



# ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

### SUMMER 2021

#### AGM 2021 MONDAY 18TH OCTOBER AT 7PM ON-LINE!

This is a new departure for IWA. We hope an on-line meeting using Microsoft Teams will attract members who would not otherwise attend our annual meeting, due to travelling a long distance up or down the Way.

*Please send an email to*

*[Lesley.blundell@uclmail.net](mailto:Lesley.blundell@uclmail.net) if you would like to receive the link to join the meeting*

*(please note, you do not need to have 'Teams' loaded on your computer to make this happen!)*



The Icknield Way Path near Pegsdon, Bedfordshire

It seems quite a while since I last assembled a newsletter. The Autumn 2020 edition did not happen, mainly because we cancelled our AGM—for reasons you will all know!

So I hope you all enjoy reading this one. It includes contributions from three members including our Chairman, Tom Chevalier. You will see that he has not been idle during lockdown. We also record a tribute to the late Mike Gee by re-printing an article he wrote for us about his home patch—Linton.

I am sure you will all support me in congratulating our Secretary, Lesley Blundell, in being awarded her PhD in Paleolithic Archaeology earlier this year, after years of hard graft. We are most grateful to her for continuing to look after our committee business during a very busy time.

And it is very good to report that our 6th Edition Walkers' Guidebook has been selling well during lockdown. Many thanks to Phil & Sue Prigg for packing and posting the copies.

Lockdown has slowed up progress in discussions about the Great Chalk Way but we hope to bring more news about it before too long.

*Chris*

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# IVINGHOE BEACON

Having written in earlier editions about an important heathland area at the far east end of our Trail, Knettishall Heath, I thought it would be interesting for members who reside at the east end and have perhaps never seen the Chilterns to include some information about a landmark at the west end—the starting point of our route if you are following our guide book.

Ivinghoe Beacon is indeed a very significant landmark and marks a high point, in several senses, along the Icknield Way. Rising to 233m (764ft) it commands a very impressive position along the chalk scarp of the Chiltern Hills. The Beacon and the adjacent Steps Hill together comprise the Ivinghoe Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest which was first designated in 1951 under the 1949 National Parks Act.

The prominent vantage points of the Beacon and Steps Hill are partially capped by clay-with-flints and their largely north and west facing flanks expose the Middle Chalk. It is due to the influence of this chalk and its thin soil that these wonderful rolling grassy downs are important for specialist plants and associated insects. The finest swards are found on the steeper slopes.

We can assume that the Beacon has been open land for centuries: its prominent position with wide views both along the hills and across the clay vale below attracted communities of the Bronze Age to construct a defensive position here. Although long gone, faint remains of their hill fort can still be seen if you know where to look. Archaeological evidence has also revealed human activity including a number of burial mounds. There also exists evidence of ancient farming: the Beacon is crossed by deep channels which are thought to be cattle droving routes. There are also cross-ridge dykes—Grim's Ditch passes to the south of the Beacon at Incombe Hole.

As its name suggests, the Beacon is an ancient signal station used to send messages along the hills at times of national crisis.

Today, Ivinghoe Beacon is a locally well-known and much-treasured area of open country. Owned and managed as part of its Ashridge Estate by the National Trust, it lies close to the urban populations of Luton, Dunstable, Tring and Berkhamstead. It is well worth a visit for a good leg-stretch and blasts of fresh air—and for that feeling that you are at the start of something promising, namely the central section of a marvellous 110-mile walk following the chalk hills of lowland England up to the Wash.



Ivinghoe Beacon (Photo: National Trust)

# THE HILL

*A belated tribute to Mike Gee, of Linton, who allowed us to publish this article in the newsletter in 2010. Mike was one of our route wardens for several years.*

I wonder how many of Linton's 3,000 or so residents have climbed Rivey Hill. Quite a few I suspect but many more will have not even thought of it.

I am writing this because it is probably my most favourite area in Linton simply because it offers beautiful views of the village and surrounding countryside - and serious history.

Walk over the hill and you are following in the footsteps of our long-gone ancestors, the ancient Britons who roamed these parts well before the Romans thought of invading Britain.

The bridleway alongside the British Telecom exchange in Back Road is still part of Icknield Way, the great road of prehistory. It is believed to have run for 363 miles from Lyme Regis on the south coast to Hunstanton on the Wash. Long distance walkers regularly use 110 or so miles of the Way between Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire and Norfolk's Knettishall Heath - and the route goes right through Linton via the recreation ground.

The history is shrouded in the mists of time but the first definite mention comes in 903AD with mention of the four great roads in Britain, Ermine Street, Fosse Way, Watling Street and Icknield Way. Apparently, Edward the Confessor believed the routes were so important he issued a royal charter giving travellers protection on all four roads.

So, if you want to walk in the footsteps of your ancestors and enjoy the magnificent views from several vantage points, there are three ways of getting to the top. The first is via the Balsham Road and up the unmade road just before the entrance to Chilford Hall. The road is private but as well as being part of the Icknield Way, it is also a bridlepath and quite in order to walk up, or ride if you own a horse. This is the best route to take if the weather has been wet or in the winter, as the other two paths can become quite slippery and muddy.

The second way up is often the most difficult of the walks, but probably the easiest to and from the centre of the village because the path begins on Back Road next to the Cemetery. Unfortunately, a number of springs on the way up often make the path very wet, but in good weather it takes you to the water tower. Views to the Bartlow Road end of Linton and across towards Balsham are certainly worthwhile.

The third route is the continuation of Icknield Way from the recreation ground. It climbs straight up from the BT exchange. At the top, as the bridlepath veers north east towards the Balsham Road, there is a seat kindly put there by the W.I. some years ago.

The outlook from there is absolutely stunning to the south and the west. Perch on the seat - it is quite high - and just imagine that this would be the view the ancient Britons had of the Granta valley as they herded their cattle and sheep on this great road.

Now, of course, our village can be seen nestling comfortably down below, sheltered from the worst north winds by Rivey Hill, but in a way not much has changed. In past days, farmers would have looked back as they made the climb and, almost certainly, there would be plumes of smoke rising from the valley. For this was a place that early man settled, with woodlands nearby supplying timber for building, plenty of grassy areas and clear water available from the Granta.

At least that is how I imagine it!



# CHAIRMAN'S LOCKDOWN

*Tom Chevalier writes:*

At the beginning of lock-down I took the view that I wanted to use the time constructively and achieve some things. I wrote a long list . . . . Here is one of those things:

## Roadside signpost arms

Some years ago Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) agreed to fund the replacement of the roadside arms on the Icknield Way. The old signs on the path had faded away. I surveyed every roadside sign (there are about 60 locations with about 78 arms!) The CBC house style is a cast arm with the designation shown (photo: right) My survey needed to clarify whether each route was footpath, bridleway, byway or road so that the right number and type of arms could be ordered. I also identified that some of the posts were in such bad condition that they needed to replace the post, prior to replacing the arms. CBC had procured the arms in 2019 but as nothing happened, I offered to fit the arms. In the summer of 2020 I was allowed to fit the arms on the posts that were not being replaced. This led to more journeys out in an evening and weekend to don our hi-vis tabards. The first one we did resulted in the landowner approaching us and asking what were up to, thinking we were stealing the signs. After an explanation he was happy. It worried us that this may happen again – but no—although doing a sign in Streatley right outside the pub did lead to an amused audience, thankfully by then we had established an efficient routine!

CBC finally organised a contractor to replace the posts and arms in the early part of 2021. Now the whole route through Bedfordshire is clearly signposted.



Central Bedfordshire Council's cast metal fingers  
on the Icknield Way Path



Tom gets himself organised during lockdown!

## GUIDEBOOK SALES

Since reporting on slow sales in the previous newsletter (Spring 2020), it is very satisfying to give a more encouraging update. Sales of our 6th Edition guidebook have now reached

*1,952 copies*

and another reprint will be ordered shortly.

## GLAMPING AT WEST STOW

West Stow Pods is a well established family-run glamping site nestled in a quiet woodland area just north of West Stow. The site has seven units: four glamping 'pods', two wooded cabins and a subterranean 'Pod Hollow'!

Ideal for a family stay whilst walking local stretches of the Icknield Way through the King's Forest.

Prices from £70/night for 2 adults. Accommodation looks excellent.

[info@weststowpods.co.uk](mailto:info@weststowpods.co.uk)

01284 728136



# THE ICKNIELD WAY AT KENTFORD

My home village of Kentford sits astride the perceived route of the 'Icknield Way', as still shown in Gothic script on Ordnance Survey maps and as described by Edward Thomas in his book.

About half a mile to the east of Kentford village, along the 'Icknield Way' (until about 1975 the A45 trunk road and now the B1506) almost on the boundary with Gazeley parish, stands a small building, known in my youth as the Tea Cosy Café. This is described on page 55 of our Walkers' Guide as a 'black and white bungalow', although it has had several changes of use and colour since. It is here that walkers arriving from Gazeley/Needham Street are invited to '*cross the B1506, and turn right along the verge for 100 yards.*' However, as the road serves as a feeder slip-road to the A14, often with lorries parked on the verge, this is neither a safe nor a pleasurable experience.

Much of the land in the vicinity has been quarried for gravel over the years. This, together with the arrival of both the railway in the 1800s and the new A14 in the mid-1970s has rendered the area unsuitable for viable agricultural use. Two such parcels of land have attracted the attention of an entrepreneur with an interest in cycling and an off-road 'Mountain Bike Facility' is now nearing completion, literally 'over the hedge' from the roadside section of our route.

I first stumbled across an outline planning application for the development of part of the site, including a 'pump track', late in 2016. The assistance of the District Council as the local planning authority was sought to resolve our problem. Five years on, following numerous site meetings, a safe off-road pedestrian route is now available to users of this section of the Icknield Way Trail. The new route will be signed but whether it will be fully adopted as Right of Way or remains 'permissive' is still to be determined.

*Phil Prigg*



View looking north from the Icknield Way near Wallington—  
between Baldock and Royston

## DAVID'S LOCKDOWN

Our indefatigable and long-term member David Allard submits regular reports about 'his' section of the Icknield Way Path between Baldock and Royston—a fabulous stretch over open chalk country and along wooded lanes (see picture above).

In a roundabout way, I discovered that he had not only kept an eye on the IWP during lockdown but that he had also walked the entire Hertfordshire Way, a 194-mile circular route around the county. David decided that, as he couldn't join organised walks he would organise his own. Altogether, the walk took him sixteen and a half days, with each leg being about 11 or 12 miles—and all achieved using public transport to get there and back from his home in Royston.

Since David's age is in the public domain, I am sure he won't mind me telling you that he is 87 (perhaps 88 now!)

As he says: 'You have to keep going—lockdown would have been pretty boring otherwise!'

Marvellous achievement—well done, David.



Check out our web sites for up-to-date and  
interactive information about multi-user  
routes along the Icknield Way

[WWW.ICKNIELDWAYPATH.CO.UK](http://WWW.ICKNIELDWAYPATH.CO.UK)

[WWW.ICKNIELDWAYTRAIL.ORG.UK](http://WWW.ICKNIELDWAYTRAIL.ORG.UK)

# VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A5	Helen Fletcher-Rogers	hfrogers@dial.pipex.com
Maps 4, 33-34	A5 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	tom@chevalier.me.uk
Maps 5,6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd	Carol Bond	carolbondbarton@outlook.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	Doug Landman	doug.landman@ntlworld.com
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	David Allard	david.slade.allard@gmail.com
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	James Quantrill	01279 653899
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	<b>VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	<b>VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Edward Wortley	edwardjwortley@gmail.com
Maps 33-34	Toddington alternative	Tom Chevalier	tom@chevalier.me.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	<b>VACANT - PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	

# COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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**PLEASE CAN YOU HELP US?** If you have a couple of hours each month and a good head for figures, please contact Tom.

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# BEDFORDSHIRE WALKING FESTIVAL 2021

Bedfordshire Ramblers have organised another fantastic programme of walks for this year's festival which takes place from 11th—19th September. Several walks go through or close to Icknield Way country.

For more information and to book:

[www.bedswalkfest.co.uk](http://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk)

# SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE!

If you have not paid your sub for 2021, please send a cheque payable to Icknield Way Association for £5/£7 single/joint per annum to:

Membership Secretary (IWA)

1 Edgeborough Close

Kentford

NEWMARKET CB8 8QY