



# NEWSLETTER

## AUTUMN 2017

### ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

#### AGM 2017

#### Saturday 7th October

The Pavilion, Ashley  
Near Newmarket at 2pm

With morning walk starting  
from the hall at 10.30am.

and Guest Speaker:

David Rippington

“The Icknield Way—in context”

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Ashley, near Newmarket	2
Future Trail Status	2
Our Treasurer—bad news!	2
Walking with Dragons	3
Riding the Icknield Way Trail	3
A Second Geo-East Conference	4
D-House at Euston	4
Fancy a Walk?	4
Wilbury Hill-Fort	5
Voluntary Route Wardens	6
Icknield Way Committee	6

#### *Welcome to another newsletter!*

It's hard to believe (it always is!) that another year has passed since our AGM last autumn and with it a marvellous spring and summer with several heatwaves and the accompanying thundery downpours—almost like the old fashioned summers we used to have.

Hopefully you have all managed some great walking in various regions of our beautiful country and even, maybe, along parts of the Icknield Way, whether ‘our’ Icknield Way or the extended Icknield Way to the south-west or north-east.

The Committee has continued to keep in mind our overall objective and has had useful discussions with Friends and partners about a possible more joined-up future. More of this on page 2.

In the meantime, our Walkers' Guidebook has had a very successful year with 1200 copies of our 6th Edition sold—far more than any other edition. We've had some useful feedback from buyers who have enjoyed the route and prompted us to make some minor amendments to text. Digital production makes it so much easier to do this and print small numbers each time.

We have encouraged our voluntary route wardens to maintain up-to-date waymarking and found a source of stick-on discs for places where the plastic ones cannot be fitted.

On following pages you will find details of another Geo-East conference, articles about a D-house and another hill forts along the Way, a write-up of a day with dragons and, not least, an acknowledgement of the 25th anniversary of the Icknield Way Trail. So, read on.

Articles and ‘snippets’ for the Newsletter are always welcome—your Editor would be delighted to receive them!

#### **The Icknield Way Path**

A Walkers' Guide  
Sixth Edition



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

The Icknield Way Association

# ASHLEY NEAR NEWMARKET

Ashley is a small village situated about four miles east of Newmarket. The county boundaries in the locality are a bit wiggly so although Newmarket lies in Suffolk, Ashley is in the far east of Cambridgeshire—just!

The modern village comprises two ancient parishes of Ashley and Silverley, together covering 2,250 acres (910 hectares). At the time of Domesday Book, Silverley was the larger parish with land enough for eight plough teams, whereas Ashley had sufficient only for four teams.

In the 13th century, both manors were owned by the Knights Hospitalers of Chippenham and because Silverley was the larger, they were known as Silverley cum Ashley. By the end of the 13th century however, Ashley was considered the main village because the manor house of the Hospitallers was situated here!

Both villages once had Mediaeval churches but each was abandoned by the 16th or 17th centuries. Only the tower of the ancient Silverley church remains today. A small Hospitaller chapel in Ashley was used as the church for both parishes from about 1550 until the opening of a new church in 1845.

About 750 people live in the village, there is a shop, a pub, another pub that has turned into a restaurant and a small community hall—the Pavilion—where our meeting is to be held.

During 2009-10, the village pond underwent a complete restoration which included re-puddling the clay base so that it could hold water to a greater depth.

The Icknield Way Path passes through the centre of Ashley, arriving from Cheveley in the west and continuing to Dalham (Suffolk) in the east.



Ashley Village Sign  
and the restored pond behind

## FUTURE TRAIL STATUS

Committee member, Clive Beckett, has continued to liaise with the Ridgeway Partnership and with the Peddars Way National Trail officer during the past few months. All are very supportive of a joined-up Trail extending along the chalk ridges of lowland England. The next step is to hold a face-to-face meeting in September which will thrash out a strategy and 'memorandum of understanding' agreed by each of three organisations that can be fed into the forthcoming Ridgeway Partnership to be held in October. All agree that it is important to keep Natural England involved in the thinking and proposals for a 'Great Chalk Way', even though at present their focus - and funding - is upon the Coastal Path for England, a huge project that is taking up huge resources!

## OUR TREASURER—BAD NEWS!

At its July meeting, the Committee heard that various domestic disasters have befallen the household of our new Treasurer, Colleen French—including a catastrophic flood. Poor Colleen has quite enough on her plate at present so has understandably stood down as our Treasurer.

*So we are once again seeking a special person able to look after our very simple accounts. If you think you are this person (please do not be timid!) or know someone who could do this for the IWA, do not hesitate to get in touch with either Tom (Chairman) or Lesley (Secretary) as soon as possible.*





## WALKING WITH DRAGONS

The Icknield Way runs very close to the West Stow Country Park near Icklingham. It is possible that Guthrum's invading Heathen Army marched past the original Anglo-Saxon village.

At the summer solstice each year a Dragon Festival is held in the reconstructed village, weaving the Beowulf theme with Tolkien and stretching it to encompass the universal appeal of wyrms, snakes, serpents, basilisks and dragons in storytelling the world over.

The museums' service kindly allowed us to have a table in the marquee so Leo and I spent a jolly weekend talking to people about the joys of walking, how the Heathen Army had walked along the Way, how long distance footpaths are an important aspect of history. We certainly learned a great deal about working at events.

The big problem is that spectre of the age, Public Liability Insurance. Without PLI, which costs an arm and a leg, it's really difficult to have a pitch at an event. It took a little negotiation with West Stow and a compromise that we wouldn't take our own gazebo.

Was it worth doing?

We networked with Suffolk County Council who kindly loaned us their banners from a recent walking festival. We've made links with West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village and Bury St Edmunds Borough Council and had some interesting email chats with the Long Distance Walkers Association (about PLI).

Of the people we spoke to several had already walked some or even all of The Way. Other people took joining leaflets so the acid test is likely to be will anyone join as a result of this?

Manning a stand at an event is very labour intensive and surprisingly tiring. It was great fun to do but as we are limited to small events where we are welcome without insurance it may not be worth participating in any other events.

Perhaps we need to look at other avenues for promoting the Association? There are several free magazines like CB8 which will accept copy and of-course we have the world at our fingertips via the world wide web.

How do other members think we should promote ourselves?

Answers (to the Secretary) on a postcard please.

*Fiona Dowson*

## RIDING THE ICKNIELD WAY TRAIL

Earlier in the year, an invitation was received from Elizabeth Barrett who, with her husband Bill, was the prime mover behind the establishment of an Icknield Way Riders Trail. In 2017, they celebrate 25 years of riding along the Trail and invited your Editor to attend a celebratory lunch. Very sadly, none of the members of the IWA committee could attend so one of the riders, Jan Harber has sent us a few words to describe the day's events.

**On Sunday July 9th, about ten riders took part in a 12-mile ride along parts of the Icknield Way Trail: through Icklingham, across Shravedell Heath and around the Kings Forest. Afterwards they joined another dozen or so supporters at Wideham Farm Equestrian Centre for a lunch hosted by Elizabeth Barrett of Camino Riders who had organised the event. The riders each received a commemorative rosette and the lunch was followed by the cutting of a celebratory cake made by fellow rider, Jill Harper.**

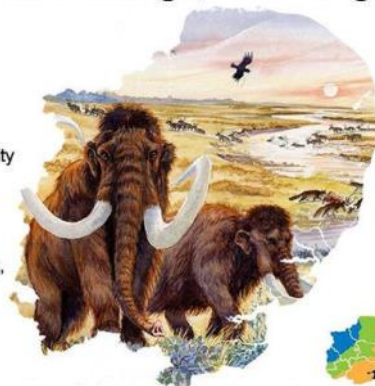


Right: Elizabeth Barrett and Jill Harper about to cut a splendid cake to celebrate 25 years of riding along the Icknield Way Trail

# A SECOND GEO-EAST ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

## The Ice (and after) in the Eastern Counties Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017 Hills Road 6<sup>th</sup> Form College, Cambridge

- Prof Nick Ashton, British Museum
- Dr Steve Boreham, University of Cambridge
- Prof. David Bridgland, Durham University
- Prof. Sanjeev Gupta, Imperial College, London
- Prof. Danielle Schreve, Royal Holloway, University of London
- Dr Colin Summerhayes, University of Cambridge



### Geology, Landscape, Life and Man: A one-day conference

To register, please go to [www.geo-eastevents.org.uk](http://www.geo-eastevents.org.uk) or:  
Email: [naomi.stevenson@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:naomi.stevenson@naturalengland.org.uk)

Having attended last year's Geo-East conference, I am pleased to include details of this year's event which will be a marvellous opportunity to discover and learn more about the underlying reasons for the topography over which the Icknield Way passes as it crosses East Anglia.

This will be a great day packed with fascinating talks and demos. Lunch and other refreshments are included in the very reasonable £30 ticket price.

## FANCY A WALK?

### Sunday 15 October

#### Buckland - Reed - Therfield

10 miles

Contact: Tony Read  
North Herts R.A. 01462 450494

### Monday 30 October a.m. only

#### Weston Green - West Watting

5 miles

Contact: Janet  
Cambridge R.A. 01223 356889

### Saturday 18 November

#### Hexton circular

6 miles

Contact: Robert Cato  
North Herts R.A. 01582 580855

### Sunday 26 November

#### Stetchworth - Kirtling Green

10-11 miles

Contact: Rosie  
Cambridge Ramblers  
01223 890139

*For all the above, please contact  
leader for starting time and location.*

## D-HOUSE AT EUSTON, SUFFOLK

About twenty years ago, an interesting letter was received from Mr Nigel Rush of Rymer Farm, Barnham, in response to an enquiry about the D-House, a significant local landmark on the route in Suffolk.

The D-House was built in 1828, along with the cottages opposite, to house the farmworkers on the Euston Estate, but nobody knows why it was built in a D-shape—flat at the back and rounded at the front. There is no other cottage like it on the estate and Mr Rush tells us that it is pretty cramped inside!

The area of the cottages is known as 'Rymer Point' because it is where nine parishes meet. It is the second highest point in Suffolk and there is no other place in the country where this is the case. There used to be pond (Ry Mere) and cattle pound opposite D-House and some historians assumed that the pond was a source of water for all parishes. However, all nine parishes were well supplied in their own right so there had to be another reason for the historical parish layout.

The reason was clay. There is about 60 acres of clay subsoil around Rymer Point in an otherwise sandy Breck area and this was a valuable resource in the days when houses were built of clay and wattle. Every parish extended its boundaries into the clay area so it could have access to this important material and there used to be many pits, most of which have now been filled in. The boundaries were established in about 550 BC by King Molmutius and his son King Billin (who founded the first port of London at Billingsgate). The Icknield Way was then a Druid road called Sarn Iken.

*With thanks to Nigel Rush and family for this fascinating historical snippet*



# WILBURY HILL-FORT AT LETCHWORTH

Hill forts are important archaeological features that we have in common with the Ridgeway National Trail (all the more reason to join us all up together as one continuous lowland Trail!). Ravensburgh Castle, Hexton, was written about in our newsletter two years ago but Wilbury has not been given much of a mention.

Time then to hear something about it, especially as some very useful grant funding has been secured within the last month or so to undertake some restoration and interpretation. We hope to keep an eye on activity and report more in future editions.

Wilbury was scheduled as an Ancient Monument in 1949 because of its importance as one of a chain of defended sites along the Chiltern Ridge which developed during late Bronze—early Iron Age Britain. It is a 'slight univallate hill fort', in other words, it is defined by a single earth-work of relatively small scale. Located on the southern slope of Wilbury Hill on the west side of Letchworth, it gives extensive views over Hitchin and south-west across much of the chalk escarpment.

Along with Ravensburgh, two other hill-forts close by are Sharpenhoe Clappers (Barton-le-Clay) and Arbury Banks (Ashwell).

Wilbury's structure is defined by two adjoining circuits of defences formed by single banks and external ditches. These are no longer distinctive on the ground although some sections show as cropmarks in good years. The eastern enclosure lies partly in a field and partly under allotments. The larger enclosure extends westwards where its western boundary is marked by the line of the present Stotfold-Hitchin road. Unfortunately the southern banks were pushed into the ditches in the 19th century to make field cultivations easier!

Today, the only banks remaining are

those forming the verge on the Stotfold road—the ditch lies under the tarmac.

Excavations in 1933 revealed that the fort was constructed in two main phases, the first being in the late Bronze Age about 700BC when shallow banks were topped with a narrow wooden palisade. The second phase took place in the Middle Iron Age about 400BC when more substantial banks were built on the old ones and accompanied by wide external ditches measuring about 8m across and 2.7m high. Entry to the eastern enclosure was controlled by a sequence of timber gateways. Small excavations to the north of a southern entrance, found remains of hearths, flint-cobbled surfaces, storage pits and evidence for huts. More recent aerial photography has revealed a dense pattern of circular and linear markings in the eastern enclosure but very little in the western one.

During the mid 19th century, the north-western corner of the site was quarried to provide ballast for the railway and during this work, a large number of Roman coins were found. This, combined with reports of other Roman artefacts found, suggests that occupation may have continued beyond the end of the Iron Age.

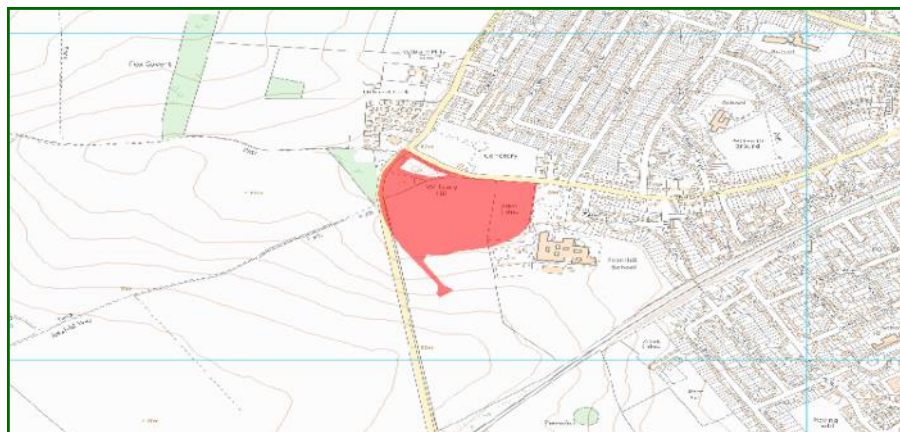
Slight univallate hillforts are quite rare in Britain—only about 150 have been recorded. They are important because they help archaeologists understand the transition between Bronze Age and Iron Age communities so all examples which survive reasonably well and are likely to have the potential for recovery of more archaeology are scheduled as monuments of national importance.

A fine circular walk starting and finishing at Wilbury and including a stretch of the Icknield Way has been made available by the Archaeology Officer at North Herts District Council:

[www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/wilbury\\_walk-2.pdf](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/wilbury_walk-2.pdf)

The path across the site was claimed by Ken Payne with support by the Association in 2009 and formally confirmed in 2012 as a public bridleway.

*The information and map included in this article are extracted from Heritage England's web page listing for Wilbury Hill—with grateful acknowledgement*



The location of the Wilbury hill-fort on the western edge of Letchworth with the Icknield Way leading away south-west to Ickleford