



ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2019

AGM 2019

Saturday 12th October
Gazeley, near Newmarket

*Please make a note
and save the date*

REMEMBERING SIR JOHN 1930—2018

We are sad to record the death of Sir John Johnson KCMG in November 2018. The Association had the greatest good fortune, during Sir John's appointment as Chairman of the Countryside Commission to welcome him to Balsham in Cambridgeshire on Friday 11th September 1992.

This special occasion marked the opening of the Icknield Way Path as a Recreational Route across six counties.



Sir John Johnson (left) unveils the Icknield Way stone at Balsham. Professor Thurstan Shaw, President of the Icknield Way Association and Elizabeth Barrett of Icknield Way Trails stand by.

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THE ICKNIELD WAY NEEDS YOU!

If you are reading this but are not yet a member of the Icknield Way Association, why not join us? Membership costs only £5 per annum. We need people who enjoy walking, who are fascinated by local history and archaeology, who can give practical help by wardening and light route maintenance and who can help promote the Icknield Way to others. We also still need a Treasurer! You can find out more at www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk

It was our good fortune because Sir John (as he was usually known) was an enthusiastic, experienced and dedicated walker—exactly the person the Icknield Way Association needed at that time to help launch our route. He willingly agreed to come and unveil the Icknield Way milestone in the centre of the village marking the half-way point of the route. He showed a keen interest in our aim to create a cohesive coast-to-coast lowland trail along the chalk spine of lowland England by linking two existing National Trails together with the Icknield Way.

We extend our condolences to Sir John's family.

AGM 2018 AT LILLEY—THE WALK

The AGM walk in October was another opportunity to enjoy the stunning landscapes of the northern Chilterns and we were blessed with fine weather. Our Chairman's wife, Bridget Chevalier, led the walk at short notice, for which many thanks.

Bridget's route led us out of Lilley along Wardswood Lane, a fine track going north-west towards Warden & Galley Hills.



On Wardswood Lane, at Wards Wood

On meeting the Icknield Way near Maulden Firs, we turned right and followed the Way along a green lane north-eastwards until we came to the Hexton-Lilley road close to Mortgrove Farm. We noted that this section of track was becoming overgrown and would benefit from cutting with tractor and flail.

After a brisk walk along the road we came to the so-called Treasures Grove parking area. Beyond this, in complete contrast, the next section—the gentle climb up to Telegraph Hill (184m) - was beautifully maintained as a wide grass track with hedges each side.



The Icknield Way west of Telegraph Hill

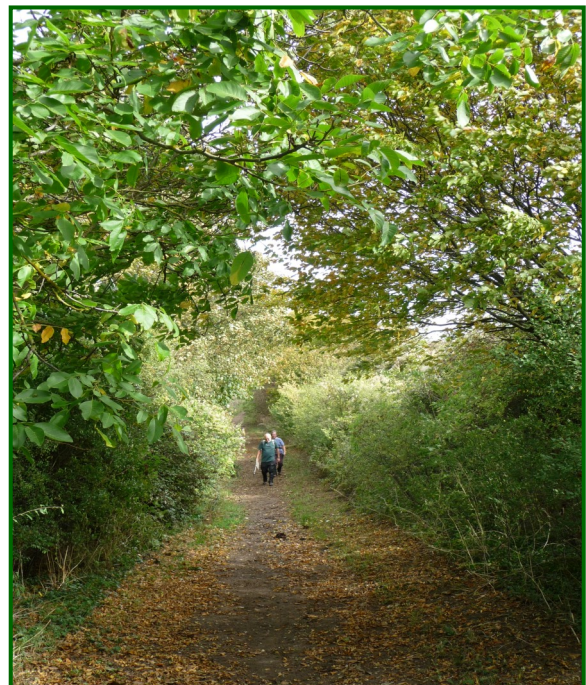
The Telegraph Hill stretch of the Icknield Way is one of the most dramatic of the whole route. To the north are the wonderfully contorted dry chalk valleys of the scarp slope, one of which is known as 'Barn Hole' - and we made a temporary diversion off Bridget's planned route to see this and admire the extensive views over Bedfordshire.



Barn Hole, north of Telegraph Hill

And parallel to the route as it crests the hill are the steeply eroded banks of the 'dual carriageway' where carts have worn deep cuttings over the centuries. Sadly, during the last 10-15 years, the scrub on these banks has been allowed to grow and invade these banks, once considered to be among the best bits of calcareous grassland habitat of the northern Chilterns.

From here we turned south and followed the bridleway along the arable plateau landscape of Lilley Hoo to an attractive but steep descent into the village (below).



THE AGM

Our meeting was attended by about a dozen members. After a warm welcome by Tom Chevalier, we were given an excellent talk about the proposed HS2 rail route through the Chilterns AONB by Keith Hoffmeister of the Chiltern Society. Keith is a long-time campaigner against HS2 so he was able to present facts and figures as well as clear diagrams and landscape impressions showing the line of the route. Although the majority of it lies outside the immediate sphere of interest of the IWA, it was extremely useful and interesting for members to be made more aware (if they weren't already) of the expected environmental impacts of this multi-million pound project.

The meeting then continued with the usual reports. Tom highlighted the importance of maintaining a healthy membership base from which to draw on various skills. Unfortunately, the Association is currently still short of a treasurer and also, now, several route wardens. Tom thanked those that had retired during the year and hoped that others could be recruited at the east end of the route to fill the gaps. He also mentioned that the committee would benefit from the help of a new member with a publicity and promotional role. And, from the 'audience', a voice piped up! Doug Landman offered to consider the position.

Tom brought everyone up to date with changes to the route arising from the M1/A5 road improvements. He then acknowledged the support of Michelle Flynn during her many years as Rights-of-Way Officer covering the Central Bedfordshire stretch of the Icknield Way. Michelle is moving on to pastures new and we wish her all the best in the future.

Tom then reported on the Association's financial situation which is very healthy. He explained that income is derived mainly from sales of guidebooks—members' subscriptions are not a major component. On the opposite side of the accounts, major expenditure is on printing of guidebooks and maintenance of the website. The balance in the accounts stood at almost £9,500.00 which Tom considered to be a useful amount for some kinds of expenditure but not enough for enormous projects!

Sue Prigg told the meeting that the IWA currently has 71 members including 8 new members who had joined during the year. She and Phil had posted 242 copies of the Guidebook during the financial year. Also, 'Contours Walking Holidays' had started to offer holidays based on

the Icknield Way.

The meeting next heard an update concerning the Association's on-going discussions with Friends of the Ridgeway. The two organisations are working together on promoting the 'Great Chalk Way' - a joined-up route extending from the Dorset coast to the Wash. Much of the route already exists although there is debate about exactly where it should lead at the far south-west end. Financial support from government is unlikely at the present time although there is interest in the concept by some officers at Natural England.

By the time of the election of officers, Doug Landman had indicated his willingness to be nominated as Publicity Officer. All the existing committee were willing to stand again, so everyone was elected unanimously. David Allard was also appointed independent Accounts Examiner for another year.

The meeting ended with thanks to Lesley Blundell for making the arrangements and with much enjoyed tea and cakes.

GREAT CHALK WAY UPDATE

At October's AGM it was reported that discussions were proceeding with the Friends of the Ridgeway and Wiltshire Ramblers regarding development of the route of the proposed Great Chalk Way in Wiltshire and Devon. The idea at present is to have two routes in the Salisbury area: one following the original Wessex Ridgeway and the other incorporating the historic Stonehenge and Avebury sites.

It is intended that the long distance trail be available for cyclists and horse riders. We have secured cycling representation on the steering group overseeing the projects development. We are also hoping to secure horse riding expertise.

Natural England have confirmed that they are concentrating resources on developing the new Coastal Long Distance Path and there are no plans at present to develop any new National Trails. They will still fund existing National Trails which includes the Peddars Way and the Ridgeway Long Distance Paths (both form part of the Great Chalk Way) but at a reduced level. We will continue to canvass for the entire route to eventually be designated a National Trail and will at an appropriate stage seek funding from various sources to undertake improvement works, new signing and waymarking, erection of information boards and carryout promotional, outreach and educational work.

Clive Beckett—Development Officer

NORDIC WALKING ALONG THE WAY— A GREAT SUCCESS!

Looking for some new challenges and different walks to explore, a group of Nordic walkers from the Bedfordshire group of Walk2Fitness decided to walk part of the Icknield Way. Hence, last October, sixteen of us walked two sections of the Icknield Way on two consecutive Sundays; Ivinghoe Beacon to Chalk Hill and then Chalk Hill to Streatley. It was a great fun!

Although the sun was shining on our approach to the start at Ivinghoe Beacon, the top was shrouded in a heavy mist, but this cleared quickly once we walked downhill into the valley to reveal breath-taking vistas. We found the route was clearly marked as it weaved its way through open pasture, deciduous and evergreen woodland which was just enchanting, before ascending again on to farmland.



Bridget's group striding out below Ivinghoe Beacon

We enjoyed glorious sunshine whilst walking along the rest of the route enabling us to fully appreciate the fantastic Bedfordshire countryside. On numerous occasions, we stopped to admire the views across to Dunstable Downs and back to the start, the now clear Ivinghoe Beacon.

The Tree Cathedral at Whipsnade was a delight, as the trees were beginning to take on their autumnal colours after our long warm summer. Well worth a visit!



The group (beautifully back-lit!) enjoying autumn tints at the Tree Cathedral at Whipsnade

As we walked out onto the ridge of Dunstable Downs, we could see for miles over the valley, identifying some of the landmarks in the villages below. Around the Chiltern Gateway Centre there was a hive of activity with many people enjoying the outdoors, kite flying, walking, playing games and picnicking. It was lovely to see, and we were fascinated by skilled kite flyers as they synchronised their kites through a wide range of aerobatics. Passing colourful hang gliders we proceeded to final destination of the day - the White Lion Pub - for some well earned refreshments!

The route from Chalk Hill to Streatley once again took us over a variable terrain: field edges, pasture, arable fields, woodland and open land. At various points we could see Ivinghoe Beacon and, later on, the distinct tree line of Sharpenhoe Clappers. A welcome stop at the Fancott Arms for refreshments set us up for the walk up into Sundon and on to Streatley.



Behind the Nordic Walkers is the distinctive tree-topped outline of Sharpenhoe Clappers and, beyond it, the expansive view across the Vale of Aylesbury

We continued to have great views of our beautiful countryside, pointing out landmarks we recognised along the way. The distances we were able to see from all the high locations was amazing. Our final destination was the Chequers at Streatley where we reflected on our walks, the views and places of interest along the two routes.

We had two fantastic days walking along these first two sections of the Icknield Way and everybody enjoyed the experience immensely. Hence, in the next few months we aim to complete some more sections of this great trail. We would like to thank those who maintain this wonderful path which enabled us to enjoy it without having concerns about any hazards on the route. The continued care and maintenance of these paths help so many people enjoy our wonderful countryside.

Words and pictures by Bridget Chevalier
www.walk2fitness.co.uk

THEEDWAY—another alternative route around Luton?

A few weeks ago, Tom emailed an idea for a 'Snippet' for the Newsletter:

"I have been getting involved (too a limited extent) in the "Chalk Arc project" which is considering the green infrastructure north of Luton in the Sundon/Streatley area. The current Icknield Way Path runs through the area which is under consideration because there is a desire to build a new road from the new M1 junction 11a eastwards to the A6. This will allow yet more housing and relieve the current country lanes of traffic but is likely to impact on the point where the Icknield Way crosses the A6."

Attached to Tom's email there were a couple of documents which got your Editor thinking!

Some years ago - in 2005 in fact — Tony Northwood (now very sadly no longer with us) wrote in Icknield Way News about an ancient route carrying salt from the East Anglian Fens south-westwards towards Buckinghamshire.

So, the Snippet has expanded somewhat. In Tony's words:

At the foot of Galley and Warden Hills, **Drays Ditches**, the degraded remnants of an ancient linear earthwork, now evident only as a rubbish-strewn ditch and scrub-covered humps behind a housing estate, crosses the Icknield Way. In the Bronze Age, it consisted of two parallel, shallow flat-bottomed ditches about a mile long, probably a tribal boundary marker. Excavations have shown that the feature was extensively reinforced in the early Iron Age as a defensive structure (and perhaps a customs barrier for collecting tolls) that would have blocked free movement along the Icknield Way. It fell out of use during the Roman era but remained as a substantial landscape feature recorded in the 16th century and one that was still evident in the 19th century.

Theedway, a similarly ancient track, follows the line of Drays

Ditches and continues west along Luton's northern boundary and, with minor discontinuities, is incorporated as various categories of rights-of-way in to the boundaries of several Bedfordshire parishes. It emerges at Egginton as a wide green lane, its course then discernable intermittently as hedgerows and field boundaries. South of Leighton Buzzard, it is lost to modern development, but it once continued through Wing and originally to the headwaters of the River Thames.

It also seems to run east, between Warden /Galley Hills and along Wardwood Lane, a wide grassy track towards Lilley in north Hertfordshire (enjoyed by members on the IWA walk!). Although now lost here, it is close to where the modern Icknield Way continues as the A505 dual carriageway into Hitchin.

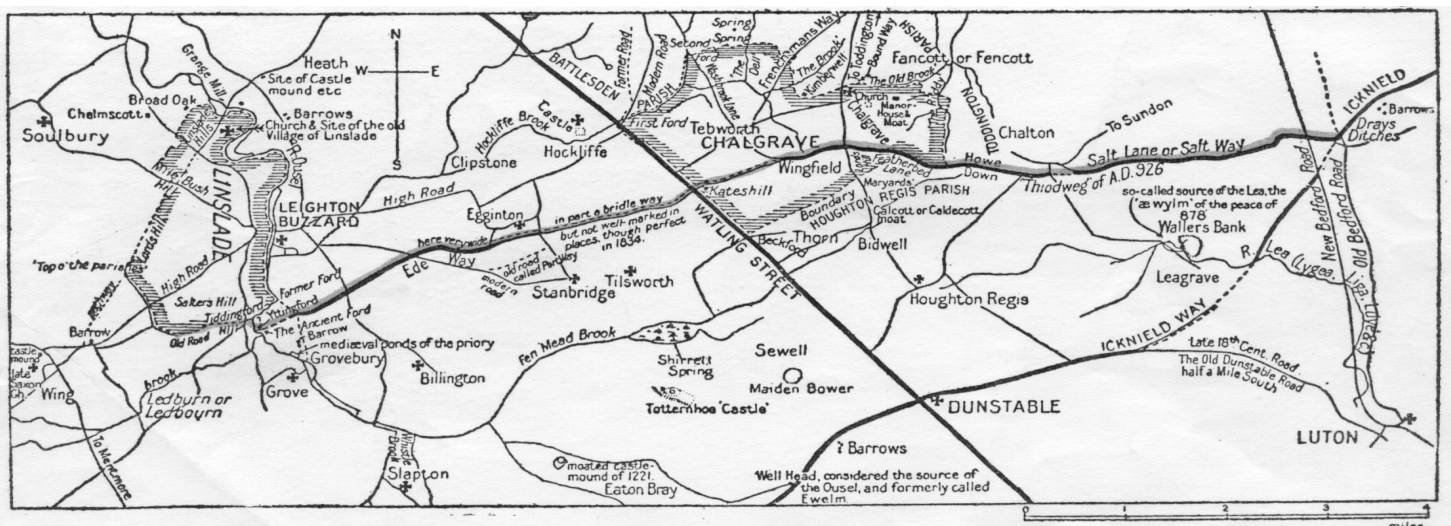
The name, with alternative spellings *Thoid* or *Edeway*, is from Old English *theod(way)*, meaning public road or highway. From its use as a trade route in the early Saxon period (perhaps even from prehistoric times) linking salt works on the edge of the East Anglian fens until late medieval times, it is also known as the *Salters Way* in this district.

(Tony acknowledges 'various articles by James Dyer in Bedfordshire Magazine).

Tom's email continues:

"On the plan, the section of the route called 'Featherbed Lane' still exists as a dead-end road and byway. Where the byway crosses the M1 at the new Junction 11a we ensured there was a wide footway suitable for riders and walkers. We are now suggesting a continuation of a 'green lane' from the railway/M1 J11a across the top of Luton to join with the Icknield Way at the A6. There seems broad support. In many years to come, this may provide a more direct route for the Icknield Way."

Watch this space!



The bold line crossing the map east-west shows the route of **Theedway** from Drays Ditches at the east end to Leighton Buzzard in the west. Featherbed Lane lies below the word 'Chalgrave' roughly in the centre. The modern M1 runs almost north-south through the word 'Chalton'. (Map kindly provided by Steve Halton, Central Bedfordshire Council)