



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke,

February 2009

Newsletter Number Twenty Eight

The Fleam Dyke leaflet

This has been rather a long time in coming, for various reasons, but here it is at last. We are very grateful to South Cambridgeshire District Council and to Rob Mungovan, the Ecology Officer, for a grant of £1,118 to cover the main costs. We are grateful to Shelley Signs for permission to use some of the artwork from the beautiful Roman Road information boards. However, it was Tina Bone who managed to fit the text and all the illustrations together in such an attractive way, filling gaps with her own excellent drawings. I very much hope that these leaflets will help people to learn the names of the flowers they see on these few areas of chalk grassland and perhaps become involved in recording. Unfortunately, there is one small problem. The quarterly newsletter published by SCDC includes the statement that Graylings and Grizzled Skippers are to be seen on the Fleam Dyke. Would it were so! However, as stated in the last newsletter, if anyone has memories or better, records, of these two species on Fleam Dyke in the last 50 years, do let us know. You can send the pdf to a friend.

Google: Tina Bone Fleam pdf



Hoary Plantain

Our Logo

At the first Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, it was suggested that we should have a logo, and Anne Waldock proposed asking Richard Sell, who lived in Fulbourn. We wrote to him and he replied that he had a gap in his programme of work into which he thought he could fit design for a logo. A few days later an envelope arrived with this remarkably handsome design, representing the Roman Road crossed by the Fleam Dyke, or vice versa. I am prejudiced, but apart from the Amnesty International candle, I cannot think of a more memorable logo.

While I am on a historical note, I might explain that our name is to some extent the victim of chance. After our initial February meeting at the Six Bells, Fulbourn, Sam Agnew received help and advice from Liz Kendrick who had established the Friends of the River Shep. They gave us permission to copy their constitution, a deeply impressive document running to 11 pages. Apparently it had begun on the back of an envelope, but then the lawyers living in the area got hold of it!

I received, most gratefully, an electronic copy of this long, dictator-proof document, which I only had to adjust here and there with the name of our new society. But were we the 'Friends of the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke', or the 'Friends of the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road'? It had not been decided. I was beginning to feel rather groggy with 'flu. I tried it one way. I tried it the other. Was there a difference? Was the rhythm better the first way or the second? I could not decide, so I left it to the sub-committee consisting of Sam Agnew, Sharon Hearle (Green Belt Project) and me. We worked our way through all the sections and clauses, asking ourselves if they were correct and did what we wanted them to. We finished with relief and went home. None of us questioned the title. So there it is. Rather long, not very catchy, but accompanied by an elegant, unforgettable piece of art work.

I had been thinking of writing something about this as a way of thanking Richard Sell again, when I was told the sad news that Richard had lost a long battle with leukaemia. I am very grateful to his friend, Anthony Day, for permission to reproduce the obituary from [The Guardian](#).

Julia Napier

Richard Sell 1922 - 2008

by Anthony Day

My friend and fellow artist Richard Sell, who has died aged 86, was a stone lithographer and portraitist of rare quality. A superb draughtsman, he was greatly in demand for his pencil portraits, particularly from members of Cambridge University. Born in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, Richard lived in India for several years as a boy. He attended Chelsea School of Art, in London, but in 1941, interrupted his studies to join the Royal India Army Service Corps. Rising to captain, he ended the war in air supply at Akyab, on the Burmese coast. In 1947, he returned to Chelsea, and later studied at the London Institute of Education.

He took up teaching to support his family but turned seriously to lithography in 1954. He never used metal plates but was devoted to his stones, levigating (grinding) them down the years, finally having to discard them shortly before his death. The subtleties in his work were exemplary, as was his sense of colour, in studies of ancient architecture or in shop windows reflecting passers-by. Three examples of his prints were exhibited at the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1985, one of which won the non-members' print prize. He exhibited in many mixed London exhibitions, his last show, in Ely Cambridgeshire, being a hastily assembled retrospective after he had been diagnosed with leukaemia.

He is survived by his wife, Jean, his son and daughter and two grandchildren.

With acknowledgements to The Guardian



Herring's House, drawing by Richard Sell, February 2003

Anyone who lives near Fulbourn will know Herring's House, the oddly tall, slightly mysterious Victorian building set back from the Wilbraham Road. I decided years ago that it must be haunted. However, it is in fact cheerfully occupied by Jane and John Robson. It owes its strange height to the need to keep the living quarters above the water level when Fulbourn Fen was still properly watery, when the Little Wilbraham River ran all the time, and had fish, and kingfishers. It was my request for permission for Richard Sell to make this sketch which led to the Robsons becoming members of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. Subsequently, Jane very kindly offered to be the Membership Secretary.

This beautiful example of Richard Sell's work accompanied a short article by Margaret Rishbeth

Memories of the Fleam Dyke

by Margaret Rishbeth (reprinted from the Newsletter in Feb. 2003)

When I read David Clark's article about Fleam Dyke in the fifties. It reminded me that my family also used the tufted knoll by the Scots Firs for picnics during the war. On other days, we used to catch a bus to the disused railway, just past the pumping station, walk up to the Dyke (you could then!) turn left, and wend our way to friends in Herring's House on the Wilbraham Road. This house had been built by an artist who loved painting horses. He had a studio attached to a stable, and a horse could be brought right up to his front door via a ramp. The kitchen was on the ground floor, and food came up to the dining room by a Service Lift worked by ropes. Great fun!

Rather obviously, this raises the question: what did David Clark write about? Since Dr Clark's article appeared in our newsletter in November 2002, when we only had about 100 members, I thought the other 188 members who joined from 2003 onwards might like to read it as well. Some early members might even have forgotten about it entirely! Julia

Caring for the Fleam Dyke

by Dr David Clark, "Watcher of the Fleam Dyke"

(Reprinted from the Newsletter for November 2002)

For nearly fifty years I have loved and cherished the Fleam Dyke. I have seen it in good times and bad, a lovely place of recreation and a neglected wilderness. I am delighted that it is now, in 2002, in better condition than ever.

When I first came to live and work at Fulbourn Hospital in 1953, I explored all the local walks: The Roman Road, the Wandlebury estate and all the copses and dingles, seeking sites for family picnics. I soon found the Fleam Dyke and was enchanted. North West of Mutlow Hill there was a tufted knoll with three aged Scots firs above a springy turf cropped by the rabbits, a delightful place for picnics. South of the A11 there was a fine sweep of dyke riddled with rabbit holes, where we saw the ferreters with their nets and guns.

Then came myxomatosis: the rabbits disappeared and in no time the briars and thorns began growing, even blocking the path. I was dismayed and made contact with the Naturalists' Trust who welcome my interest and then appointed me 'watcher' of the Fleam Dyke, a post I held for nearly thirty years. My task was to report to them on the state of the Fleam Dyke and particularly to alert them to areas that required attention as happened often in the 1960s. Each autumn I would survey the dyke and find where the briars had crept in, so that working parties could be arranged.

Ever since I had worked for the Forestry Commission during the war, I had enjoyed tree felling and brush clearing; the Fleam Dyke now gave me an excuse for doing this with vigour for the public good. I spent many Saturdays and Sundays up there working to keep the path open. Whilst doing that I met others who were interested, some who had adopted part of the path for themselves and kept it open. Botany PhD students counting every plant in a square metre of chalk soil, ornithologists spreading nets to capture and ring small birds. Nobel prize-winners out exercising their legs and minds. At one period 'fun runners' used it, pounding the track to mud. At another time, Leys School boys built timber steps in slippery places.

In the sixties, very few people came walking along the Dyke and I began to fear that it would block up completely and cease to be a place of pleasure for Cambridge people. In the seventies, however, more interest was taken and working parties became more frequent. The Naturalists' Trust moved its headquarters to Fulbourn Manor and appointed a professional officer, [with funding from the City Council, the County Council and South Cambs. District Council] so a more scholarly interest was taken in the Dyke and the vegetation of the Dyke was meticulously mapped, [by Sarah Lambert in 1998] especially of course, the precious Junipers.

In 1990 came a rapid burst of activity when it became clear that the highway authorities upgrading the A11 to a dual carriage motorway intended to ignore our ancient footpath entirely. When asked, they said that if there were any walkers, they could walk along to the Balsham overpass and come round that way. A campaign sprang up, vigorously masterminded and co-ordinated by the Ramblers Association and their national secretary. In September 1990 we all appeared at a public enquiry conducted by a retired Air Vice-Marshall and made our eloquent pleas. As a result we gained the handsome bridge which now stands there.

In the last ten years progress has been even better, Mutlow Hill has been cleared and kept clear so that we can now see much of the view that caused the Bronze Age men to choose it as a site for their chieftain's grave. The stretch between the Mutlow Hill and the railway is considerably clearer, so that the chalk grassland is flourishing again. To the south of the A11 we now have a magnificent stretch of completely cleared dyke so that one can see the Saxon's intention and realize what an effective barrier it was, at least to cattle raiders.

I am now too old and ill to do any brush clearing and it is only occasionally that I can get to my beloved Fleam Dyke: but it is a joy to see what has been achieved by the Green Belt Project and I can only hope that the fascinating Fleam Dyke will remain as a source of pleasure to people of Cambridge for many years to come.



Memory test for older readers!

Not long after the Friends were set up, Chris Jakes, the Librarian of the Cambridgeshire County Records Collection looked through old photographs of Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road and found 12 taken in 1932.

Unfortunately, the quality of the photographs was too poor to be photocopied. However, with improved technology, here is one of the most recognizable, or so it seemed. At first I thought it was Dr David Clark's picnic spot, but that is lower than Mutlow Hill, which would surely be visible behind the trees in the background.

Any suggestions?

Fleam Dyke from the south west corner near the Bedford Gap in 1932, with Mutlow Hill in the background. The scattered bushes are probably Junipers. The white mounds of soil appear to be part of a badger sett. The tall, pale grasses hide the legs of a dog, whose nose is, I think, pointing this way. There is, as yet, no obvious scrub invasion.



Private Enterprise on the Fleam Dyke by Shaun Wylie

(from the Newsletter of February 2003)

It was a real pleasure to read Dr Clark's account in the Newsletter for November 2002, Number 7 of working to clear the scrub along Fleam Dyke. Like him, I enjoyed walking on the Dyke, and I too was dismayed at the difficulty of doing so.

During the 80s, when I was finally retired from teaching Mathematics in the Sixth Form College, I took to spending days clearing the path on the Dyke. The Section between Dungate Farm and Balsham was particularly bad. Many trees and shrubs had fallen across the path, and people had to make detours down the bank and up again.

Sometimes with friends or relatives, and sometimes on my own, we sawed and clipped to restore the passage. The criterion was that two people could walk abreast in comfortable conversation along the crest. We probably did little more than one or two hundred yards a day, but it was very rewarding. One friend, looking back at a day's work, once said what I had often thought myself, "It's like fairyland".

Other enterprising Bushwhackers

In the spring of 2002 **John Davison** wrote to say:

As a 'veteran' of the opening of Fleam Dyke, I should like to be associated with its Friends. (£5 included.) I hacked my way on to the Stonebridge Lane end in 1979, while the WildlifeTrust Work party were operating from the A11. I think it was I who brought in the County Archaeologist, who roused the County Footpaths officer to his duties. I kept up my work, mainly on banks and that ditch for 6 years. Good luck!

I am sorry to say that John Davison died in August 2005.

Other members of Shaun Wylie's unofficial work parties were Dr Douglas Gardner, who died more recently, and **Peter Barker**, a former pupil. Last year **Alec Sadler** told me that he had helped on these work parties too. **So who else was out there hacking and hewing?** Do let me know.

(The word 'bushwhackers' came to me as I was thinking of a title, and I realized that I did not know what it meant. Some of you may be devotees of the band of the above name, but for anyone else who shares my ignorance, the original bushwhackers were guerrilla groups who for their own reasons attacked the Unionist army or the Confederate army during the American Civil War.)

The Green Belt Project

David Clark refers to the Wildlife Trust appointment of a professional officer, Sharon Hearle, in the early nineties, funded by the local authorities. Sharon organized a great deal of skilled clearance work, commissioned expert surveys of the three linear sites, and successfully applied for a large grant for the Devil's Dyke.

Unfortunately, in recent years the local authorities have cut their funding, and the Green Belt Project officer, Iain Webb, can only take work parties to parishes which can pay. This is a problem for the Linear Sites because no one village has responsibility for them or part of them. The Wildlife Trust pays for half a dozen work parties a year and the Friends do 4 work parties. The main plan at the moment is to ask local landowners and farmers to manage their section of the sites using the money given by the government for environmentally friendly farming, HLS or the Higher Level Entry Scheme. It is unclear what happens if a landowner does not wish to collaborate, or the HLS rules change in five years time, as may happen.



Rock Rose from Flowers of the Field, by the late Rev. C.A.Johns. Revised edition 1902 by Professor G.S Boulger of the City of London College. Published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. The artists remained unacknowledged.

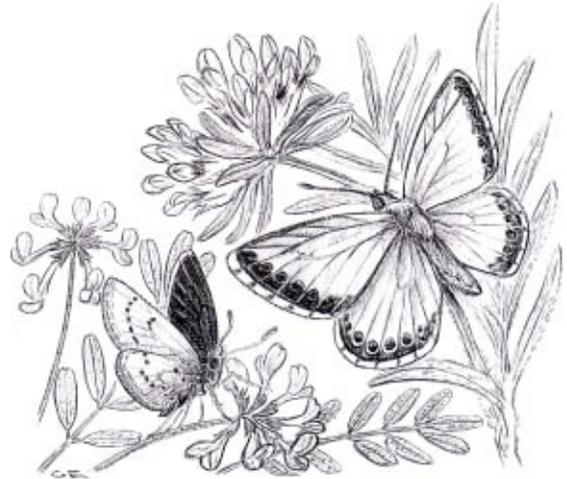
Today's Watchers of the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road

Iain Webb is our current **Juniper Watcher**. Dr Max Walters recorded 24 junipers in 1961. In 1986, there were only 12 (Crawford). Despite the efforts of David Clark and Sharon Hearle, the decline has continued. However, 6 seedlings were found by Sharon Hearle in 2001. Subsequently other seedlings have been found by Iain, and given anti-rabbit guards, but even so not all have survived. By 2008 the total was 9 old bushes and 4 small seedlings, growing very, very slowly. There are, I hope, 3 cuttings growing well in Hildersham churchyard, south side. These were taken from the branches of the tallest Juniper which snapped in a gale at the end of 2002, and finally died. **Calling Hildersham! Reports please.** Incidentally, almost opposite the church, there is a house with a steep bank covered by Grape Hyacinths. They are not the usual garden ones, but the native *Muscari neglectum*, a more compact, darker blue flower with an interesting scent.

David Barden walks key parts of the sites every year and keeps an eye out for the **Purple Milk Vetch**, **Field Fleawort** and other unusual or rare species. **Rachel Gray** has kept records of the Autumn Gentian and looked for **Pyramidal Orchids** but has seen none in the last two years. Roger and Stella Wolfe will be checking on the Pyramidal Orchid colony which they found on the Gunner's Hall section of the Roman Road last summer.

Butterfly Watchers

In August 2005, Stella and Roger Wolfe saw 2 Chalkhill Blues on the south end of the Fleam Dyke. So far both Stella and Roger and the Chalkhill Blues have turned up on cue each year, though Roger Lemon was first on the button in 2008 with one sighting on 7th August. Roger Lemon organises the Butterfly Transect walks on both the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke, which makes him Butterfly Watcher in Chief, with a supporting cast consisting of Sam and Trish Agnew, Nick Ballard, Jo Darlington, Mike Gittos, Vince Lea, Julia Napier, and Rosemarie Parks



Chalkhill Blue and Small Blue. Drawing by Graham Easy. The tiny blue-black Small Blue has not been seen on the Roman Road or Fleam Dyke for 40 years or so

But Bird Watchers, where are you?

When the Friends were set up, we had two expert bird watchers who walked both sites twice a year for a couple of years. Since then various Friends have sent in very interesting observations: large flocks of Golden Plovers over the Fleam Dyke, the occasional Corn Bunting or Siskin on the Roman Road, Buzzards over Mutlow Hill or Wandlebury, and Curlews feeding on the newly ploughed land near Worsted Lodge. Last week a regular walker told me that she had seen a Marsh Harrier rise up from beside a hedge on Deadman's Hill, the area of the big clearance in 2006. However, we have no annual records for the key sections of either site let alone the full length of both. **Any offers?**

On Friday 20th February this year, Helen Chubb noticed this item subtitled:

From the Cambridge Evening News of 1984

Demise of Rabbits

Fleam Dyke stretches across the open corridor of chalk dowland between what were dense forests above Newmarket and the swampy fens at Fulbourn. Now it is a rich habitat for chalk-loving plants like the pasque flower orchids. Its maintenance was the work of the rabbit population, but after myxomatosis there was nothing to stop the advance of shrub. The path became covered with thorns and brambles. Working parties will carry on where the rabbits left off.

I was about to make derisive remarks about Pasque flower orchids, when I realized that I had just typed Spotted Orchids instead of PyramidalOrchids! However, that is as nothing to a feature article on the Fleam Dyke published in **The Financial Times** last spring. It was more full of inaccuracies than I could have believed possible anywhere, let alone the internationally famous FT. The journalist, ignoring 4 information boards, said the Dyke was 1200 years old, which would mean that it was built in 800 AD. He refers to the 'man-made fens' and hedges 'trembling with larks'. He and his friend praised the wonderful wildness of this remnant of ancient woodland. The photographer took a big picture A11 from the road bridge, a poppy, the large deep red kind with a dark centre, and a pink clover. At no point in the three-page spread was there any mention of Wild Thyme, Rock Roses, Horseshoe Vetch, Milkwort and Lady's Bedstraw or any other chalk grassland species. I did finally write in protest, but the editor did not reply

With thanks to Vera Carroll for the entertainment, and to Peter Sell, C.U.Plant Sciences Department, for pointing out that our native poppies are more orange than red.

One Man Went to Mow

Last year there was a special arrangement whereby Iain Webb took a new contractor, Andrew Davison, along the Fleam Dyke from the disused railway to Fulbourn in early summer and showed him where to cut in July and where to leave the flowers we want to conserve. The result was very good. There were lots of Clustered Bellflowers for people to see and enjoy instead of a carpet of rather rare and very dead flowers for them to walk on. The half dozen Dropwort plants, which had amazingly survived scrub invasion, flowered and set seed instead of being mowed flat. Wonderful.

However, simultaneously, whoever mows the Roman Road from the golf course down to Wandlebury cut the verges right back to the hedge in mid-July 2008, which had not been done before. The bank opposite the golf course on which the Friends' work parties worked in 2007 and 2008 were given a short back and sides although in full flower. When I went in late July to do a butterfly transect walk, Hay Rattle, Rock Roses and Lady's Bedstraw were gently rotting under a mulch of long, wet grass. However, Kate Day and Karen Whymark of the Countryside Services Team are doing their best to get things sorted out this year, and we must hope for the best.

Traffic Restriction Order

This is another area in which we continue to hope for a solution. The Countryside Services Team appear to have agreed that the southern section of the Roman Road would benefit from at least a seasonal TRO, but they repeated that there were expensive legal processes to be gone through, and every parish in the County and indeed across Britain has byways which needed protection. We had hoped that if the Marjoram-covered bank that runs down to Mark's Grave could be declared a County Wildlife Site, it would help us to get a TRO to protect it. However, the damage is now so bad, that it does not qualify for CWS status! That is the fate of Britain's wildlife. Catch 22!

However, Karen Whymark did say that if people wrote to her or to Kate Day this would help to make the case. **Dear Friends, could you please do this?** All it needs is a short statement. "I hoped to walk from X to Y but found the section of the Roman Road which passes Yole Farm and Hare Wood was almost impassable, and certainly no pleasure" or as one walker said, "I have given up trying to walk towards Horseheath. I just have to go the other way." **Please also take photographs.** The address to write to is Karen Whymark, Countryside Services, Shire Hall, Cambridge, CB3 0AP

In addition, Karen Whymark said that petitions signed by a lot of people do receive attention. Therefore at the AGM on 23rd April, there will be a petition for a seasonal Traffic Restriction Order to be applied in wet weather. It constantly surprises me that the extensive damage caused by a very small number of motorcyclists and 4 x 4 drivers should be allowed to spoil the pleasure of so many people.

Subscriptions now due for 2009

The subscription remains £5 per household, but if you feel you can afford more, that would be wonderful. Every year since we began, there has been a surplus of about £250, or 25% of our income. Every year this has allowed us to pay for something extra or to bridge a small financial gap. In 2008, because a significant number of people paid £10, we shall be able to pay for a contractor to poison the roots of the clematis on the south side of Mutlow Hill, making the site easier to manage in future.



Dulcie Cornwell and her late husband picnicking on the Roman Road. Mrs Cornwell is looking very stylish in the latest 1920s fashion: cloche hat, up-to-the minute dress and shoes with an ankle strap. I have a picture of my mother looking equally chic. I still have the Greek key pattern blanket!

Soon after the Friends were set up, Mrs Cornwell sent us the subscription, having heard about our work from her grand daughter, Ann Waldock and her great grandson, John Dawson. As Mrs Cornwell came closer to receiving a telegram from the Queen, we thought that perhaps our congratulations could come in the form of free membership, but she was having none of it. "I paid to support the group the only

way I can. I would love to come with John on the work parties, but my Zimmer frame would get tangled up with the tools. So please accept this donation to help support those who can work." The letter continues equally delightfully, but I am running out of space and shall have to include the rest in the next newsletter. Bad planning!

Work Parties

On Sunday 25th January, 8 people turned up on a very wet and miserable day to help Iain rake off arisings and set back the eastern hedge on the Roman Road near Mount Lodge. Our thanks to David Barden, David Cambridge, Helen Chubb and Richard Fowling, David Seilly, Cassie Sparks, Sue and Matthew Wallis and an energetic Venezuelan called Eduardo, who I was told had an impressive technique with his machete. On Sunday 22nd February, it was drier but very wintry. Iain had found some end or year money in some official pocket and had organized the brush cutting of all the clematis in advance. This time 9 Friends arrived and, remarkably, managed to rake up and bale the long stringy arisings over the whole hill. Many thanks to Mike Albutt, David Barden, Helen Chubb, Rachel Gray, David Seilly, Cassie Sparks, Matthew and Sue Wallis, and Roger and Stella Wolfe.

Annual General Meeting, 23rd April 2009, 7.30

This will be held in the handsome conference room of the Cambridge Masonic Hall, Bateman Street, opposite the Botanic Garden. There is a car park. Turn in and approach the red light confidently! The barrier will open. Exit supervised by the staff or by using a token. Bar open 7.0 – 11.00pm

Professor Andrew Balmford is a very well known specialist in Conservation Biology. His research has been on the identification of priority areas for conservation action; establishing how much effective biodiversity conservation would cost; and how conservation efforts might best be reconciled with other forms of land use, especially in developing countries. He is keen on building close working relationships between conservation scientists and conservation practitioners. He was active in the campaign to save Roswell Pits, Ely.

We believe it will be a most interesting and relevant talk. It will also be an opportunity to meet our new Chairman, Dr Edmund Tanner, and propose new committee members.

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