf \(nationaltrails.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://nationaltrails.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/12882_OCC_Ridgeway_Leaflet_2022-1.pdf)

Or for a printable A4 version go to:

[Version for home printing \(nationaltrails.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://nationaltrails.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Version_for_home_printing)

## NEW WARDEN

We are delighted to welcome another new warden. Lawrence Rix has very kindly offered to take on the long stretches at the east end of the Icknield Way between Icklingham and Knettishall Heath. He will also keep an eye on the Thetford Link.

This means that we now once again have voluntary wardens along the entire route, which is marvellous news. Wardens are our eyes and ears, not only for the physical condition of the path but also for any potential development threats (or opportunities!).

*Please see back page for contact details of our wardens. You can help them by reporting any issues or offering light maintenance duties.*

## SHRUBS ON THE CHALK

*Can you name these three white-flowered shrubs?*



# WHIPSNADE TREE CATHEDRAL

The Tree Cathedral is located in a former hayfield on the outskirts of Whipsnade, on the north side of the village with open country to the north and east. It is on level ground and occupies an area of approximately 6.35 acres. The Icknield Way Path passes close by on its south side.

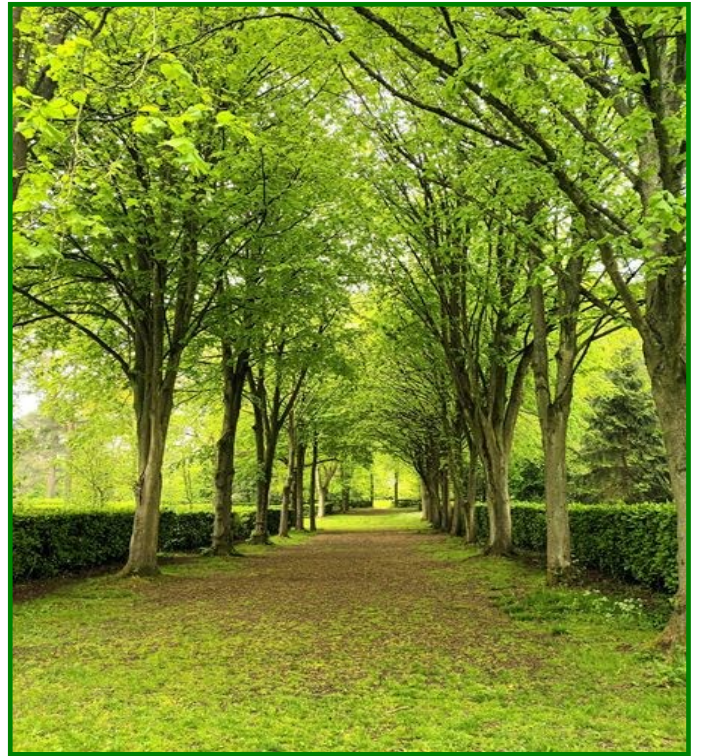
This peaceful site was created in faith, hope and reconciliation by Edmund Kell Blyth (1898-1969) as a memorial to three of his comrades from the First World War. After leaving the Army in 1922 and joining the family firm of solicitors in the City of London, Blyth made his home in Whipsnade, an area that he loved. He converted a pair of old cottages into holiday homes for poor London families in memory of his friends, and in 1930 was further inspired to create the Tree Cathedral after a visit with his wife to Liverpool Anglican Cathedral which was then under construction. He started planting in 1932 and over the next seven years created the memorial which follows the plan of a medieval cathedral.

The nave was the first element to be planted using poplars at 10ft intervals to give a pillar effect. In 1933 Blyth's wife suggested that he plant two chapels to fill in the corners between the nave and transepts which became the Easter Chapel and Winter (now known as Christmas) Chapel. The latter was planned in the shape of a star with a tree in the middle. In 1935 Blyth enlarged the Tree Cathedral and turned its transepts into the present nave using Lombardy poplars again for the pillar effect with laurel for walls. He chose silver birch to represent the High Altar in the chancel because of its gracefulness.



The original nave became the transepts, and the Summer and Autumn Chapels were added. In 1938 Blyth invited Mr Smith, the third generation of dew pond builders who had recently built a dew pond in Whipsnade Park, to construct one adjacent to the Tree Cathedral. This became the centre

of the cloister walk. In planning this extension he found three dells in the field that had been produced many years earlier by farmers digging out chalk to lime the fields. They became the corners of the cloister walk and were surrounded by trees to indicate towers.



Around the same time, the nave was extended with limes to intersect the last section of the cloister walk. A fourth dell was also surrounded by trees to create a tower which has a larger diameter in order to incorporate an existing oak. This became known as the Gospel Oak, recalling the preaching of early Christian missionaries under the trees. Next to this tower Blyth created a grand entrance, and finally he placed a Lady Chapel in the triangular space between the cloister, nave and entrance.

The Tree Cathedral had just been completed in 1939 when the outbreak of the Second World War stopped all work and maintenance for the next eight years. The plantation became colonised by thorn and other self-sown trees. It was cleared during the late 1940s and early 1950s by Blyth.

In 1960 the site was given to the National Trust by Blyth's youngest son Tom who is commemorated by an avenue of hornbeams leading to the south entrance.

*I am indebted to Historic England for the information and illustrations in this article.*  
Editor

# THE 'VIA DEVANA'—A ROMAN ROAD IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Walkers following the Icknield Way between Linton and Balsham will encounter and follow, for a short distance, another linear feature in the landscape. The time spent on this track will probably not be long enough to appreciate that this green lane extends south-eastwards from very near Cambridge to very near Haverhill, a distance of just over 10 miles (about 16Km) as the crow flies—or as the Romans went!

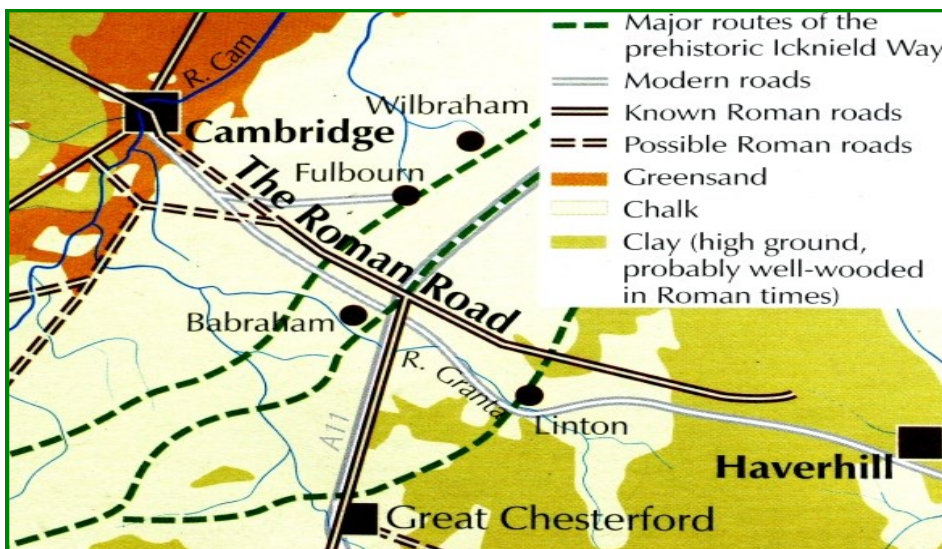
It is thought that the Romans improved an existing track linking their settlement at Great Chesterford with Cambridge. The Roman Road also links together three alternative and parallel routes of the Icknield Way.

Parts of the track were improved by the Romans who laid a rammed chalk rubble surface to form an *agger* up to 1m high. Water was shed down the sides into ditches about 14m apart. At the Cambridge end of the road, the chalk was augmented with gravel to provide an all-weather surface.

Known as *Woles* or *Wolves Street* in the 13th century, later records refer to it as *Woolstreet Way*, thus suggesting that it was a route used by traders in wool, sheep or worsted yarn (probably originating in Norfolk). 'Via Devana' was contrived by 18th century historians who assumed that the road ran from Colchester to Deva—Chester!

Today, this attractive green route is linked with the Fleam Dyke to the north to create a 25-mile (40Km) circular walk passing through gently undulating countryside comprising chalk grassland, woodland and farmland. The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke have been working for many years with local councils, Natural England and Historic England to protect and enhance the natural and heritage assets of these two archaeological sites of national importance. Large sections of each are scheduled monuments.

Further information, including a guide book to the walk and downloadable leaflets, is available from the Friends' website at [www.frrfd.org.uk](http://www.frrfd.org.uk)



Map showing relationship of the Roman Road to the Icknield Way  
(with acknowledgement to Cambridge County Council)

# FANCY A WALK?

Please contact leader to confirm meeting place and to tell them you plan to join their walk.

**Wednesday 31 May 10am**

**Sharpenhoe & Sundon Hills, Beds.**

Church Road, Streatley TL 073286

Morning circular 6.5m/10.5km



Phil O'Connor 07860 123978

North Herts Ramblers

**Saturday 10 June 10am**

**Pirton, Hertfordshire**

Motte & Bailey PH, The Green TL145315

Morning circular 5m/8km



Barbara Goulden 07770 797599

North Herts Ramblers

**Sunday 9 July 10am**

**Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire**

Church Lane TL641591

All day walk 12m/19.3km



Ivel Valley Walkers

Group contact 07890 232685

**Sunday 23 July 10am**

**Pitstone & Ashridge, Beds/Bucks border**

Pitstone Hill CP SP955149

All day walk 12m/19.3km



Bob & Celia 07474 303545

Ivel Valley Walkers

**Thursday 24 August 10am**

**Sharpenhoe Clappers**

National Trust CP TL 065296

Morning walk around the Clappers

5m/8km



Ivel Valley Walkers

Group contact 07890 232685

# VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A5	Helen Fletcher-Rogers	hfrogers@dial.pipex.com
Maps 4, 5(part)	A5 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	info@icknieldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 5-6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd	Alec Gallagher	alecgallagher701@btinternet.com
Map 7	Lilley Road to Pirton	Lesley Blundell	Lesley.blundell@uclmail.net
Map 8-9	Pirton to Wilbury Hill	Alex Goldie	kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com
Map 10	Wilbury Hill to Baldock	Elaine & Paul Curley	elaine.curley@live.co.uk
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	David Allard	david.slade.allard@gmail.com
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	Andy Mountain	andymountain.sail@hotmail.co.uk
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	Neil Summers	neil336@googlemail.com
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	Lawrence Rix	rix.lawrence@googlemail.com
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Lawrence Rix	rix.lawrence@googlemail.com
Maps 33-34	Toddington Alternative	Tom Chevalier	info@icknieldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	Lawrence Rix	rix.lawrence@googlemail.com

## COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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Looking east along Wood Lane in the Pegsdon Hills  
 (Photo: Chris James)

## GUIDE BOOK

The selling price of our Walker's Guide Book has remained at £10 including postage since 2012. This has meant that the profit margin on UK sales has gradually dwindled as postage costs have increased. Overseas sales have actually been making a loss. The Committee has decided that the price will now be £12 *including* postage for UK sales and £12 *plus* the cost of postage for postage overseas.

Sales of the 6th Edition have been good and steady—another batch were printed in 2022

<http://icknieldwaypath.co.uk/guidebook/>

