

# NEWSLETTER

## SPRING 2015

### ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

#### HELP NEEDED SOON!

John Boardman, our Treasurer, will be standing down at the next AGM. The person who looks after finances is a vital member of any committee and we are seeking that new vital person. The IWA accounts are not complex so if you would like to help the Association and have the skills to offer, please do call John and find out more (number on back page).

*DIARY DATE!*  
**AGM 2015**  
*SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER*  
*GREAT CHISHILL*  
*CAMBRIDGESHIRE*

#### CELEBRATING AT BALSHAM 2014



**The morning walkers gather around the half-way stone at Balsham, Cambridgeshire on Saturday 11th October 2014**

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It was a great day at Balsham and you can read more about the route that members followed elsewhere in this newsletter. With summer on the way, you might like some encouragement—and the confidence given by a ‘ready-made’ walk leader—in exploring other parts of the Icknield Way! There are six walks to choose from, with thanks to North Herts and Newmarket Ramblers groups. If you have a copy of our Walkers’ Guidebook, why not take it along with you and help spread the word about the Icknield Way?

In this edition we also have an excellent article about one of the most significant but sadly hidden historic landmarks on our route, updates about three other connected cross-country trails, including important news about the Ridge National Trail and an evocation on Green Lanes with recommended reading.

Work has already begun on the construction of a new road north of Dunstable which will impact on our route, but you can keep up to date with this by checking the website from time to time—and reading a little about it.

If you know of someone else who would be interested in the Icknield Way, please do tell them about our Association. Why not send this newsletter on to them and encourage them to support us.  
*Chris James, Editor*

# THE AGM AT BALSHAM

Here is Phil Prigg's account of the walk:

Balsham is the ideal place for a walk: plenty of rights of way, not least the Icknield Way Path, easy access to both the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke routes, several fine buildings grouped close to the parish church with its massive tower visible for miles around, a handy car park, and a couple of pubs for refreshment. Fears that the renowned local boulder clay would impede our progress were unfounded (on this occasion!) and a fine morning dawned with some sunshine for our walk of about 8Km.

We set off via the churchyard, village lanes and enclosed paths to reach open countryside to the north-east of the village, then followed field-edge paths and some well-maintained cross-field sections leading us into a wood and on to the outskirts of West Wratting. At Wadlow Hill Farm, members mused on the domination of the countryside by wind turbines - these rarely seem to be turning, and their usefulness is often queried!

Some unavoidable road walking along the B1502 road took us back towards Balsham, before a right turn on to a byway led to the Icknield Way Path and a welcome coffee-break in the shelter of a group of trees. We then followed the undulating IWP, here on a wide un-surfaced track known as Fox Road for about 1500m before reaching the first house of the village. A short detour via Nine Chimney Lane allowed members to visit the Icknield Way Stone on the Green before following Church Lane back to the hall.



After an enjoyable lunch break, members were rounded up once again at the Balsham Church Institute for the afternoon meeting. There were eighteen members present at this thirtieth anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the Association, held at Royston in 1984.

Chairman Tom Chevalier welcomed a speaker to the meeting. Julia Napier, Secretary of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, spoke most entertainingly about the origin, history and current work of the Friends. The Friends have raised funds to help conserve and enhance the chalk grassland flora and fauna along these important defensive features (see our Autumn 2014 Newsletter for an article about the dykes) and have cleared scrub overgrowth, installed information boards and published promotional leaflets and a walks booklet, copies of which were available to buy at the meeting. Julia told our members that the group's greatest triumphs have been the return of significant numbers of the rare Chalkhill Blue and Green Hairstreak butter-

flies to the banks as a result of their hard work.

In his report to the meeting, Tom explained that it had been a quieter year for the Association. However, guidebook sales had been good with 185 copies sold. Stanford's Map Shop in London is now stocking the Guide Book.

He updated members on the current National Trails Review, which is considering the organisational and funding arrangements of all National Trails, including the Ridgeway and Peddars Way. The Review Officer has been informed about the Icknield Way Association and how it operates. Two officers from Norfolk County Council responsible for maintaining the Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path are agreed that the Icknield Way should be a National Trail and were keen to take forward the idea of a coast-to-coast National Trail consisting of the Ridgeway, Icknield Way and Peddars Way. This requires a lot of background work and the pulling together of a memorandum of understanding that would include the Friends of the Ridgeway. It is hoped that this idea will be raised at a forthcoming meeting of all National Trails officers.

John Boardman reported on a healthy financial position with a net income from sales of guidebooks of £552.00. Donations totalling £100.00 had been received during the year. Overall the Association was £462.90 better off than last year with a closing bank balance of £5251.44 and £1,067 of guidebook stock.

Although the Association attracted 7 new members during 2014, it also lost a few and the Chairman noted that increasing and maintaining members was a serious issue for the Association.

There was a discussion about promotional activities. Ideas received included establishing closer links with other walking groups along the Way, putting up more information boards, tapping into any existing walking festivals along the route, the possibility of an IWA walking festival with a minibus to facilitate linear walks and use of either a student on a marketing course or a professional PR company to promote it. Additional ideas put forward at the meeting included the installation of seats or benches bearing the IWA logo, laminated hard copy leaflets kept at key points along the route for people to read and return, A4 laminated posters promoting membership of the IWA, QR codes on existing Icknield Way information boards and leaflets, and the possibility of getting a brewery to sponsor an Icknield Way ale!

There were no surprises during the election of officers. All were re-elected *en bloc* (see back page for details). So, altogether it was another enjoyable and useful meeting. Thank you everyone for coming along.

# A NEW PARTNERSHIP TO RUN THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL

From 1<sup>st</sup> April a new organisation, The Ridgeway Partnership, will be responsible for the future management, development and promotion of The Ridgeway National Trail. This new body will involve a wide range of organisations representing users and other stakeholders alongside Natural England and the local authorities that manage The Ridgeway at present.

In their press release dated Monday 30th March, Ian Ritchie, Chair of The Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR), said "The Partnership represents a great opportunity to bring the delights of the UK's oldest path to a much greater number of people, pursuing a wide range of activities. It is a wonderful asset so close to large centres of population. The Ridgeway has some spectacular scenery and unparalleled prehistoric sites such as the Uffington White Horse and the series of Iron Age hill forts along its length. We aim to encourage more people to get out to walk, cycle, and ride or drive horses along it, and we want to introduce it to young people and make it accessible for the less mobile and those with disabilities."

"We shall enhance the visitors' experience by improving the approach paths to The Ridgeway," said Dave Cavanagh of the Ramblers, a Partnership member, "with the help of volunteers from Ramblers and the Chiltern Society. This will encourage some people to park in villages or use public transport, enjoy many circular routes that take in sections of The Ridgeway, accessing it at more points, and to enjoy local pubs and tea shops on their return."

The Ridgeway Partnership comprises Oxfordshire County Council as the Lead Partner, the other local authorities for the areas through which the Trail passes, Natural England, North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Chilterns Conservation Board and organisations that between them represent many of those who use The Ridgeway and its wider corridor, including archaeologists, cyclists, families, horse-riders, landowners, naturalists, runners, tourists and associated businesses, as well as walkers.

A Ridgeway Forum will be established, open to all community, business and individual stakeholders for communicating information and ideas, answering queries and receiving feedback and opinion.

The Partnership has been created in response to the decision by Natural England that local partnerships should assume collective responsibility for management and delivery of their respective Trails. "The introduction of a full range of stakeholder and community interests as active participants in running The Ridgeway may be expected to unleash a new energy and new ideas for its enhancement and enjoyment by new users," said FoR's Jeff Goddard, who has been involved in drafting the Partnership's formation documents. Natural England will continue to provide much of the finance for National Trails.

The Partnership is in the process of engaging a Ridgeway Officer (RO) who will be the single point of contact for the Ridgeway. The RO will attract investment, lead on development issues, co-ordinate maintenance, liaise with stakeholders and respond to public enquiries. He will also work with the Partners, including the AONBs, Chiltern Society, National Trust and others to promote the Trail in conjunction with all the other attractions along the route. Maintenance of The Ridgeway will continue to rely heavily on the National Trails Team and its volunteers, who also maintain the Thames Path Trail, and on other volunteer schemes organised by various Partners.

*In response to this exciting development, our own Chairman, Tom Chevalier says, 'We wish our Friends on the Ridgeway every success in their new Partnership and hope that, one day not too distant, we can report a similar new partnership arrangement for the Icknield Way that will make sense of our shared route along the chalk spine of lowland Britain. Surely it cannot be long before the powers that be will share our vision of a wonderful historic route all the way along the Great Chalk Way from the Jurassic coast to the Wash'.*



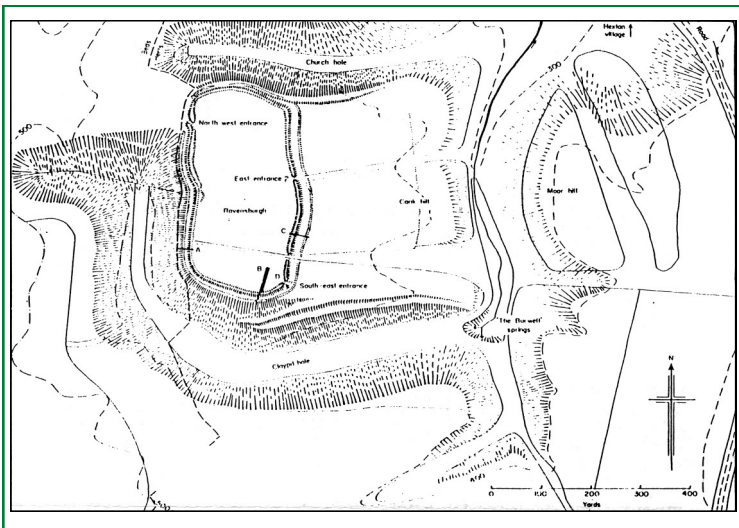


# RAVENSBURGH CASTLE AT HEXTON

In September 2014, Dr Ian Brown gave a lecture to the North Herts Archaeological Society about one of the most significant historic features along the Icknield Way. Several members attended the lecture following which in February this year was a site visit arranged with the kind permission of the Ashley-Cooper family at Hexton. Coincidentally, almost 20 years ago, in Spring 1996, a similar visit was arranged by IWA to visit Ravensburgh Castle.

Ravensburgh Castle is located at TL 099 295, on the border between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. Situated 1km south-west of Hexton Church and 1.5 km north of the traditional route of the Icknield Way, it is one of a line of hill-forts occurring at regular intervals of between 8–16 km (5–10 miles) along the Chalk scarp. Although some hill-forts, such as Ivinghoe Beacon, were begun in the late Bronze Age, Ravensburgh is early Iron Age, first occupied about 400 BC. At that time it was probably one of the territorial headquarters separated by triple dykes that crossed the Icknield Way. With an internal area of 6.5 hectares (16 acres) it is the largest hill-fort not only in the Chilterns but also in the whole of eastern England.

Excavations last century suggested that, during the Bronze Age, the site was used for cereal cultivation and that, after its first occupation in about 400 BC, Ravensburgh was deserted for several centuries before being reoccupied about 50BC, at the time of Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain. There is no direct archaeological evidence that Caesar's military expeditions ever reached the Chilterns but Caesar himself wrote that in 54BC he successfully attacked the stronghold of the local Catuvellauni tribe and routed their king Cassivelaunus. Although the site of this decisive battle is not known for certain, Ravensburgh sits within Catuvellauni territory and fits Caesar's description of the their capital very closely. It could easily have been reached via the Lea Valley and along the Icknield Way.



A general site plan of Ravensburgh Castle  
(Dr James Dyer)

Ravensburgh Castle is rectangular and sits on the western half of a plateau surrounded on 3 sides by steep-sided dry valleys. On the eastern, more vulnerable side, where the ground slopes gently down to a stream, the rampart still stands to 5.5m, though much overgrown with scrub. At first it was a reinforced box rampart, held in position by strong timbers in front and behind, tied together with cross-bars. By 50 BC it had been rebuilt as a *glacis* rampart strengthened by an earth slope using material from a re-dug ditch.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century excavations and more recent survey indicate that the earliest fort had only one entrance, at the north-west corner facing Barton Hills. The later fort also had a second, south-eastern entrance giving access to the Burwell stream and spring, in the valley bottom. The north-west entrance was undoubtedly still the most important, however. By this time it was slightly oblique, with the northern rampart end curving into the camp and the southern side curving outwards. Immediately north of the entrance the rampart end is much wider and higher, forming an observation post at the highest point of the fort, from which the whole interior can be seen. There was a triple rampart at this point and a double line of ramparts to the north. There was also a double bank and ditch, originally 3.6 m deep and 6 m wide, on the western side. An entrance at the centre of the eastern side is not original.



The main entrance to Ravensburgh Castle  
(Photo: John Boardman)

Although hill-forts are generally acknowledged to have had considerable defensive capacity they may also have had a number of other purposes: they could have been intended as status symbols; as 'central places' for storage, exchange and distribution; as centres for animal husbandry; as defensive places for the community; or as special places marked by enclosure for ritual purposes. The only evidence for domestic occupation at Ravensburgh came from the Early Iron Age, when pottery, a brooch and a bone comb were found. In the later phase it seems to have been used primarily for



herding and penning cattle (44 large post-holes inside the south-east entrance were interpreted as an extensive series of cattle stockades) and for controlling up-land farming resources.

For most of its history this dramatic and important part of the historic heritage of north Hertfordshire has stood within an open downland landscape but in 1908 the whole site was unfortunately planted with trees. The Castle is sadly obscured and it is difficult now to fully appreciate its scale and layout.

Ravensburgh Castle is on private land, used for pheasant shooting, and permission to visit (possible only during winter and spring) must be obtained from Hexton Estate Office.

*Lesley Blundell*



**Two more views of Ravensburgh Castle**  
Each clearly indicate the massive scale of the fortifications  
now so sadly obscured by trees  
(Photos: John Boardman)



## THE ANGLES WAY

This Long Distance Path was conceived by Norfolk and Suffolk Area Ramblers in the 1980's to follow the Waveney Valley which forms the border between Norfolk and Suffolk. The Angles Way starts from Great Yarmouth and arrives at Knettishall Heath, linking with the Peddars Way and Icknield Way.

It has recently been extended and way-marked to Thetford using the Icknield Way route from Knettishall Heath to Barrow's Corner and then using the Icknield Way link to Barnham Cross Common and so in to Thetford. The additional 14 miles increases the length of The Angles Way to 93 miles.

The Angles Way is promoted by Norfolk County Council as a Norfolk Trail although curiously less than a third of the route is in Norfolk, the majority being in Suffolk.

For more information go to

[www.norfolk.gov.uk/leisure\\_and\\_culture/.../angles\\_way](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/.../angles_way)

*Roy Wheeler*

## THE NORTH CHILTERN TRAIL

Building on the success of the Chiltern Way – the long distance walking route around the Chilterns, which was established by the Chiltern Society in 2000 – a new circular footpath has been created in the north Chilterns.

The North Chiltern Trail is designed to encourage people to explore this lovely area on foot and has been created by combining the original and extended routes of The Chiltern Way footpath in the North Chilterns. This will provide a 67km/42 mile circular walking route through some of the most delightful Chiltern countryside of Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire, including parts of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Starting at Lilley, the Trail takes in the Warden and Galley Hills, Pegsdon Hills, Great Offley, Preston, St Paul's Walden, Whitwell, Peter's Green and Breachwood Green. If you are familiar with this part of the Chilterns, you'll know how attractive the North Chiltern Trail will be. There are extensive views and outstanding landscapes, plenty of wildlife and some intriguing industrial and agricultural archaeology. As a bonus, the route is handsomely provided with a fine range of country pubs – in fact there are 21 opportunities either on or near the Trail to take refreshment – many more if you include tea shops!

For loads more information and access to maps and leaflets visit [www.chilternsociety.org.uk/about-NChltnTrail.php](http://www.chilternsociety.org.uk/about-NChltnTrail.php)

*With thanks to the Chiltern Society website  
for this information*



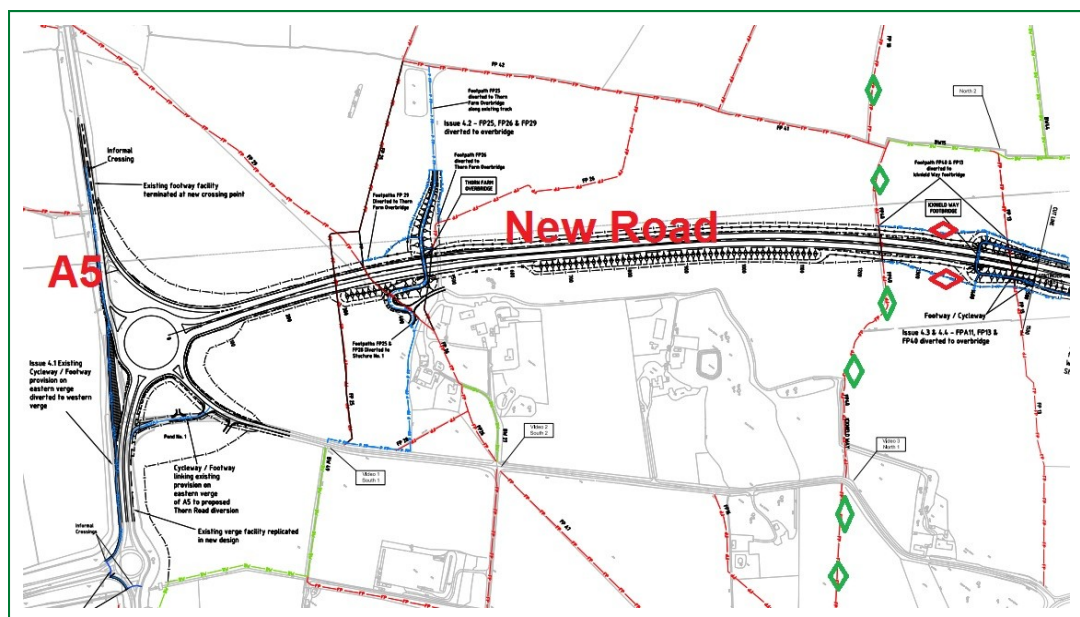
## A5-M1 LINK—Dunstable Northern By-Pass

This a major road dual-carriageway scheme promoted by Highway England. Various schemes to relieve traffic through Dunstable have been proposed over many years. the current proposal was consulted upon in 2005 and was progressing until it was stopped in 2010 when the government cancelled many similar schemes. The scheme is primarily intended to reduce the traffic through Dunstable, but it was also perceived as a method to enable further development north of Dunstable/Houghton Regis. So after 2010 the property developers committed a significant sum of money which meant the scheme was restarted.

The Icknield Way (Guidebook Map 4 – between Ouzel Brook and Wingfield) runs north across the new road. Prior to the formal proposals in 2005 I was involved in discussions as to how to accommodate all the rights of way affected by the scheme. The Icknield Way will be diverted on to a new bridge across the new road which will result in a slightly longer route.

Construction work has now started on the ground and expected to continue for two years. During this period there will be a closure at some time on our route. The builders are well aware of the significance of the Icknield Way as a long distance path but I have not discussed the planned alternative route or the timing of any diversions. On the Icknield Way website there is a link to where diversions are published, and I will provide updates to Sue, our webmaster.

In the longer term the local development plan is intending to develop the land south of the new road to link with Dunstable/Houghton Regis. As these plans are developed it will lead to further changes to the rights of way network. The intention is to ensure the Icknield Way is contained within a 'green corridor', but that will develop over the coming years.



# DISCOVERING GREEN LANES

Many of our ancient tracks became known as Green Lanes, famously used by drovers to drive livestock from one part of the country to another. The Icknield Way is comprised of many of them. So what is a 'green lane' exactly?

The Countryside Commission (1979) defines them thus: *A green lane in broad general terms is an un-metalled track which may or may not be a public right of way for the public either on foot, horse, bicycle or motor vehicle, including a motor bicycle, and which is usually bound by hedges, walls or ditches.*

Their use by motor cycles (or indeed motor vehicles of any sort) is a contentious but apparently accepted practice in some parts of the country, and is even known as "green-laning" but is not something generally welcomed by walkers seeking tranquillity and immersion in the natural world.

In her excellent books on Green Lanes, Valerie Belsey firmly emphasises the broader attributes of 'landscape character' – a 'Green Lane being any of these: footpath, bridleway, carriageway, drove/driftway, restricted or unrestricted byway, unclassified road or private road. The Icknield Way under this definition could be said to be almost entirely 'green lanes', the greenness being the important feature, and the almost circular tunnel-like appearance of some of them, which is what really drew me in.

Before 1920 all lanes were green. Sadly, many hedges have been destroyed along with their 'greenness', although new hedgerow regulations enacted in 1985 have helped curb this trend.

As one of the Icknield Way's newer wardens, I now walk more frequently the stretch between Linton in Cambridgeshire and Willingham Green. This includes a longish section – about three miles – of green lane with trees or hedges each side. Part of this green lane is also a Roman Road, presumably a GRUTH (a Green Route Used Throughout History).

Prehistoric man cleared the ground, grazed his cattle and moved on. Large sections of the Icknield Way still have surfaces that remain untreated since people and animals first made tracks along them. Evidence of their use can be traced from Anglo-Saxon times through to the medieval period using place names and parish records.

For up to date information and news flashes about the Icknield Way go to [www.icknieldwaypath.org.uk](http://www.icknieldwaypath.org.uk)

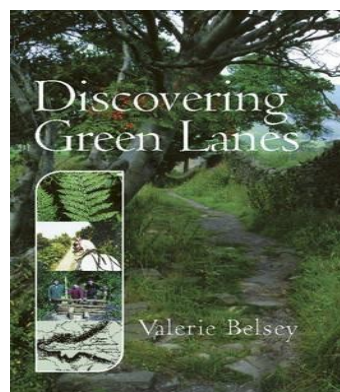
For a mass of fascinating evidence, look out for Valerie Belsey's book, 'Discovering Green Lanes', (quoted below), to uncover the history and ecology of green lanes.

*"Within their microclimate, green lanes are man-made corridors between equally man-made habitats, producing and protecting their own bio-diversity. Although they clearly vary from district to district, it is safe to say that most hedgerows are habitats for over half of our twenty British mammals and for as many as 600 species of wild plants. Over 65 bird species have been recorded both nesting and hunting along hedgerows. They need insects to feed on and thousands of different kinds are available. One oak tree alone might support over 280 insect species.*

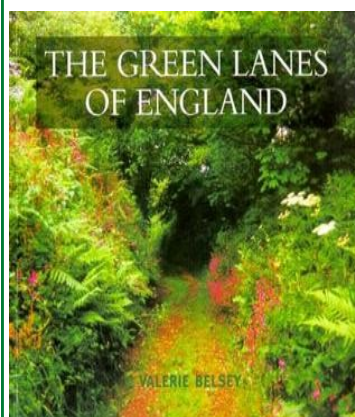
*But the larder is continually replenishing. Green Lane corridors act as transportation routes for the dispersal of seeds, fruits and berries. Shrubs and trees will continue to thrive, lizards will scuttle on the dry banks and slow worms, frogs and toads live in the ditches ..."*

Issa Cochran

## SOMETHING TO READ



For anyone interested in discovering green lanes, this handbook shows how to identify them on the ground, how to recognise them on antique maps and how to locate documents and other records which will reveal who used them in past times. Valerie Belsey also discusses their ecological value, the current controversy about who should be able to use them, and how to get involved in restoring and protecting lanes in your area. The book includes contact information, key dates in highway history and sample survey forms for recording wildlife in your local green lane.



The 'Green Lanes of England' explores the history and present state of our remaining network of green lanes. The future of green lanes in our besieged landscape is considered on a local and national basis, and the opinions of conflicting user groups and county councils are also discussed.

Published in 2001 and 1998 respectively by Green Books, both are undoubtedly available via Amazon.

## VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A5	Helen Fletcher-Rogers	hfrogers@dial.pipex.com
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Maps 5,6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd	Carol Bond	carol.bond@hotmail.com
Map 7	Lilley Road to Pirton	Lesley Blundell	lesleyblundell@btinternet.com
Map 8-9	Pirton to Wilbury Hill	Alex Goldie	kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com
Map 10	Wilbury Hill to Baldock	Chris James	chrisjames56@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	Clarissa Cochran	clarissa@clarissacochran.com
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	Tom & Gill Caple	gill.caple@btinternet.com
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Edward Wortley	ewortley@tiscali.co.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	Mike Gee	ramblergees@hotmail.co.uk

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