



# ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025

### AGM 2025

*Advanced Notice !*

**SATURDAY 18TH OCTOBER**

**Wilkinson Church Hall**

**Toddington LU5 6BP**

**Guest Speaker:**

**Dr Wendy Morrison**

**Heritage & Archaeology Manager for  
Chilterns National Landscape**

### *Welcome to our Spring Newsletter*

This issue will focus mainly on two key events, namely the launch of the Great Chalk Way and our Fortieth Anniversary Meeting, both held last October —a busy month for those on our organising sub-committees!

On both those occasions, the weather seemed to be against us but this did not deter good attendance and hopefully enjoyment of each day's proceedings. The rain eventually cleared away at Dunstable revealing the huge view north-west from the Downs (see photo, left).

Since then, Doug Landman our Development Officer has been following up offers of help and 'influence' from Chris Hinchliff MP for North East Hertfordshire for which we are most grateful. Chris recommended we produce a briefing paper to assist our claim for National Trail status which he will help lay before the important people we need to persuade of the logic and common sense of our claim! We have been working on this and Doug has been circulating it for comment before it is finally submitted.

Our new secretary, Laurence Rix, has been persuaded to put pen to paper with some information about himself. We are pleased to say that he is channelling lots of his energy into the IWA, so we welcome him warmly to the team!

*Chris James*



**View over the Vale of Aylesbury from Dunstable Downs**

**Photo: Chris James**

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**Anniversary Cake enjoyed at the 40th AGM held at Royston**

**(Photo: Tom Chevalier)**

# THE GREAT CHALK WAY—LAUNCHED!

Despite the very discouraging weather on Thursday 10th October, nearly fifty people gathered at the Dunstable Downs Visitor Centre to launch the longest coast-to-coast trail in Britain. People came from far and wide, befitting the linear character of this newly-designated route extending between the Dorset and north Norfolk coasts and following the line of the chalk ridge—a magnificent lowland route!

The event was hosted by the National Trust outside their visitor centre, which served very welcome hot drinks. The Letchworth Morris nobly danced for us in the rain and Sarah Day (Prehistoric Experiences) demonstrated her flint-knapping skills. National Trust guides led a group on a short walk along the Downs to the Five Knolls barrows.



Letchworth Morris (above) and Sarah Day (below)  
(Photos: Chris James)

When everyone had re-convened, Doug Landman warmly welcomed special guests. We were delighted that Rachel Hopkins MP for Luton South responded to our invitation as well as Cllr Louise O’Riordan, Mayor of Dunstable Town Council and Cllr Kevin Collins from Central Bedfordshire

Council along with his rights-of-way officers. Alan Coxon from West Berkshire Council also attended. There were representatives from Friends of the Ridgeway, the Peddars Way, the Thames Path, the CPRE, the Long Distance Walkers’ Association and National Trails UK.

Doug gave a short introduction to the Great Chalk Way project that had finally brought the partner organisations together to achieve the launch, building on Professor Thurstan Shaw’s original vision for the route. Then he asked Mary-Ann Ochota, Patron of the Friends of the Ridgeway and President of the CPRE to speak.

Mary-Ann said: “This new, unified Great Chalk Way is a magical route, an epic that leads you from one side of the country to the other. It’s a deeply historic route – you’re travelling in the footsteps and hoofsteps of many generations of ancient people and en route you’re confronted by some of their most intriguing monuments – from secret, carved caves, to hillside white horses, to the largest prehistoric stone circle in the world. The Great Chalk Way is also a connection of beautiful, nature-rich and ever-changing geological, natural and farmed landscapes – from the wind-stripped Norfolk fens to the lofty beech woodlands of the Chilterns, to the wide downs of Wessex and through Dorset to the Jurassic coast. And it’s also hugely accessible – close to southern England’s towns and cities, with transport links, and terrain that isn’t too daunting for beginners. I hope the Great Chalk Way will be one of the best-loved and celebrated long-distance routes in the country - one that people share with friends and family and across generations. I hope it inspires a new generation of adventurers, nature lovers and history fans and becomes a rite of passage. Whether you walk or ride it in one long journey or in short stages over a lifetime, it will deliver experiences to treasure and memories to savour. What a gift and a great way to celebrate our countryside, our people, our history and nature.”

Wonderful words, Mary-Ann. Thank you!



Doug Landman (IWA), Mike Lewington (Chair of Friends of the Ridgeway) and Mary-Ann Ochota with one of the new signboards for the Great Chalk Way.

(Photo: Mary Tebje)



# FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

The morning of Saturday 19th October brought thick grey cloud and rain—a most unusual phenomenon for an Icknield Way Association AGM! We have usually been blessed with wonderful sunny weather for our AGM morning walk, so it must have been a relief for both the potential walk leader and those who might have been going on it that, on this auspicious occasion, there wasn't a morning walk!

Instead, a pre-booked group of about twelve people were taken for a guided walk underground to Royston's famous cave. This is an intriguing and fascinating experience for all those who visit this strange place. Further information can be found by visiting the official website at <https://www.roystoncave.co.uk/discover>

In the meantime, other members of the Executive Committee and coerced family were busy setting up the hall at Royston's Market Hill Rooms ready for the afternoon meeting. And it wasn't long after lunch that people began to arrive. Over forty people had responded to our invitation: it was particularly good to welcome the local MP Chris Hinchliff along with Cllr Terry Douris, Chair of Hertfordshire County Council and his colleagues from the Highways department. There was a lively buzz of conversation until Tom Chevalier, our Chaiman, brought the meeting to order to invite our Anniversary Speaker, Mary-Ann Ochota to tell us 'Why Old Paths Matter'.

Quoting several historic locations along the Ridgeway and the Icknield Way, she emphasised the importance of telling stories about the landscape. The more that stories are told, the more that people will be encouraged to look around them whilst out walking. Mary-Ann told us that she loved being able to sit in a landscape and be part of the history of that place and that this is why paths matter and why we must go on telling the stories. Every piece of history along our old roads is a huge resource for storytelling. For example, further east along the Great Chalk Way, Mary-Ann suggested that a larger story could be made about Boudicca and her probable use of the Icknield Way. Thetford should claim her and make her history theirs!

Mary-Ann made another interesting observation: our countryside used to be much busier. It used to be full of people doing things—working the fields, shepherding sheep, making fences, harvesting crops. Now, there might be a few walkers or a horse-rider, the occasional person on

a tractor but, generally speaking, the land is very quiet and lonely (to some).

This led Mary-Ann to observe that one of the key challenges of managing our old drove roads such as the Ridgeway and parts of the Icknield Way was keeping them open and unblocked by invasive scrub. Why not pay livestock owners to walk along them with their sheep—regularly—to eat the seedlings and grasses? Why not re-introduce drovers??

Using the example of the great out-pouring of grief following the felling of the Sycamore on Hadrian's Wall, Mary-Ann believed that many people have a huge attachment to a place. Being part of somewhere is deeply in our psyche and we have a huge appetite for learning more about it.

Telling stories about places is what Mary-Ann does so well through her books and television work. The Icknield Way Association was fortunate that she was available for our anniversary AGM and made it such a memorable occasion for all those who were able to attend—indicated by the warm applause at the end of her talk.

Refreshments were then served. The occasion was marked by the cutting of an anniversary cake—the first for the IWA—made as a surprise item by Helen Smith, an IWA member from Gloucestershire!



**Mary-Ann Ochota cuts the Anniversary Cake**  
(Photo: Tom Chevalier)

# AGM REVIEW

After everyone had eaten enough cake, Tom once again brought the gathering to order so that we could hear about the other activities of the IWA during the previous year. Officers' reports had been made available on the website so those presenting their reports were asked to be brief!

Doug Landman had been busy with the organisation of both the Great Chalk Way Launch and the Anniversary meeting. In light of this change in emphasis, he had suggested to the Executive Committee (EC) that he become Development Officer and relinquish his actual role of Publicity Officer to someone with current media skills.

Tim Johnson presented the accounts for the year. He explained that the EC felt that the Great Chalk Way Launch had given the Association the first opportunity for years to invest in a project which will hopefully lead towards gaining National Trail status. The costs of the launch and of the new signboards to be installed along the Icknield Way (approximately £5,000) will be shown on next year's accounts. Annual income from sale of guidebooks and subscriptions had been about £1,000. The balance of the funds at 31st August was almost £12,500.00. The accounts were approved, subject to a review by an accounts examiner, by a majority show of hands.

Tom maintains three websites on behalf of the Icknield Way: for the path, the trail and for the Great Chalk Way. Potential members can join on-line, others can 'subscribe' to news items. Currently there are about 245 subscribers.

Lesley Blundell explained that increasing the membership continued to be a primary objective, so she was pleased to report that 10 new members had joined since the 2023 AGM bringing the total to 62. Letters to 'lapsed' members had yielded some success. The Association had unfortunately lost three very long-standing members during the year: both Janet Moreton and David Allard had died and Roger Moreton subsequently resigned his membership due to ill-health.

Tom then summed up the reports with thanks to the committee who had all worked hard during the year. He specially welcomed Laurence Rix as the new Secretary whilst thanking Lesley for remaining on the team as Membership Officer after her 12 years as Secretary. Tom also acknowledged the help and support over many years of Clive Beckett who had stepped down from the committee during the year. Tom then thanked the voluntary wardens who keep

an eye on their sections of the route. He reminded people that there were three vacancies that needed filling!

The Executive Committee was duly elected for the forthcoming year (details on last page of the newsletter). Tim then explained that the Association had been without an Accounts Examiner since the death of David Allard in 2023. However he was pleased to say that Jonathan Whitman, son of a member and a chartered accountant had agreed to take on the job. Jonathan was elected as Examiner.

There was one item of Other Business brought by Ian Thomas (see below) and the meeting closed at 5pm after a very successful and enjoyable afternoon.

## DAVID ALLARD BENCH



At the end of last September, the North Herts Rights-of-Way Group led by Herts Countryside Management & Rights-of-Way Service on behalf of North Herts Ramblers installed an oak bench in memory of David Allard on the Icknield Way Path close to Therfield.

On its Facebook post, the Herts Rights-of-Way Team said: "David Allard was well known to us in RoW as a key contact in north Herts who was easy to get along with and to work with. His reliable knowledge of the entire area and thoughtful approach to changes affecting the RoW network contributed massively to getting the best outcomes across the area".



**A fitting tribute to David Allard**  
**(Photos and text: Herts Countryside & Rights-of-Way)**



# INTRODUCING OUR NEW SECRETARY

## *Laurence Rix writes:*

It was an honour to be confirmed as the association's secretary at the AGM last October. I am constantly amazed at the expertise, knowledge, and commitment to the Icknield Way of Tom, Lesley, Doug, Chris, and Tim and I suspect that I will feel like the new boy on the Executive Committee for quite some time.

My wife and I moved to Hitchin in 1988. Our two grown-up children know it as home and, although there will always be a piece of me that belongs to Essex, I guess I do too. I love the fact that a 10-minute walk takes me into countryside and that a short train journey can take me to London in one direction or Cambridge in the other. And I love all the coffee shops in the town centre!

I retired three years ago after a working life spent in senior management positions in the financial services and then the events sectors. I started and ended my career in HR roles: between those bookends, I managed a large IT team and, in a small company environment, acted as company secretary (unqualified) and finance director (seriously unqualified!). Having been a leadership team member for three different organisations, I have more experience than I'd like of organising meetings and I am a competent taker of minutes! I will do my best to use this experience to add value to the IWA's executive committee.

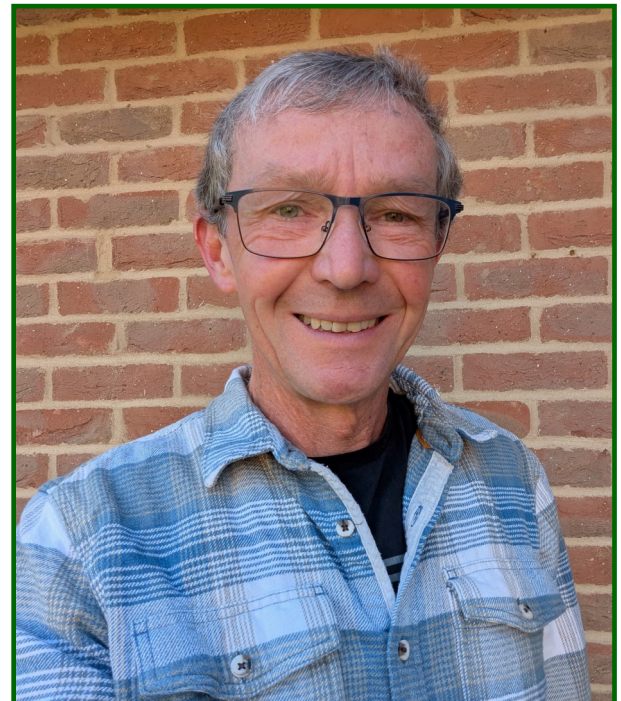
I consider that I am an active person: I am a runner, a cyclist, and a walker. Things change, of course, as one gets older! My half-marathon days are behind me but I still run regularly. I am a road cyclist - once or twice a week depending on the weather. I have cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats as well as in Spain and France. For the last three years, though, my cycling holidays have been in Belgium where the terrain is friendly and the beer exceptional!

My love of walking developed initially in the Lake District and the Peak District and my annual walking holidays with friends have taken in the South Downs Way, St Cuthbert's Way, the Offa's Dyke Path, the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, as well as more exotic trips to the Alsace, Mallorca, and Austria. Favourite walk? Helvellyn from Glenridding. I know, I know: everyone says that! But walking across Striding Edge just after lockdown was as stunning as when I first walked it 30 years before.

I joined the IWA after answering an advert for Wardens. I have family in Norfolk, so there was a bizarre logic to taking on responsibilities for the stretch of the Icknield Way

from Icklingham to Knettishall Heath and for the Thetford Link. I am currently on my fifth round of walking each section and I love doing it. I am slightly embarrassed at my ignorance of the history of the route and of the importance of the chalk ridge traversing southern England. But I will bring to the committee an enthusiasm for getting out onto the path and walking it and for encouraging others onto the cyclist and riders' routes. I will also do what I am able to support the association's objective to secure National Trail status.

*Thank-you Laurence!*



**Laurence Rix - our new Secretary**

## Welcome to New Members!

**We offer a warm welcome to all those who have joined the IWA during last year:**

**Lesley Abbiss & Alan Cooper—Hertfordshire**

**Tony Brown—London**

**Sue Chandler—Hertfordshire**

**Babs Dore—Milton Keynes**

**Mukesh Patel—Bedford Borough**

**Mary Tebje—Central Bedfordshire**

**Mr & Mrs Tilling**

**We hope you all enjoy the Icknield Way -  
in all its variety.**

# VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

Maps 1-3	Ivinghoe Beacon to A505	Colin Muskett	colinmuskett@yahoo.co.uk
Maps 4, 5(part)	A505 to Sundon Hills Country Park	Tom Chevalier	info@icknielldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 5-6	Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Road	Alec Gallagher	alecgallagher701@btinternet.com
Map 7	Lilley Road to Pirton	Colin Muskett	colinmuskett@yahoo.co.uk
Map 8-9	Pirton to Wilbury Hill	Alex Goldie	kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com
Map 10	Wilbury Hill to Baldock	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com
Maps 11-15	Baldock town centre to Heydon	Alec Gallagher	alecgallagher701@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@icknielldwaytrail.org.uk
Maps 35-36	Thetford Link	Laurence Rix	rix.laurence@googlemail.com

## COMMITTEE CONTACTS

### Chairman: Tom Chevalier

22 Byfield Close, Toddington, Dunstable, LU5 6BH (01525 873986)  
[info@icknielldwaytrail.org.uk](mailto:info@icknielldwaytrail.org.uk)

### Secretary : Laurence Rix

40 Sycamore Close, St Ippolyts, Hitchin SG4 7SN (07984 308834)  
[Rix.laurence@googlemail.com](mailto:Rix.laurence@googlemail.com)

### Membership: Lesley Blundell

7 Church Street, Shillington, Nr Hitchin, SG5 3LH (01462 711530)  
[lesley.blundell@uclmail.net](mailto:lesley.blundell@uclmail.net)

### Treasurer: Tim Johnson

4 Ickniel Rise, Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden, CB10 1FG  
[Jtimed.t@gmail.com](mailto:Jtimed.t@gmail.com)

### 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: Bridget Chevalier

### Development Officer : Doug Landman

[doug.landman@ntlworld.com](mailto:doug.landman@ntlworld.com)

### Accounts Examiner: Jonathan Whitman

## FLEAM DYKE NEWS

Fleam Dyke, the huge earthwork monument running between Fulbourn and Balsham in Cambridgeshire is an impressive presence in the landscape.

The Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants has been able to take a substantial length of the Dyke into its ownership after a successful fund-raising campaign. Work is now underway to bring back this important chalk grassland site into good condition. Invading bramble and scrub has already been cleared back to improve visitor access and larger scale scrub removal is planned for the coming autumn and winter.

Adjacent arable land already in Trust ownership has been cultivated and sown with a grass and wildflower mix and this is now germinating well.

The Fleam Dyke and Roman Road Walk is a 40km (25 mile) waymarked route, incorporating two of Cambridgeshire's ancient linear sites. The Ickniel Way Path links this route through the village of Balsham .



Photo right: The Fleam Dyke

(With thanks to Friends of Fleam Dyke & Roman Road)