



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2017

ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

AGM 2017

Saturday 7th October

**The Pavilion, Ashley
Near Newmarket,
CB8 9DX at 2pm**

**With morning walk starting
from the hall at 10.30am.**

and Guest Speaker:

David Rippington

“The History of the Way”

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2016 AGM IN BEDFORDSHIRE

Our AGM last October re-visited an area that we had not walked in for ten years so it was a great opportunity to remind ourselves of the attractive Chiltern country that characterises the western end of the Icknield Way. We met at Upper Sundon Village Hall in rather tentative sunshine—about 7-8 of us with four dogs—originating from places as afar afield as Norfolk and Wiltshire.

Tom Chevalier, our Chairman, led a walk going north-east following a good field-edge path in a more-or-less straight line towards Sharpenhoe Clappers. The Clappers is a very prominent wooded feature on one of the chalk scarps. Fortunately, the fly-tip at the start of the path that Tom had noted on his earlier reccé had been cleared away!

By this time, what should have been enticing views over south Bedfordshire were disappearing beneath grey cloud and rain. Gradually the wooded scarp of the Sundon Hills came towards us – or rather we gradually arrived at it! Our path dived down into the edge of woodland, where there were fine beech trees, some of which were showing signs of decay sadly often typical in mature beech. After several ups and downs along the very edge of the woodland, we popped out again on to the grassed fields of the Sundon Hills Country Park. A regularly used path along the edge of the park allowed us to experience the very undulating character of the dry chalk valleys that are a feature of this part of the Chilterns. (*Continued overleaf*)



A rather damp and overcast morning for our walk at Sundon, with views disappearing under low cloud in the distance!

MORE ON THE AGM

So we enjoyed a very pleasant walk in the morning, with thanks to Tom. It was a shame about the weather, which although not bad, deprived us of the clear views that Tom was hoping we would enjoy of his home stretch of the Icknield Way in Bedfordshire.

Back in the village at the pub we found that the chef was off sick so it seemed at first there would be no lunch (and there is no village shop either!). However the kindly publican took pity on us and offered to cook chips and other 'bits and bobs' which were very welcome.

As is our usual custom, we re-convened after lunch for our afternoon meeting. Several more members boosted the small group in the village hall where we gave a formal welcome to Ian Ritchie, Chairman of the Ridgeway Partnership. Ian had joined us on the walk earlier to see a little of the Bedfordshire Chilterns but he now gave us an excellent presentation about the current situation with the long established Ridgeway National Trail. After some background to set the scene he reminded us that the original proposals for Trails never came into being. The Pennine Way was established first and the 'coast to coast' Ridgeway was intended to be next. Sadly it never happened and the much shorter and incomplete current Ridgeway section seemed to be a very arbitrarily selected route. Money ran out and the Countryside Commission did not want to extend into another county, so the Ridgeway stopped at Ivinghoe Beacon.

Next, Ian told us how the Ridgeway is currently managed and about changes that have taken place including the formation of the Partnership in April 2015. Sarah Wright, the new Ridgeway Officer is a great asset and together they have achieved many things. The Partnership has five themes for promotion and enhancement, plans to improve access from villages along the route with improved public transport links and links to other attractions. But future development and progress is threatened by a collapse in government funding for National Trails. Finally, Ian was persuaded to show us his slides of special features along the Ridgeway before he had to rush off home to Wiltshire.

Our second talk was given by Clive Beckett with Powerpoint slides showing us his thinking about how we can re-invigorate the Icknield Way and try again to attract funding for its promotion and enhancement. It was most encouraging to hear that there is unofficial support for the idea of a Great Chalk Way linking up the four routes from Dorset to the Wash from other National Trail officers.

Our small group then had a lively discussion about how the IWA might usefully adopt aspects of Ridgeway management including the five themes. We agreed that links to villages should be looked at in more detail and we could certainly benefit from a large-scale map showing all the special features along the route. There was unanimous support for working with others to promote the coast to coast route again to Natural England. The Heritage Lottery Fund is more likely to support this enlarged vision than something more limited. *It was agreed that the IWA would need to make changes to its constitution that include all users of our Path and Trail in order to attract the funding we might need.*

Other AGM items all passed swiftly. The accounts, containing a balance of £7,500 were presented and approved. There was an urgent appeal for a new Treasurer (but see further news on this below!) Clive Beckett was proposed as a full committee member but sadly Cissa Cochran stood down as she is moving away.

Tea was enjoyed and, needless to say, the weather cleared up at end of afternoon and the sun came out!

NEW TREASURER!

In what might be called a light-bulb moment, our Chairman remembered that one of his part-time staff is a trained book-keeper. He asked her if she would be prepared to look after the IWA accounts and she agreed. This is excellent news.

Colleen French lives in Bedfordshire: her current book-keeping work is for small and medium sized companies and includes producing finance reports, payroll, VAT returns, bank reconciliation and many other useful skills.

It goes without saying that the IWA is delighted (and relieved!) that she has joined us. Welcome, Colleen!

MEMBERSHIP

The Icknield Way Association currently has 65 members. We would like to increase this number to include more 'Friends' - including local archaeological societies, parish councils, schools, rural businesses along the Way—as well as the loyal group of walking members which supports us at the moment. So, if you are reading this and believe you can twist an arm, please download a membership from the website and stick it under their noses!

Welcome to our latest new member:

Nigel Jenkinson of Thursford Green, Norfolk

NEW MINE OPENS AT GRIME'S GRAVES

Grime's Graves is the only Neolithic flint mine open to visitors in Britain. It was not until one of the 433 pits in this grassy lunar landscape was excavated in 1870 that they were identified as flint mines dug over 5,000 years ago. This fascinating and very special archaeological site, with its crucial relationship to the Icknield Way, is owned and managed by English Heritage.

At present, only Pit One in the north-west part of the site, is open daily to the public but, thanks to the installation of a new winch and harness system, visitors will be able to access Greenwell's Pit at the far south end of the area and see a mining shaft in its original archaeological state. In order to ensure that the pit is carefully protected, Greenwell Pit will not be open a daily basis but only for special events and exclusive English Heritage Members tours.

Special tours during the early summer are already fully booked but hopefully more open days will be arranged. For more information go to www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/grimes-graves-prehistoric-flint-mine/events



The 'new' pit at Grime's Graves, named after William Greenwell, Anglican priest and archaeology enthusiast, who excavated here in the 1870s. His large collection of artefacts is held in the British Museum.

With special thanks to English Heritage for the information and photos in this article



CHILTERN WALKING FESTIVAL

The first ever Chilterns Walking Festival will be held this year from 15—29 May organised by the Chilterns Conservation Board. It offers the perfect opportunity for local residents and temporary visitors alike to find a change of scenery and to try something and somewhere new. There will be more than 70 walks and activities, offering choice and variety, whatever your age, fitness and interests.

This beautiful and characterful area is shared by both the Icknield Way and the Ridgeway—which are, after all, one and the same trail! With its steep chalk scarps, extensive hill-top woodlands and delightful villages, it is not hard to understand why it has been popular with walkers, riders and cyclists for decades.

If you would like to discover more about the activities on offer during the Festival, visit www.visitchilterns.co.uk/walkingfest.html

BEDFORDSHIRE WALKING FESTIVAL

And in similar vein, this time with The Ramblers as a main partner, the Bedfordshire Walking Festival takes place from 9th—17th September. The programme is still being finalised but it is quite likely that the Icknield Way Association will be invited to take part. We will hopefully include more details in the Autumn edition of Icknield Way News.

ICKNIELD WAY WALKS IN SUFFOLK

Wednesday 24th May

Meet at Red Lodge (TL695700) at 10am. 5½ mile circular via Herringswell led by Bob (01638 750415).

Sunday 16th July

Meet at Cheveley (TL 683613) at 10am. 5 mile walk led by Hilary (01638 668266).

Sunday 13th August

Meet at Cavenham Heath Nature Reserve at 10am. 4½ mile circular led by Tony (01638 604797).

Wednesday 30th August

Meet at West Wrating at 10am. 5 mile Icknield Way Walk led by David (01223 893674).

Sunday 17th September

Meet near Gazeley Church at 10am. 10 mile 'Three Churches Walk' led by Phil & Sue (01638 751289).

A5/M1 LINK UPDATE

The new A5/M1 link road (Dunstable Northern By-pass) north of Houghton Regis in Bedfordshire should be open in May 2017. Construction has continued during the last two years and an alternative route for this section of the Icknield Way has been waymarked to avoid closure. But now, to accommodate the Icknield Way and other users a new multi-user bridge has been built over the new road. The bridge requires an additional walk of a few hundred metres but the design allows for a ramp access as well as steps to ensure easy accessibility for all users. Map 4 in the Walker's Guidebook will require a small amendment but the new route is very clear and obvious, especially now that Icknield Way discs have been added!



The long and gradual ramped access to the new bridge over the Dunstable Northern By-pass providing easy access for horses and bikes along the Icknield Way Trail

The steeper but more direct route for walkers over the new bridge with street lights a rather un-necessary addition!



Text and photos by Tom Chevalier

WELL DONE TO THE MORETONS!

Two of our founder members received special volunteer recognition by The Ramblers in 2016:

"Janet and Roger have been the cornerstone of the Ramblers in the Cambridge area for more than 30 years. Without their passion and dedication to all things walking, the footpath network across Cambridgeshire would be greatly reduced. They've achieved this through going out and making a practical difference and working with the County Council to ensure people can enjoy walking. Major successes have included coordinating the surveying of 1,300 paths and taking a leading role in making sure the Council is able to keep the footpath network open for everyone to enjoy."

The Moretons' enthusiasm and dedication was key to establishing the route of the Icknield Way Path through Cambridgeshire in the early 1980s and we are immensely grateful to them for their continuing support and interest.

A THANK YOU

A few weeks ago, your Editor passed a delightful couple of hours and delicious lunch with Dr Pamela Smith, widow of our late President, Professor Thurstan Shaw.

In the months since Thurstan's death, Pamela has been sorting out a wide range of important archive material and finding good homes for it.

We are very pleased to receive a collection of colour slides of the Icknield Way taken by Thurstan during the 1980s. The carefully labelled slides include topographical views as well as photos of occasions such as the launch of the Way at Balsham.

It is proposed to digitise the slides so that they can be used in modern media, including our website.

Thank you Pamela for allowing us to accept this archive.

HOCKTIDE AT HEXTON

Hexton lies very close to the Icknield Way on the Hertfordshire border. According to one Francis Taverner, who wrote about it three hundred years ago, the villagers used to celebrate Hocktide, a spring time frolic which took place over two days between Easter and Whitsun. It was '*solemnized by the best inhabitants, both men and women, in the fields and streetes with strange kind of pastyme and jollities.*' He then proceeds to give a detailed account of the game of Pulling at the Pole, which was played by the men and women on the slope of Waytyng Hill, the women attempting to pull the pole down the hill in defiance of the men, who were trying to pull it uphill. The game would last some two or three hours, but in the end the women always succeeded in bringing the pole down the hill, after which a feast was held in the town house, and a collection made, the proceeds of which were given in part to the poor, and part to the churchwardens for the repair of the church—the latter share amounting on an average to some 20s. The feast was followed by further sports, the women once more against the men. The roughness of the play would seem open to obvious objections, but Taverner concludes his account with the criticism that '*these nice tymes of ours would not only despise these sports, but also account them ymmodest if not prophane, but those playne and well-meaning people did solace themselves in this manner, and that without offence or scandall.*'

With acknowledgement to Victor Rowe, who sent us information about this past-time!

PATH IMPROVEMENTS AT CHALGRAVE

During the winter, our Chairman (with help from his wife Bridget) has been busy clearing a section of the Icknield Way next to Chalgrave golf course in Bedfordshire (Map 4 in the Guide Book).

This section of the route was upgraded from footpath to bridleway when the golf course did some major re-profiling work over five years ago. At the time, the definitive route was expanded to five metres wide and the surface drainage improved to enable walkers and riders to use the route without it getting too muddy. Over time, however, the vegetation had encroached so much that parts of the route were reduced, even in early autumn, to a narrow muddy slither between two prickly hedges.

Clearance of some 640 metres involved cutting up and moving fallen trees, trimming brambles, wild rose, hawthorn, blackthorn, etc. One section had such dense and extensive brambles that the Chairman took the opportunity to refresh his brushcutter/trimmer training which he had not used for over ten years!

So a noisy, but satisfying, Christmas break was achieved with a brushcutter borrowed from Central Beds Council rights-of-way team. Although the brushcutter was more efficient, it does make a mess compared with the hand saw, loppers and scythe, which given the time, are much tidier. Either way, the activity was great exercise with a great sense of achievement.



The Icknield Way at Chalgrave—before Tom and his wife got to work on the clearance



Looking in the opposite direction after all the hard work — what a fantastic effort, Tom!

The most disturbed wildlife was probably the moles that had established themselves under the brambles and roses. The mole runs are now disturbed by walkers and riders. The local rabbits, fox and badgers kept well hidden in the hedgerow, although a robin was often on the look-out for worms while we worked.

The only certainty is that the vegetation *will* grow again. The surface vegetation is meant to be cut twice a year. It is hoped that this regular maintenance will keep the growth under control so that extensive clearance is not required again for many years.

The focus has now moved to another section of the Icknield Way along the alternative Toddington route.

Tom Chevalier

With its rich 800 years of history, fascinating architecture and beautiful mediaeval wall paintings, All Saints parish church at Chalgrave is well worth a visit when you are walking along this part of the Icknield Way.



All Saints Parish Church
Chalgrave, Bedfordshire

NEW TODDINGTON PATHS WEBSITE

Tom has created a new website to provide a guide to the local footpaths in and around Toddington. As you might expect, he has made sure there is mention of the Icknield Way with links to the local Icknield Way circular walks. The website is www.Toddington.Info

MOVING FORWARD ON THE WAY

Clive Beckett reports back from the AGM:

At our AGM we had an inspiring presentation from Ian Ritchie, Ridgeway Partnership on the Ridgeway Long Distance Path. The most interesting point was Ian's vision regarding a Greater National Trail encompassing the Wessex Ridgeway, the Icknield Way, the Peddars Way and the Ridgeway. This concept was the original plan for the Countryside Commission's (now Natural England) second long distance path but did not materialise because of funding, timing and other issues. At the AGM we felt that to achieve long distance path status and, potentially, HLF support for the Icknield Way, we would be more successful in re-invigorating this original scheme for the route - the Greater National Trail.

Since the meeting, Tom Chevalier and I have made contact with Andrew Hutcheson, Peddars Way National Trail Officer and Ian Ritchie to discuss how such a scheme might be progressed, bearing in mind that Natural England's resources are limited and concentrated on developing the new long distance Coastal Path as well as sustaining the existing national trails. In addition, the existing trails (apart from those involved in the partnership) may view the new larger trail as competition for the limited funds available for the maintenance of the existing trails. It was agreed that we need to bring on board all parties, including the newly formed National Trails Association. It is intended that further meetings will take place over the next twelve months aimed at securing agreements and a plan of action.

'ERE BE DRAGONS!

We don't know if there used to be dragons along the Icknield Way in the olden days, but there obviously are now!

**The Dragon Festival at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village
Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 June 2017**

**celebrating all things dragon from folklore to dinosaurs
across a weekend of fun activities *for all the family*.**

Things to do

Beowulf and Grendel trail quest

Have-a-go at archery

Giant bubble sessions

Dragon nest building

LEGO brick building zone

Uncover dragon fossils & relics in the discovery zone

Face painting

Children's craft workshops

Beowulf selfie throne

On the door tickets: Adult £11 / Child £9 (under 5s go free!) / Family £35

<https://www.weststow.org/whats-on/event/1370/dragon-fest-2017>

GUIDE BOOK SALES

Sales of the 6th edition of our walkers guide book, with its attractive cover, have been going very well indeed.

Earlier in 2016, Sue Prigg's earnest desire was that she should sell 1000 copies by Christmas. In fact, this target had been met by mid October!

Sales have continued since then, with a little blip after Sir Tony Robinson's television series about ancient ways.

We have now sold 1100 copies.

**Well done Sue, not forgetting Phil.
Thanks for all your help with this.**

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

MOVING FORWARD SOME MORE

The IWA needs the help of all its members and friends at the next AGM—to give the committee your vote of confidence that we are pushing forward in the right direction to obtain proper recognition and funding for the 'Great Chalk Way' - this amazing national trail that will stretch from coast to coast across southern England. Our Constitution will need some small adjustments to make it fit for Heritage Lottery Fund purposes. Do put the date in your diary and come and give us your support:

SATURDAY 7TH OCTOBER

GREAT CHESTERFORD TO BALSHAM

This section of the Way leads through the gently undulating and peacefully rural countryside of the Essex and Cambridgeshire borders and passes through three large and attractive villages: Great Chesterford, Linton and Balsham.

Great Chesterford is entered by the road bridge over the River Cam (or Granta) and a right turn up the main street into the village. There are no longer any signs of the walled town and important military fort which once covered 14 hectares during Roman times. The settlement was provided with stout defensive walls by the 4th century AD, some of which remained until the late 18th century before being robbed for building and hardcore. The Way leaves Great Chesterford along Rose Lane and a clear footpath as far as the B184. After only 50m of tarmac, our route continues on an excellent 3m wide chalky track leading to the top of a hill from where there are fine views in three directions over the pleasant cultivated acres of the Cam valley.

South Cambridgeshire is drained by the River Cam, a tributary of the River Great Ouse. The Cam is derived from three main sources: the Cam or Rhee rising from chalk



The River Cam at Great Chesterford
(Photo: Martin Black)

springs at Ashwell (Herts); the Cam or Granta rising in Henham, (Essex) and the Granta rising at Castle Camps (Cambs). All three meet within 5 miles of Cambridge before flowing through that city.

Returning to our route, the Way soon reaches Burtonwood Farm and continues along another grassed track with hedges to the Essex/Cambs county boundary, reaching a significant (for these parts!) height of 114m above sea level. From here there are more good views downhill to Hadstock and Linton.

After several miles through peaceful farmland, a built-up environment comes as a surprise. Our path pass-



Looking down along the Icknield Way
towards Linton
(Photo: British Walks)

es the entrance of Linton Zoo, a well-known local attraction with an interesting collection in a 3-hectare garden, before crossing the very busy A1307 road and entering this historic settlement. The village was recorded in the Domesday Book as having four manors but its name is Saxon in origin and derives from 'Flax Town'. The High Street contains a number of listed



Linton Mill
(Photo: English Heritage)

buildings. So, with a fine church, a mill and several pubs, Linton is worth exploring.

Leaving Linton via the recreation field, the path crosses the river Granta and passes through housing before finally joining another green track. If heavily laden, the walker may now justifiably complain that Cambridgeshire is not as flat as some believe it to be! A short steep slope leads to the crest of Rivey Hill where the path turns briefly east towards the prominent water tower landmark. One can pause here and glance down over the slopes of Chilford Hall vineyard, the home of a fine Riesling. Our track descends once again to the B1052 and then reaches the double hedges of the Roman Road (the Via Devana between Colchester and Chester) which crosses our path at right angles. After about half a mile along this historic track, our northerly route continues on a green lane. And before long, our third village is reached.

Balsham marks the half-way point along our trail and here, on the Green, can be found our Icknield Way stone, laid to launch the Icknield Way as a Recreational Route in September 1992.



*With thanks to Janet Moreton for
her original article in Icknield
Way News Autumn 1987*