



# ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

### AUTUMN 2024

#### **40TH ANNIVERSARY AGM**

**SATURDAY  
19TH OCTOBER**

*Market Hill Rooms, Royston  
at 2pm.*

**Guest Speaker:  
Mary-Ann Ochota  
Archaeologist &  
Anthropologist**

***“Why Old Paths Matter”***

*Optional morning tour of Royston  
Cave or traditional walk starting  
from Therfield*

#### *Welcome to our Autumn 2024 newsletter!*

Another anniversary with a ‘O’ is a momentous occasion well worth celebrating but it is also worth remembering how it all started back in 1984. You can read all about this on page 2. We hope that members who were around back then, as well as our newer members, will come and join us at Royston for an excellent afternoon.

There are still a few spaces left on the morning tour of Royston Cave—a really intriguing place—but please book your place with Doug Landman [doug.landman@ntlworld.com](mailto:doug.landman@ntlworld.com)

Very few people have booked on the morning walk so unless enough members add their names to the list—again by confirming with Doug—the walk will not take place.

Read on to learn more about Royston and its history, to puzzle over what the Icknield Way was for, to hear about those who have walked the Way—or who are doing so at the moment, to discover the chalk underlying the Way in the Chilterns and to get details of the launch of the Great Chalk Way also on page 2.

*Chris James*

## MARY-ANN OCHOTA



We are delighted that Mary-Ann Ochota has agreed to be the guest speaker at our 40th AGM.

Mary-Ann Ochota is a well-known and widely respected British broadcaster who specialises in anthropology, archaeology, and social history. She gained her MA at Cambridge University and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Mary-Ann is also an Ambassador for the British Mountaineering

Council and for the Ordnance Survey. She has featured on numerous radio and TV programmes over the years as well as writing books and articles on her specialist subjects.

*We are hugely looking forward to hearing her tell us ‘Why Old Paths Matter’.*

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# LOOKING BACK—LAUNCHING THE ASSOCIATION

The proceedings of the inaugural meeting of the Association were recorded in its first newsletter, published in Spring 1985.

The meeting was held on Saturday 13th October 1984 at Royston Town Hall and attracted 75 people. Opening the meeting, Baroness David JP said she had been delighted to be asked to be involved with the new organisation although she made no claims to be a great Rambler!

Professor Thurstan Shaw, Chairman of the Steering Committee, then explained the background to the forming of an Association to promote the Icknield Way as a long-distance walking route linking the end of the Ridgeway National Trail with the Norfolk coast—following the chalk spine of south-east England. He had always wanted to walk the route, which Edward Thomas had described in his book published in 1912, but he did not find the time until 1979, after his retirement.

Cambridge Ramblers had prepared a version of the route but it had received little attention. A local walker and writer, Bruce Galloway, had included the route in his book 'Walks in East Anglia' published in 1982. Thurstan continued to promote the route and assembled a Steering Committee to 'get things moving'. This Committee first met in November 1983.

After a vote of thanks for all the efforts of the Committee, Thurstan told everyone it had been the best committee he had ever worked with! The result of the effort was that there was now a viable established route across six counties and that everyone was at the meeting to establish an Association to promote it.

There followed an excellent and fascinating talk given by James Dyer FSA, archaeologist, writer and teacher from Luton. James gave an overview of the Icknield Way and its archaeology, briefly touching on the importance and role of the many earthworks, dykes, ditches, cropmarks, barrows along the route and encouraging all those present to consider the Icknield Way as one of a network of tracks running across Europe.

After this, Alan Mattingley, former Director of the Ramblers' Association told the meeting about the recent recommendations for new long-distance paths made by the RA to the (then) Countryside Commission. He felt strongly that the Icknield Way was a totally logical extension to the Ridgeway, which was a much truncated version of

what had been originally proposed just after WWII.

Alan believed that Long Distance Footpaths were of especial value in lowland, agricultural parts of the country such as East Anglia where the density of paths is half that found in the rest of England. Official designation could have many benefits, not least the improved chances of creating new paths. Finally, Alan reminded the meeting that Tom Stevenson had to wait thirty years before the approval of the Pennine Way. He hoped, with the pressure of public opinion, it would not take this long for the designation of the Icknield Way.

Little did he know that we would still be waiting for Trail status in 2024!

The formal part of the meeting then followed. It was agreed that the Icknield Way Association be formed and the Constitution was adopted. Lady David was elected President, Sir Gerard Newman (then landowner of Burloes Hall, Royston) was elected Vice-president and Professor Shaw was elected its first Chairman. The Executive Committee was also elected.

## GREAT CHALK WAY LAUNCH

After months of discussions and planning with the Friends of the Ridgeway, we are very pleased to announce that Mary-Ann Ochota, recently appointed Patron of the Ridgeway National Trail, has agreed to launch the Great Chalk Way on

**Thursday 10th October 2024**  
**9.45am—12.30pm**  
**Dunstable Downs Visitor Centre**  
**Bedfordshire LU6 2GY**

Invitations have been widely distributed but if you would like to attend this event please email [mary@marytebjie.com](mailto:mary@marytebjie.com) for more information and to book your place.



## MAGGIE'S WALK



**Maggie striding up the hill between Linton and Balsham with Kiwi keeping her company  
(Photo: John Herod)**

Back in April, Maggie Herod decided to walk the Icknield Way Path to raise awareness and funds for the Luton Foodbank, where she has volunteered during the last five years. Spreading the walk over 13 days (including a rest day), Maggie was accompanied by her rescue dog, Kiwi, her husband and various friends.

Maggie tells us: *I loved walking the green lanes along the Icknield Way because I felt close to the generations of people who had once walked that way. And I tried to imagine their way of life and their stories.*

*Also I loved the gentle grace and polite curiosity of the race horses who watched us as we walked past their paddock, in complete contrast to the snuffling, grunting pigs in their fields; they too were contented in their own way.*

Maggie thinks that the final total of the sum she has raised will be close to £3,000.

Congratulations on this marvellous effort, Maggie!

You can read Maggie's daily journal, including the highs and lows at <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/maggie>

## WALKING FOR DAVID

Royston Ramblers, chaired by Ian Thomas, decided earlier in the year to walk the Icknield Way in memory of David Allard (see Icknield Way News Spring 2024).

Walking from west to east in 7 monthly stages, they had reached Linton by mid-July.

Good Luck on the rest of the Way and we look forward to hearing more in the near future!

## NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to our new members who have joined the Association during the last year:

Matt Allen - Hinxton, Suffolk

Andy Carter - Weeting, near Brandon, Suffolk

Caroline Cook - Colchester, Essex

Lyn Daniels - Milton Keynes

Nicki Harris - Litlington, near Royston

Roger Hawkins - Randaberg, Norway

Caryl Lynzy - Frating, Essex

Katrina O'Connor - Sunderland, Tyne & Wear

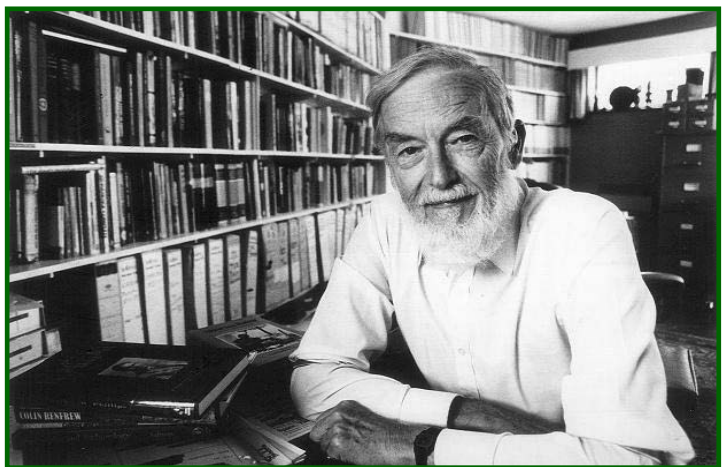
Steward Pomeroy - Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Ian Thomas - Odsey, near Royston

It is especially good to know that we have a member supporting our cause as far away as Norway! But we hope all of you will enjoy hearing about what the Association is doing via our website and twice-yearly Newsletters and will help us promote our beautiful and peaceful walk and trail whenever you have the opportunity.

*Perhaps we might even see some of you at the forthcoming AGM!*

## REMEMBERING THURSTAN



It is appropriate on our 40th Anniversary that we remember Professor Thurstan Shaw. Thurstan was the founder of the Association - without his enthusiasm and vision, not forgetting his persuasive personality, the IWA would not have got off the ground in time for its launch in 1984. After a very active life as a professional archaeologist, Thurstan died in March 2013 at the grand age of 98.

# SPECULATIVE THOUGHTS ON THE ICKNIELD WAY

*In mid-August your illustrious editor was contacted by phone by Adrian Grant, of Fife, with some fascinating ideas about, amongst other things, the possible early use and importance of the Icknield Way. Given the impending deadline for the Autumn newsletter, I am very grateful to Adrian for rapidly putting his thoughts together for us:*

Pursuing a line of historical research I found the need to understand the tribe hitherto called the Coritani or Corieltauvi. This led me to consider their neighbours - *inter alia* the Iceni.

## **Name of the Iceni**

I was quickly struck by the dissonance between the way "Iceni" is pronounced (eye-SEEN-i) and the "Icknield" way. I am advised that eye-SEEN-i is new and I suspect that the emphasis is based on a supposed connection with a Kentish tribe noted by Caesar as the Cenimagni. My working hypothesis is that there is no connection and so the pronunciation of Icknield is probably more authentic. I suspect that the correct pronunciation is Ickeni (or Eckeni) with the emphasis on the Initial I/E. Based on this I will be exploring possible meanings both for Iceni and for Cenimagni in due course.

## **The Icknield Way**

Reading around the subject on your own website and others I was struck by two claims you make:

1. that the path is one of the oldest roads in Britain and
2. that it extends to the Dorset coast.

I dismiss the second of these on the grounds that (a) no-one would have had reason to go from one end to the other and

(b) even if they did they would go by sea.

On the other hand when I looked at the route of the Icknield Way two potential destinations sprang out at me: Stonehenge and Avebury.

And then of course Dorset makes sense because it is likely that the people there, too, would have wanted to go to either location. So, in a sense, there may well be a "continuous route" such as has been proposed, but it is accidental - two separate roads with Stonehenge - or Avebury - as a common endpoint. If I am right then Icknield way probably is VERY old - and could predate the Iceni themselves by some thousands of years. Recent archaeological news suggests that the altar stone at Stonehenge

comes from far northern Scotland - so distance and technology is no issue.

There is more to explore and I would urge your members to bring their own knowledge and expertise to bear. If my line of thinking can stand such scrutiny it may be of great advantage to you in promoting your case for preservation and funding - even extension - of the route!

© Adrian C Grant, Fife, Scotland, August 2024

*Adrian has published his research into an enormous range of subjects on*

[www.adriangrant1.academia.edu](http://www.adriangrant1.academia.edu)

## ALL ABOUT CHALK

The Autumn 2024 edition of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England's Bedfordshire newsletter has a very interesting section describing the chalk landscape of south Bedfordshire.

The article includes information about the geology of the chalk, its history and archaeology, its wildlife and woodlands. There are also very useful links to local walks (including maps and leaflets), to the Icknield Way and to nearby nature reserves managed by the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants.

<https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/discover/c-is-for-chalk>



**The Chalk landscape of the Chilterns at Dunstable Downs  
(Photo: CPRE)**



# ROYSTON

Royston is a small market town in north Hertfordshire on the boundary with Cambridgeshire. It is located at the once very important junction of Ermine Street, the Roman road linking London and York and the Icknield Way, an older network of routes along the chalk ridges of southeast England.

It was not uncommon for wayside crosses to be set up at important road junctions. One such cross fixed in a large boulder was placed at the road junction some time after the Norman invasion. The settlement which grew up became known as Roysia's Cross or Roysia's Town after the name of the titled Lady who had it installed. Or so the story goes.



**Roysia's Stone—a glacial erratic boulder which once formed the base of Lady Roysia's Cross (Photo: Royston Town Council)**

An Augustinian priory was established in the 12th century and Richard I encouraged the development of a new town around it to support what had become a thriving market. By the 14th century, Roysia's Town had become Royston.

Royston became even more important after King James I stopped here to hunt on his way down from Scotland to take over the throne. He liked it so much he built a grand hunting lodge and returned frequently with nobles and courtiers for more hunting. Several of



the courtiers' houses also survive close by what is now known as The Old Palace.

Until 40-50 years ago, Royston was still mainly a market town relying on local agricultural trades, especially corn merchants but more recent expansion has included provision for light industry on its outskirts and development of new housing. Royston's population today is over 17,000. There are still market days on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Residents of the town are most fortunate in having a very extensive green space on their doorsteps. Known locally as Royston Heath, rolling acres of grassland spread westwards from the town, capped by beech woodland. The Heath is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve important for rare chalk flora including the purple Pasque Flower - Hertfordshire's county flower. Extending to almost 170 hectares, the reserve is one of the largest remaining areas of chalk grassland in East Anglia. From its highest point at 168m (551 feet), there are expansive views northwards over Cambridgeshire—on a good day as far as Ely. The Heath is a registered common which until recently was grazed by sheep which were a vital part of grassland management. Sadly this is no longer possible due to disturbance and injury from dogs.

It is also important for its scheduled ancient monuments. There is a Neolithic long barrow and several Bronze Age round barrows, all in prominent locations.



**A view over part of Royston/Therfield Heath showing the round barrows on the horizon (Photo: Trevor James)**

Walkers heading to Royston on the Icknield Way from the west will arrive at the Heath after following a wide green lane from Therfield village. The path will then lead down a narrow valley towards the Heath Sports Centre before turning east into town. Leaving Royston and going east, the Icknield Way Path (and modern Newmarket Road) cross the Greenwich Meridian—another claim to fame for Royston!

**Left: King James' Old Palace (Photo: Royston Cave)**

# VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A505	<b>VACANT—CAN YOU HELP US WARDEN THIS SECTION?</b>	
Maps 4, 5(part)	A505 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 5-6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Road	<b>ALSO VACANT—CAN YOU HELP?</b>	
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	<b>VACANT—CAN YOU HELP US?</b>	
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	Alec Gallagher	alecgallager701@btinternet.com
Maps 16-19	Heydon to Linton	Matt Allen	mattyal@hotmail.com
Maps 20-21	Linton to Willingham Green	Neil Summers	neil336@googlemail.com
Maps 22-27	Willingham Green to Icklingham	Phil Prigg	phil@prigg.co.uk
Maps 28-29	Icklingham to D-house	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 30-32	D-house to Knettishall Heath	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 33-34	Toddington Alternative	Tom Chevalier	info@icknielwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com

## COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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Accounts Examiner: **The Association urgently needs someone to undertake this role. If you can help please contact Tim (above).**

## THANK-YOU

Many thanks to Helen Fletcher-Rogers for keeping her eye on the Ivinghoe section of the Way for many years. Helen now feels it is time to stand down. Helen—we are sure that you won't yet be hanging up your boots but thank you for all your support at the far west end!

And thank-you to Matt Allen who has taken over the Heydon to Linton section. We look forward to receiving 'condition reports' from you in the future, Matt.

More thanks to Tom & Bridget Chevalier for sterling work on their section of the route southeast of Toddington. Tom says: *"We went for fresh air this morning for a couple of hours and cleared (using brush cutter and loppers) some 225m of Ickniel Way bridleway. It had become somewhat overgrown over the last couple of years, it is meant to be 5m wide – which we did not achieve over the full distance, but next time!"*

