



# ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2022

### AGM 2022

*Advance Notice!*

**MONDAY 17TH OCTOBER**

**7.30PM**

**To be held via Teams**

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**The Icknield Way near Pegsdon, Bedfordshire**

Photo: Chris James

### *Welcome to another Newsletter*

It is with great sadness that I must open this edition with the news that Sue Prigg, for so many years a dedicated member of our Executive Committee, died at the end of April. Sue had been receiving treatment for non-Hodgkins Lymphoma for a couple of years but unfortunately this was no longer successful.

We extend our very warmest condolences to Phil. It was undoubtedly through Phil, who was already a member of the committee in 1998, that Sue was persuaded to become Membership Secretary in 2005. She not only took this on but soon developed our first website, undertook all the updates and re-printing of the 6th edition of the Walkers' Guidebook and, with Phil's help as 'postboy', handled all the sales. Sue has done so much for the IWA and we will miss her terribly.

Our secretary, Lesley Blundell, had already taken over the Membership role and Tom Chevalier (as you will read later in the newsletter) has for several months been looking after and re-designing our website. Tom has now relieved Phil of guidebook sales—for the moment! *If anyone would like to help with this, please contact Tom.*

This edition includes an article about Neolithic hand axes. The hand axe is a uniting feature of all the trails along the chalk ridge and a new edition of a book about them has been published recently. Read on to find out more!

Elsewhere, you can learn about our new connection with Ordnance Survey mapping, choose a summer walk along the Icknield Way and admire a beautiful butterfly!

*Chris James*

# THE GREAT CHALK WAY

Work has continued on finalising the route of the Great Chalk Way incorporating The Wessex Ridgeway Long Distance Path (LDP), The Ridgeway National Trail (NT) The Icknield Way LDP & Trail and The Peddars Way NT. All paths will keep their individual identity, however. Notice boards promoting the new long distance trail are at the draft stage and will be erected at strategic points along the route (including the start of each path). It is envisaged that the new trail will be formerly opened either later this year or in 2023.

For more information about the Great Chalk Way, go to [www.greatchalkway.org.uk](http://www.greatchalkway.org.uk)



## AGM 2021

The Committee hoped that members would welcome the opportunity to meet via 'Teams' without having to drive a long way up or down the Icknield Way. However, the response was disappointing! Just eight of us 'met'.

However, all the usual reports were presented including a very full and interesting one from Tom, our Chairman. Much of what he told us is included in this newsletter but he also thanked everyone on the Committee for continuing to do all their jobs to keep the Association going. Tom is still trying to stand down from his two roles—as Chair and Treasurer.

During the year, the Committee had reviewed the Association's Draft Action Plan. A series of tasks have been identified but they still require volunteers to help achieve them.

The Association has a healthy bank balance and in 2020-21 had an operating surplus of £476, with major income received from sales of the Guidebook.

Tom, Clive Beckett and Doug Landman had attended meetings of the Great Chalk Way Steering Group (reported elsewhere) and although progress has been made, it is disappointing that Natural England is still unable to provide financial support.

Doug, our Publicity Officer, is putting renewed effort into promoting the Icknield Way via the media and has produced a plan to help focus the Committee's ideas.

There were no changes to the Executive Committee.

# WEBSITE CHANGES

Since Christmas the [www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk](http://www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk) website targeted at walkers has been rebuilt. The original software was 'life expired' and did not support modern devices such as mobile devices and all the modern accessible features. Changing a website host is never a simple process: trying to find where it is hosted and getting the right passwords to be able to move it took multiple phone calls to multiple faceless companies - but we got there in the end! Much of the material on the old site has been transferred to the new site which has a similar 'look and feel' to the site I recreated last year aimed at riders [www.icknieldwaytrail.org.uk](http://www.icknieldwaytrail.org.uk). There are cross links between the two sites, but much of the material is common between the two sites, like membership, while information specific to walkers and riders is different.

There are some new features. We can now post news on each website, which can be more 'real time' than the six-monthly newsletters. Then there is the ability for anyone from either site to "subscribe" to news posted on the websites. Once subscribed, subscribers get a weekly email of any news items through the cleverness of Mailchimp. Mailchimp allows subscribers to unsubscribe at any time. This has already led to a number of new subscribers, who may not be members but are demonstrating their support and interest in the Icknield Way which allows us to communicate directly with them.

The purchasing of the [Walkers Guidebook](#) is still possible and continued virtually uninterrupted during the migration. A download of changes from earlier versions is also available for those of you that bought a copy a while ago!

A new '[join us](#)' feature has been added to both websites for visitors to allow them to pay on-line to join the Icknield Way Association immediately. It is hoped that this will encourage an increase in our membership.

We have no presence on Twitter or Facebook as the current Committee have no experience/knowledge of these social media platforms. *If any members would like to take the lead in expanding our social media presence, then please contact the Secretary.*

*If there are any other suggestions for improvements to the websites please get in touch.*

*Tom Chevalier*



# THE NEOLITHIC HAND-AXE

*A Neolithic hafted hand axe was chosen by the Icknield Way Association in its very early days as being an appropriate object to use as its logo. The first Steering Committee intended the axe to clearly indicate the antiquity of the route of the Icknield Way and its connection along the chalk of southern England with other existing trails.*

*On looking through the Association's newsletter archive, it appears that no-one has yet written about hand axes, which is a bit of an oversight! The following article is by no means a full archaeological appraisal but it will hopefully offer some basic information about hand axes for those readers who have not thought about them before.*

A hand axe is a prehistoric stone tool with two faces that is the longest-used tool in human history. It is usually made from a hard stone such as flint or chert. It is characteristic of a period from about 1.6 million years ago to roughly 100,000 years ago and was used by earlier hominids such as *Homo erectus*.

The earliest examples were found in eastern Africa and Ethiopia with some of the best specimens coming from 1.2



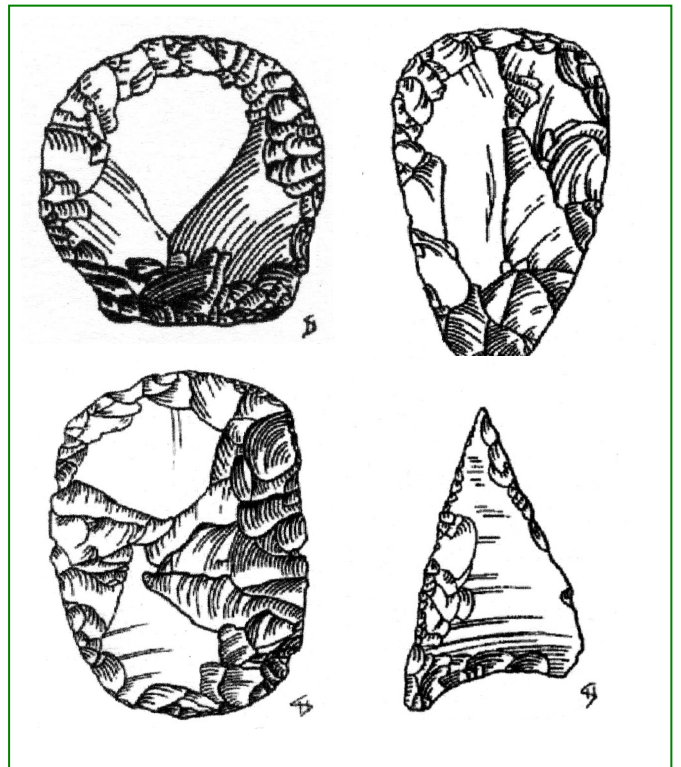
**A hand axe similar to those found in Olduvai Gorge**

million year-old deposits in Olduvai Gorge. In Europe, particularly France and England, the oldest axes do not appear until much later – about 750,000 years ago.

Hand axes were the first prehistoric tools to be recognized as such: the first drawing of a hand axe appeared in a British publication in 1800, made by John Frere. Until that time, their origins were thought to be natural or supernatural. They were called *thunderstones*, because popular tradition held that they had fallen from the sky during storms or were formed inside the earth by a lightning strike and then appeared at the surface.

John Frere is generally credited as being the first person to suggest that hand-axes must be ancient. In 1797, he sent two examples to the Royal Academy in London

from Hoxne in Suffolk. He had found them in prehistoric lake deposits along with the bones of extinct animals and concluded that they were made by people "who had not the use of metals" and that they belonged to a "very ancient period indeed, even beyond the present world". His theory fell on deaf ears – this being the time before Darwin! However, about fifty years later two French archaeologists found more examples of these stone tools in northern France, near Abbeville. These discoveries were backed up with further visits and eventually the age of stone tools was accepted.



**Various shapes of early axes held in the hand**

The earliest stones were generally round or pear-shaped, very obviously worked with another stone to create sharpened edges. Hand axes are most commonly made from rounded pebbles or nodules, but many are also made from a large flake.

Manufacturing a hand axe from a flake is actually easier than from a pebble. It is also quicker, as flakes are more likely to be closer to the desired shape. This allows easier manipulation and fewer blows with a hammer stone (knaps) are required to finish the tool; it is also easier to obtain straight edges. The physical character of the outside or *rind* of the tool stone, created by weathering, is different from the stone's inte-

rior. For example, lumps of flint are most usually surrounded by a limestone layer that is soft and unsuitable for stone tools.

Modern experiments in knapping have shown the relative ease with which a hand axe can be made, which helps explain their success throughout the early hominid world: it was easy to improvise their manufacture, mistakes could be rectified without sacrificing the whole item and a long apprenticeship was not needed to learn the basic techniques. Their easy adaptability made them effective in a variety of tasks, from heavy duty such as digging in soil, felling trees or breaking bones to more delicate activities such as cutting ligaments and slicing meat.

In the Neolithic period people began to develop a way of making the axe heads stronger by polishing them after the initial shaping had been done. The polishing of flint marks such a significant technological advance that archaeologists use this to draw the boundary between the Mesolithic and the Neolithic periods. These stronger, polished axe heads were set into a wooden handle and could then be used to clear larger trees to create areas of land for farming. It was this kind of tool that began to change much more rapidly the landscape of Britain and is the one used in the Association's logo.

## THE TALE OF THE AXE

*With thanks to Dr. Chris Catling for his review of the latest edition of David Miles' book:*

"Around 12,000 years ago, the course of human history changed forever when hunter-gatherer communities in western Asia made a dramatic lifestyle change, switching from foraging to farming. It was the beginning of the Neolithic revolution: a cultural phenomenon that swept across Europe to reach Britain c.4,000 BC. The Neolithic 'package' included domestication of plants and animals, pottery, building settlements and monuments, and the technological leap forward that was the polished stone axe. David Miles takes this archetypal artefact as a launchpad to explore a vast sweep of prehistory, from the emergence of *Homo sapiens* out of a diverse array of early hominins to the first flickerings of the Bronze Age, with absorbing detail and an amiable turn of phrase. The Tale of the Axe was first published in 2016, but in just five years our understanding of the Neolithic has greatly expanded. This new edition includes a thought-provoking afterword that brings the story up to date, summarising recent discoveries and exciting scientific advances."



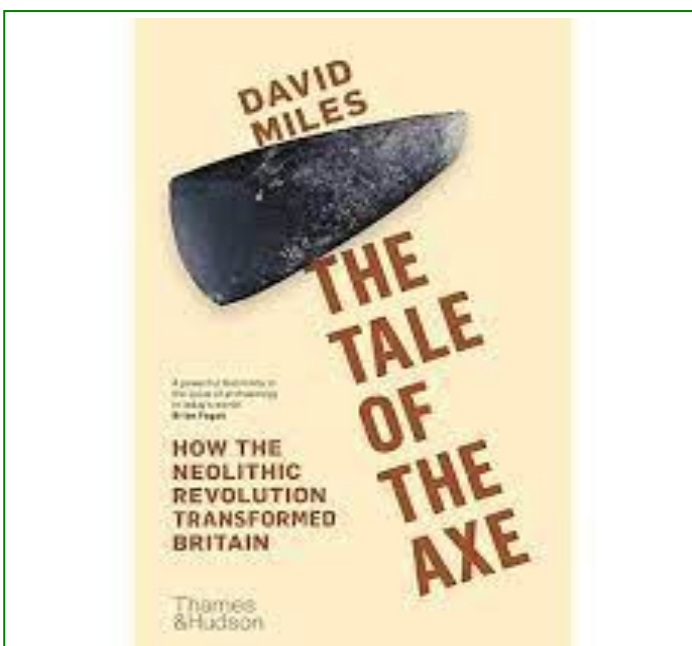
**Polished hand axes found at Grimes Graves**

(Photo: English Heritage)

To watch an excellent video of a hand axe being made from scratch go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryMJ3c1gHuw&ab\\_channel=EnglishHeritage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryMJ3c1gHuw&ab_channel=EnglishHeritage)

During excavations in advance of a multi-billion euro tunnel project in November 2014, archaeologists in Denmark unearthed a very rare find, namely a neolithic hand axe *complete with its wooden handle*. Dating from 5,500 years ago, the axe was lodged into the mud of what had once been sea bed where lack of oxygen had helped to prevent the wood from decomposing.



Published by Thames and Hudson - May 2021

Paperback - 448 pages

ISBN: 9780500293874



## O.S. MAPS

The Ordnance Survey is a national treasure for those of us interested in their fascinating maps. Last autumn I was approached by a member suggesting that the Icknield Way Association should become an 'O.S. Maps Trusted Route Partner'. This was not something I had heard of before, but through a series of emails with O.S. it was agreed that we become a trusted partner. The [off-road cycle riding](#) and [walking routes](#) have been added to O.S maps. For O.S. subscribers it is possible to see the route using traditional Landranger or Explorer O.S. map backgrounds. Without the subscription there is an aerial view or a less rich background. A GPS route can also be downloaded to add into other tools.

The O.S. Maps allow anyone to search for walks that members of the public have published, but selecting Trusted Partner routes are meant to provide a higher quality of any routes which will have specific routes.

The walking route has been mapped to follow the guide-book 'day' walk lengths. The riding route has been mapped in 18 to 38km lengths. Each section has links to the successive and previous section. Users can do any length and any distance to suit their skill and access opportunities. These O.S. maps complement the Google map routes: the Google map highlights railway stations and other facilities along the route(s). For more details see our [routes page](#).

At the time of writing, I am still working on the equestrian routes. I am finding this more difficult to split into sensible day ride sections (not being an equestrian myself) and allowing for parking of horse boxes etc. I am also adding some of the circular routes (such as the one at Lilley) that we have produced on the respective county pages.

If there are any other suggestions for improvements to the websites please get in touch.

*Tom Chevalier*



Sharpenhoe Clappers, viewed from Sundon, Bedfordshire

## FANCY A WALK?

*Please contact leader to confirm meeting place and to tell them you plan to join their walk.*

### Monday 23rd May 10am

BRINKLEY, CAMBS. TL629546

CIRCULAR 6M / 9.7KM



John & Hilary 07875 629713

Cambridge Ramblers

### Monday 20th June 10am

THERFIELD, HERTS. TL 336372

CIRCULAR 6.2M / 10KM



John and Hilary 07875 629713

Cambridge Ramblers

### Sunday 26th June 10am

SHARPENHOE, BEDS. TL 065305

CIRCULAR 6M / 9.7KM



Beryl & Eric 01582 883257 / 07522 436603

### Saturday 2nd July 10am

ROYSTON, HERTS. TL 347405

CIRCULAR 5M / 8KM



Mary & Mike 07512 154600 / 07597 371875  
North Herts Ramblers

### Wednesday 6th July 10am

TODDINGTON, BEDS. TL 007288

CIRCULAR 7M / 11.3KM



David R. 01582 714208 / 07305 561430  
Ivel Valley Walkers

### Tuesday 9th August 10am

PEGSDON, HERTS/BEDS BORDERS TL 121303

CIRCULAR 12M / 19.3KM



Tom C. 07743 128645  
Ivel Valley Walkers



# VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A5	Helen Fletcher-Rogers	<a href="mailto:hfrogers@dial.pipex.com">hfrogers@dial.pipex.com</a>
Maps 4, 33-34	A5 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	<a href="mailto:info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk">info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk</a>
Maps 5,6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd	<b>VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
Map 7	Lilley Road to Pirton	Lesley Blundell	<a href="mailto:lesley.blundell@uclmail.net">lesley.blundell@uclmail.net</a>
Map 8-9	Pirton to Wilbury Hill	Alex Goldie	<a href="mailto:kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com">kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com</a>
Map 10	Wilbury Hill to Baldock	Doug Landman	<a href="mailto:doug.landman@ntlworld.com">doug.landman@ntlworld.com</a>
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	David Allard	<a href="mailto:david.slade.allard@gmail.com">david.slade.allard@gmail.com</a>
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	James Quantrill	01279 653899
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	Neil Summers	<a href="mailto:neil336@googlemail.com">neil336@googlemail.com</a>
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	<a href="mailto:phil@prigg.co.uk">phil@prigg.co.uk</a>
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	<b>VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	<b>VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
Maps 33-34	Toddington alternative	Tom Chevalier	<a href="mailto:info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk">info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk</a>
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	<b>VACANT - PLEASE CAN YOU HELP?</b>	

*We are very pleased to welcome Neil Summers as a new route warden for the Linton to Willingham Green section of the Way. Neil tells us he is pretty familiar with all these paths and usually walks them at least once a year anyway. This is all we ask!*

## COMMITTEE CONTACTS

### Chairman: Tom Chevalier

22 Byfield Close, Toddington, Dunstable, LU5 6BH (01525 873986)

[info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk](mailto:info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk)

### Secretary & Membership: Lesley Blundell

7 Church Street, Shillington, Nr Hitchin, SG5 3LH (01462 711530)

[lesley.blundell@uclmail.net](mailto:lesley.blundell@uclmail.net)

### Treasurer: **STILL VACANT—PLEASE CAN YOU HELP US?**

**This is not an onerous task—if you have a couple of hours each month and a good head for figures, please contact Tom.**

### Editor: Chris James

56 Back Street, Ashwell, Baldock, SG7 5PE (01462 742684)

[chrisjames56@btinternet.com](mailto:chrisjames56@btinternet.com)

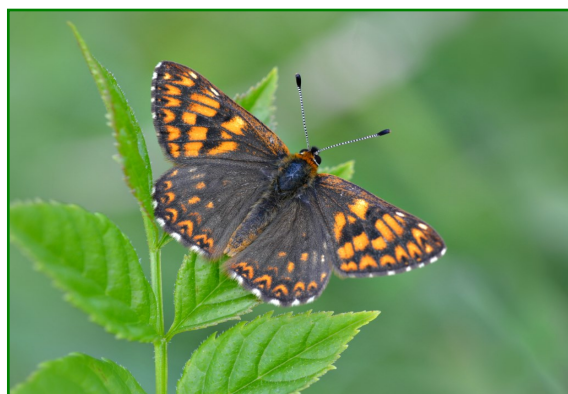
### Website: Tom Chevalier

**Guide Book Sales: Tom Chevalier (PLEASE CAN YOU HELP WITH THIS?)**

**Publicity Officer: Doug Landman** [doug.landman@ntlworld.com](mailto:doug.landman@ntlworld.com)

**Development Officer: Clive Beckett** [soniaandclive@hotmail.com](mailto:soniaandclive@hotmail.com)

**Accounts Examiner: David Allard**



**The Duke of Burgundy—a rare butterfly of the chalk hills in Bedfordshire**

Photo: Butterfly Conservation

This small orange and brown butterfly frequents scrubby grassland and sunny woodland clearings, typically in very low numbers. The female lays her eggs underneath the leaves of primroses and cowslips. The caterpillars emerge to feed at dusk and are dependent upon moist conditions—a summer drought as they are developing can be fatal.

This rare butterfly is found only in southern England, Cumbria and North Yorkshire. It is a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and its European Status is 'Threatened'.

How lucky we are to still have small colonies in Bedfordshire!