

Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke  
Newsletter Number Three  
November 2001

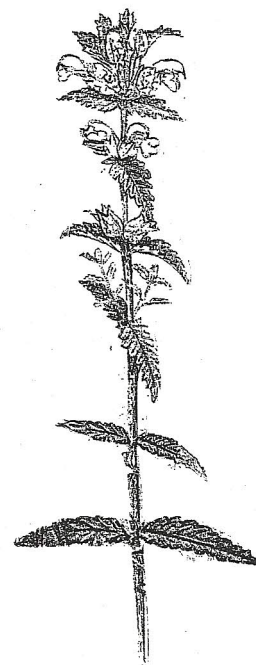


## Conservation Management on the Roman Road 2001/2002

by Sharon Hearle,  
Cambridge Green Belt Project Officer

### Mowing Work

Cambridgeshire County Council arranges grass cutting on the Roman Road as part of their 'rights of way access' cuts in July and September. The first cut this year would normally have been earlier but was delayed due to Foot and Mouth restrictions. Liaison with Cambridge Green Belt Project is good, so I was able to mark a number of sections of grassland to be left uncut in July in the confidence that this would be done. This included areas of Yellow Rattle near Hildersham Road and Wandlebury, as well as sections with Knapweed and Knapweed Broomrape near Worsted Lodge. **Yellow Rattle** is particularly vulnerable to early mowing because it is an annual and needs to produce seed to survive the following year. The Midweek Conservation Volunteers visited the site on two Wednesdays in order to remove the cuttings, which is essential if small herbs are to compete with more vigorous grasses and other plants. The open section between Copley Hill and All is cut by the farmer over the winter. This year, as usual, the Green Belt Project will organise volunteers to remove the cuttings and treat any cut stumps.



### Scrub Clearance

Scrub is being cleared on several sections of the Roman Road this year, with the main concentration of work being done between Worts Causeway and Worsted Lodge. Clearance is targeted along the edge of the best sections of remaining chalk grassland. The Beech trees from Copley Hill to the Valley Farm footpath have also been trimmed to reduce their shading and leaf-fall effect. There is concern that the strips of Rock Rose along the edge have been severely reduced over the last ten years. This clearance work will also improve access for all users, especially those on horseback. At the moment, most scrub is stacked in the hedge bottom and forms habitat for small mammals and birds. As space runs out in the future, it may be necessary to burn cuttings. The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke would like to express their gratitude to **South Cambridgeshire District Council and English Nature** for funding this important conservation work.

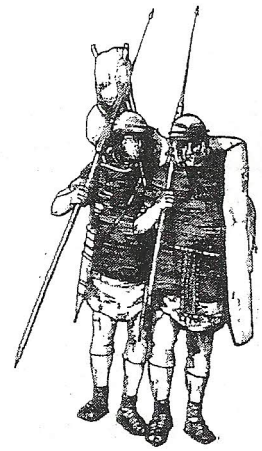
### Coppice Stumps and Remarkable Trees

The scrub clearance work has revealed a particularly interesting Beech Tree along the Roman Road near the end of the Golf course extension. The Beech fell about 30 – 40 years ago. New growth has sprouted from the fallen trunk as well as from the broken root plate. Some of these new stems are now quite substantial: over ten inches in diameter. It is remarkable evidence that, where possible, fallen trees should be left where they are. There are also many substantial hazel coppice stumps to be seen along the boundary of the Roman Road near the Wandlebury section. A group of Ash has been re-coppiced near the footpath to Fulbourn.



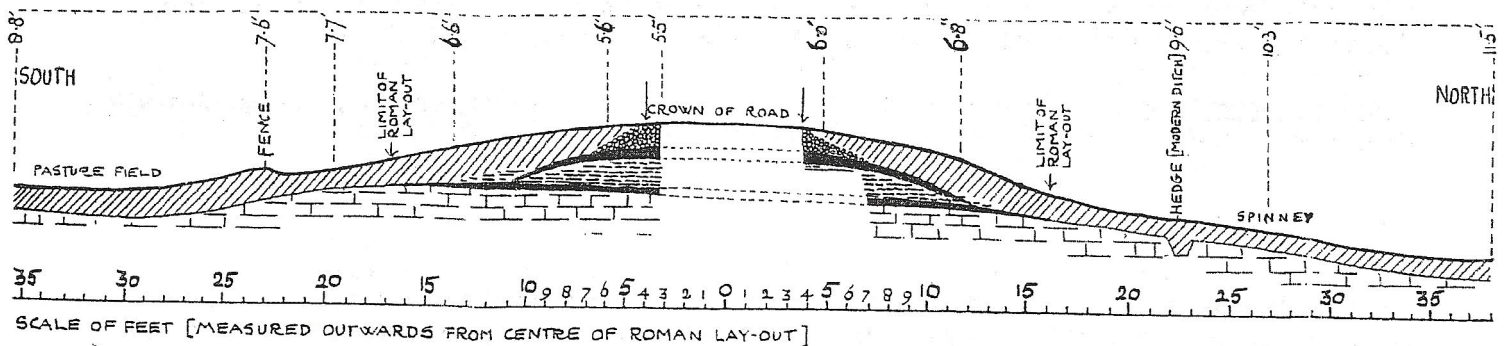
# Worsted Street Roman Road

by Tim Malim,  
 Manager of the Cambridgeshire County Council  
 Archaeological Field Unit.



The Roman Road that runs from Worts Causeway to Horseheath has been called many names over the years but the most common one is that of Worsted Street. This and Wool Street, (or Wolves Street), another name given to it, might both refer to mediaeval times and an association with a landowner, and trade in cloth. It runs in a very straight line between Worts Causeway and the A11 (which follows approximately the same line as that taken by the Icknield Way from Worsted Lodge to Newmarket); but southeast of Worsted Lodge, the road has some shifts in alignment and odd kinks. Along parts of the northeastern end, a pronounced bank with ditches on either side shows how well the road has survived. Roman roads were built by quarrying along either side and compacting the upcast into a bank, or *agger*, in the centre to form the foundation of the road, the surface of which was then often metalled in some form or other. The cambered *agger* then allowed rain to run off into the roadside ditches. Roads came in three general categories: main routes surfaced with stone so that they could be used in all weather; secondary roads that were surfaced with gravel; and others that were local tracks, probably impassible in wet weather. The straight lines we associate with Roman roads come from Roman methods of surveying, but are in fact made up of a series of long straight sections with short changes of course to bring the road back in to line.

SECTION, ACROSS WORSTED STREET AT A POINT 5 YARDS S.E. OF B.M. 191.8 ON 6" O.S. XLVII S.E.



In the nineteenth century, Worsted Street was variously described as Iron Age in date and one of the Cambridgeshire Dykes, or as part of a Roman road that ran from Colchester to Chester, and so was given the misnomer of *Via Devana*. Serious archaeological excavation of Worsted Street has occurred three times: once in the 1920s when Cyril Fox from the Cambridge Antiquarian Society cut two sections across the road, near its northeastern end; once during 1959 when a gas pipeline was inserted along the length of much of the road; and finally in 1991 at Worsted Lodge prior to widening and dualling of the A11.

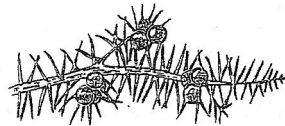
All this work confirmed the Roman nature of its construction along the stretch north of the A11, with a rammed chalk foundation topped by gravel metalling. Its construction further south, however, was less impressive and distinctly different from that to the north. Excavations north of the A11 have shown that the ditches are 14m apart and between them lies an *agger* 3 - 5m wide and up to 2m high. Evidence for the date of construction of the road has been largely absent, apart from coal found beneath the *agger* by Dewhurst in 1959 who concluded that it must, therefore, be later than the 1st century AD. The foundations of the road had been laid directly onto a de-turfed land surface, and so a buried soil survived, from which it was possible to find molluscan evidence for the kind of local environment into which the road was built. This showed an open treeless landscape, possibly heavily grazed or recently cultivated, but also a woodland phase at a period not too long before construction.

The interpretation would suggest that Worsted Street was a Roman road of local importance along the northeastern end, connecting Cambridge to the Icknield Way and the road to Great Chesterford. The continuation to the southeast would seem to be of lesser importance but allowed access in good weather to the Stour valley and beyond. This arrangement seems strange as a more direct route from Great Chesterford to Cambridge must have existed following the river valley of the Cam. Such an apparently illogical road system can be explained, however, if Worsted Street actually followed the route of a pre-existing road, a prehistoric

ridgeway with its northern end running from the twin forts of War Ditches and Wandlebury, and thereby joined the important routeway (Worts Causeway), which crossed the Cam at Trumpington, with the Icknield Way zone and beyond. It is, therefore, the Iron Age and earlier landscape which determined the line of the Roman road, but it is Roman engineering and mediaeval repairs that have left us the legacy which we know today.

Reference: Malim T *et al* 1997 New Evidence on the Cambridgeshire Dykes and Worsted Street Roman Road. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society Vol. 85*, pp. 27 – 122.

Editor's note: The word *agger* has been bothering me, so I finally got out my old Latin dictionary and this, more or less, is what it says: *agger, -eris*. masculine noun. Material brought together to form a heap or mound. There follow lots of examples from the writings of Caesar and Virgil of mounds needed for ramps, forts, causeways etc. *Agger*, with its verb *aggero*, was clearly a key word in Roman life, and yet it looks so like *ager, agri* a field, from which we get 'agriculture'. What difference did the double g make to pronunciation?



### The History of the Wild Juniper in Cambridgeshire

The following article by Dr Max Walters, Director of the Cambridge University Botanic Garden from 1973 - 1983, will appear in the 2001 edition of Nature in Cambridgeshire: "The Wild Juniper, *Juniperus communis*, in Cambridgeshire, Part 1". This paper looks at the Juniper story in Cambridgeshire from 1660 to 1975. A future article will bring the story up to date. Apparently, a population of Wild Junipers used to occur on the Roman Road, near Hildersham. It was last recorded by Humphrey Gilbert-Carter in 1939.

Nature in Cambridgeshire is available from The Herbarium, Department of Plant Sciences, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EA £3.50 by post.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Roman Mushrooms on the Roman Road?

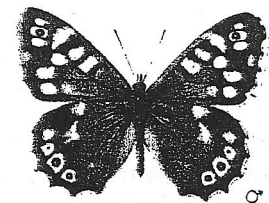
Hélène Davies, of the Melbourn Mushroom Club, has told us of a rare fungus that is occasionally found on Roman Roads. *Pisolithus arhizus* is large, lumpy and markedly lacking in aesthetic appeal. It is 6-12 cm across, and 5-25 cm high, mostly hidden underground in a thick stem-like base. The fungus is brownish-yellow to olive-brown, with chrome yellow markings on the submerged part, and "resembles balls of horse dung lying on the ground"! In autumn, the thin outer wall of the fruiting body becomes brittle and breaks apart to show the dark brown, stony, pea-shaped spore containers. It is to be found in sandy or well-drained, gravelly soil in fields or roadsides. It is not edible.

See Mushrooms and Other Fungi of Great Britain and Europe by Roger Phillips, from which this is description is adapted. If any member sees, or has seen it, please let us know.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Friendly Events

Late summer events for Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke were not blessed with good weather. **Sunday August 26th** was very damp and chilly, and only four enthusiasts turned up at the A11 lay-by to look for butterflies, flowers and birds. The rest of you stayed at home with the Sunday supplements. Very wise. However, we had a good time, plant spotting and sharing wild life information. Most butterflies had also decided to spend a quiet afternoon at home, i.e. hanging upside down under a sheltering leaf. However, one Meadow Brown and one Common Blue made brief appearances. A Green Carpet moth was sitting quietly on a patch of low grass, looking like a green carpet, and there were two Speckled Woods patrolling the entrance to the wooded section that runs from the Bedford Gap towards Dungate Farm. As we walked back from Dungate Farm, we saw a flock of about 25 Goldfinches wheeling over the dyke, and realised that they were just

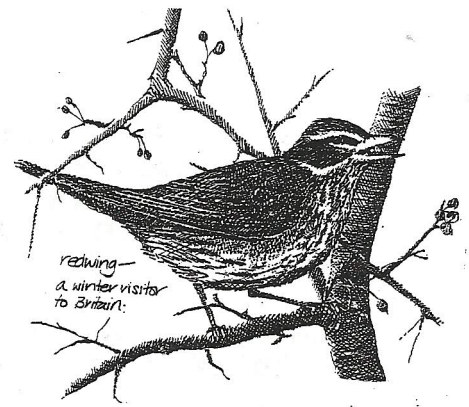


Speckled wood *Pararge aegeria*



waiting for us to be gone so that they could get back to feeding on thistles and other seed heads. Unfortunately, when we got back to our cars, someone who could not think of anything better to do on a wet Sunday afternoon had smashed a window and taken ..... absolutely nothing, because there was nothing to take.

**Reminder. Do not leave valuables in a parked car.**



redwing  
a winter visitor  
to Britain.

Sarah Wroot

**Our second Friends Outing on 2nd September**, was equally successful, or unsuccessful. The sun refused to shine, but six people turned up, including one gentleman from Swaffham, Norfolk who liked the idea of a walk on a Roman Road. Again, we pooled our knowledge and had a pleasant afternoon despite the weather. The parking place here is overlooked by farm buildings and guarded by some watchful and noisy dogs, so car owners can relax. The only mishap this time was that we had lost some of the party on the way to the parking place. If anyone knows the couple who failed to find the Worsted Lodge entrance to the Roman Road, please give them our apologies and invite them to come again.

**Our third Friends event, on Sunday 7th October**, also took place under skies billowing with dark clouds. (This is beginning to look like the *Tale of the Curse of the Trojans*, but read on!) There were, in fact, too many of us to work in the chosen area at the Fulbourn end of the Fleam Dyke, so we moved over to the A11 bypass and spent several hours working on the banks of the Dyke near the Bedford Gap. There were seventeen of us in all: "Friends", members of the Mid-Week Conservation Group, Butterfly Conservation, the Badger and Otter Group, the Melbourn Mushroom Club, Queens' College Cambridge, the Wildlife Trust, and the Cambridgeshire Police Force. Greatly assisted by John Dawson with a brush cutter and Peter Pilbeam with a chain saw, we succeeded in clearing a substantial area of long grass, privet scrub and larger hawthorn and blackthorn overgrowth. At about mid-day, the heavens opened and it poured for about ten minutes, but everyone continued to work as if drip dry, and by the time we stopped for lunch, we had indeed dripped or steamed dry. I am not a natural for cold, out-door events, and a wet walk on a day like that is my idea of misery, but conservation clearance work gets you warm very quickly. You are guaranteed fresh air and exercise in a beautiful country area. There is usually a big, or indeed enormous, bonfire to play with! Everyone is very friendly, and we all share the same enthusiasm for wildlife, with different specialities and interests. Don't miss the next big Scrub Bash, Sunday Feb 10th. See Events.

**Yes, but how are you going to keep all that cleared area mown properly?**

Good question.

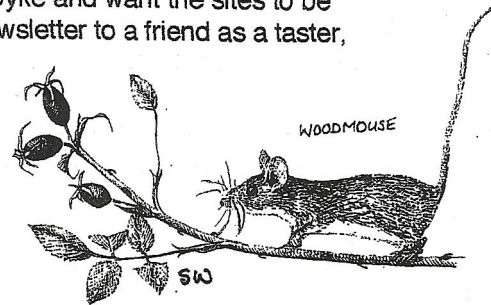
However, Sharon Hearle's secret weapon, **The Bank Commander**, is scheduled for arrival on Wednesday 12th December on the Fleam Dyke. This splendidly named machine is a sort of superior lawn mower. It can be handled by anyone with a bit of training. It does not take the muscular strength needed to wield a brush cutter. The protective shield means that chips and splinters do not fly in all directions, not to mention dog poo. (Take a break to think about that one, and then rejoin the campaign to persuade dog walkers to carry a small plastic bag at all times.) The Bank Commander will make it possible to extend and maintain the mowing regime needed to restore the chalk grassland flora on the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke.

The £4,000 needed for this essential piece of equipment has been provided by **South Cambridgeshire District Council and Anglian Water**, to whom we extend our warmest thanks.



**Congratulations! You have joined the Fastest Growing Conservation Organisation in Cambridgeshire!**

110  
We now have 85 members, including our first overseas member, who lives in Alberta, Canada, and our first collective member: **Fulbourn Parish Council** have just become members. Would members from other parishes feel they could suggest this to their own parish council? The committee thought that it would be reasonable to ask collective members to pay a £10 subscription. Can you help us to reach 100 by the New Year? When it comes to applying for public money for conservation work, size matters, which is as it should be, and the support of neighbouring parish councils will be very helpful. We need to be able to show how many people enjoy walking along the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke and want the sites to be properly cared for. If you would like me to send a copy of the newsletter to a friend as a taster, do ring, write, or e-mail the Secretary. See below.



**And, finally, "When Wandlebury was called Troy", the saga continued.**

Henry Arnold, Manager of the Data Bank at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Monkswood, kindly supplied the following information:

The Cambridge Preservation Society mentions the Wandlebury/Troy link on its web page, but also says Wandlebury might have been an Arthurian outpost. A search through the Web gave 8 matches for Wandlebury and Troy, one of which, by someone called Colin James Hunter, contains great detail on the hypothesis of one Zecharia Sitchin, which seems to involve extra planets, and the Zodiac, and Atlantis, but the relevant paragraph is as follows:

"Like Iman Wilkens, the author of Where Troy Once Stood (Rider, London, 1990), I also still at present believe that Homer, who lived about 1,200 B.C., and whose Odyssey includes coded instructions for the successful crossing of the Atlantic from Britain to America, was a Celt who was born and died within a stone's throw from where Middelburg town-hall in Holland stands today. He subsequently visited South East England, where he was an eye-witness to the Trojan war, which was fought at Wandlebury Ring [sic] on the Gog Magog hills near Cambridge, ostensibly to liberate Helen, but fundamentally to establish which groupings of Celtic tribes and their allies would control the English Channel, exercise naval supremacy, and enjoy priority of access to the tin-mines of Cornwall."

Any other contributions to this delightfully batty theory are invited for consideration by our new editorial adviser, Marie of Rumania. Readers will be disappointed to learn that Where Troy Once Stood is now out of print.

Julia Napier, November 2001



Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?  
(A rather small Friends' Outing)

## Mid-Week Conservation Group

Meet at the Barn, behind Bidwell's, Trumpington Road  
Please ring 01223 712410 if you intend to meet on site, as plans may change

Wed	5 Dec	Mowing, raking, scrub clearance as needed on	Fleam Dyke
Wed	12 Dec	" " "	Roman Road
Wed	2 Jan 2002	" " "	Fleam Dyke
Wed	13 Feb	" " "	Roman Road
Wed	20 March	" " "	Fleam Dyke
Wed	27 March	" " "	Roman Road



**The Cambridge Conservation Volunteers** will also be running practical conservation tasks on both sites. For further information, telephone Sharon Hearle 01223 712410

## Other Events and Meetings for your diary

Wed 6 February **Anniversary Meeting** ~~in the Function Room at the back of the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn.~~  
An evening to celebrate our first year of existence. **Dr Roger Clarke**, an expert on local birds and a specialist on birds of prey, will give a talk with slides, entitled **Birds of Prey and Their Prey!** There will be an interval for tea or coffee and an opportunity to meet other Friends, and then **Sharon Hearle** will give us all an **Update on Work in Progress** on the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, and answer questions.

7.30 - 10.00 pm Entrance free Please bring anyone you know who is interested in conservation, or who walks regularly on these sites.

Sun 10 February **Scrub Clearance Event for Friends**  
Come and help to open up the Fulbourn end of the Fleam Dyke. No skills required. Wear gloves, old clothes, strong shoes, bring waterproofs and packed lunch. Tools provided, but bring your own if you prefer. If you are qualified to use power tools, you will be very welcome. Please let Sharon Hearle know in advance. Unskilled labour is extremely useful, as we shall need helpers to drag away the branches which have been cut, and pile them on the bonfire. If you like playing with fire, this is your big opportunity. Meet at 10.0 am at the entrance to Fulbourn Nature Reserve, Stonebridge Lane, Fulbourn. tel: Sharon Hearle 01223 712410

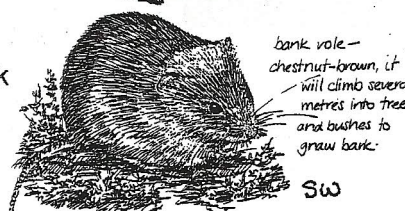
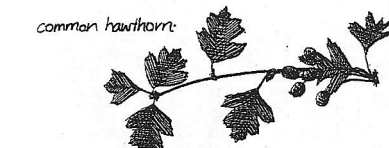
Wed 10th April **Annual General Meeting**  
A shortish business meeting followed by a talk on **Butterflies of the Cambridgeshire area** by Dr Val Perrin, who organises the butterfly monitoring scheme for Cambridgeshire vice-county.  
7.30 - 10.0 pm at the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn

### Contacts

Sharon Hearle  
Cambridge Green Belt Project  
3b Langford Arch  
London Road  
Sawston, Cambridge, CB2 4EE

tel: 01223 712410,  
e-mail: [shearle@cambswt.cix.co.uk](mailto:shearle@cambswt.cix.co.uk)

common hawthorn:



Sw

Julia Napier  
Secretary, Friends of the Roman  
Road and Fleam Dyke  
30a Hinton Avenue  
Cambridge, CB1 7AS

tel: 01223 213152  
[JN1@napierj.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:JN1@napierj.freereserve.co.uk)

6



