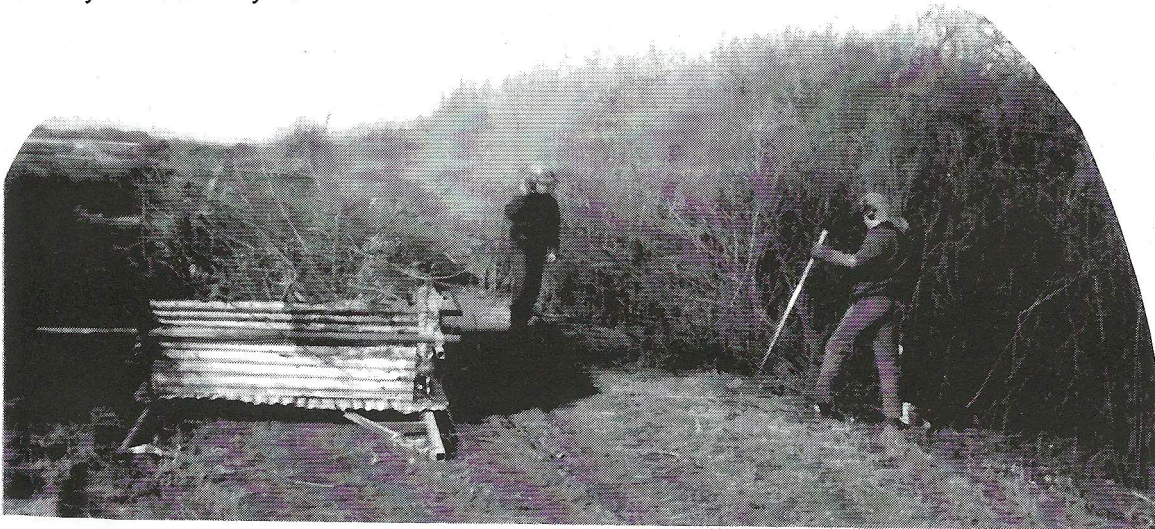


Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Twelve February 2004

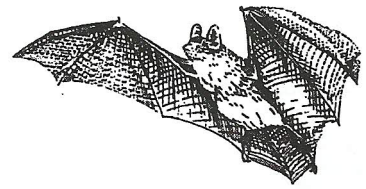
Work in Progress on the Roman Road

Visitors to the Roman Road in February may well have seen smoke rising in the area south of Worsted Lodge and come across a two-man team cutting and burning scrub. Iain Hysom and his assistant, Tim Bailey, have been taking the scrub back for one and a half metres in places where we hope the existing narrow band of flowers such as Small Scabious, Hoary Plantain and Lady's Bedstraw will spread and seed into the cleared space. As readers may imagine, this leaves an enormous amount of prickly cut wood to be disposed of. Last year, scrub that had been cleared north of Worsted Lodge was chipped and spread along the hedge base, but the piles of chippings with grass cuttings on top seem to have attracted local arsonists and the hedge now has substantial gaps as a souvenir. In any case, a heavy-duty chipper is expensive for the contractor to hire. An alternative is to cart the brash off site, but this involves a heavy vehicle driving up and down the track, which churns up the surface, especially in wet weather such as we have been having. Iain Hysom's ingenious solution was to build a metal trailer out of scrap, tow it up to the site, and burn the cut material as it is produced. It is amazing how quickly awkward piles of hawthorn and blackthorn disappear into the leaping flames. No wonder that Fire Gods appear in ancient belief systems and myths.



At the same time, north of Worsted Lodge, going up to Copley Hill, Don Davies has been busy hedge-laying. Don used to work for the Wildlife Trust here, before moving to a job with the Woodland Trust. He was also the Voluntary Warden of Fulbourn Nature Reserve. He now lives in Yorkshire, - their gain, our loss - but Iain Hysom has lured him back for a few weekends to begin the programme of hedge management which is part of the overall plan for the Roman Road. This is being paid for with money from English Nature, which hopes to be able to bring all Sites of Special Scientific Interest up to standard within the decade.





Fulbourn, a personal reminiscence by Colin Harris

Growing up in Fulbourn in the 1950's and 60's was very different to the present day in many ways: the village was smaller in population and everyone knew everybody else, but the area was the same. The major difference was that within the main part of the village there were fields, allotments, greens, orchards, and unmade roads. Televisions were only just becoming available to a few, and there were so few cars on the roads that 'taking car numbers' was quite a boring game and needed only one sheet of paper. Fulbourn seemed much further from Cambridge, as most people just went in on the bus on Saturday mornings, apart from those who worked in Cambridge, and they mainly cycled.

Exploring the village and surrounding areas became a great adventure for us local boys. There was so much to do, see and discover. Most Saturday mornings we would gather together by going to everybody's house to see who was coming out. I lived in the old prefabs (not to be confused with the 'flat tops' - the new concept estate which I saw built in the sixties) and two of my 'mates' lived there as well, so we started with two or three of the 'gang' straight away.

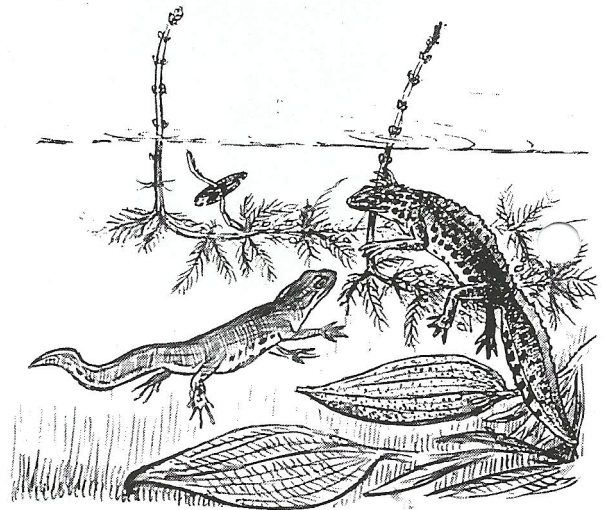
Usually we would head off in the direction of the 'rec', unless we had already made a decision to do 'down the fen, and duck pond', or along Babraham Road to the Gogs. Of course, all these adventures were on foot. Although we may have decided to go 'down the dyke', the progress was always affected by deviations and interesting discoveries along the route.

Mostly we would meander down the left hand side of the 'rec' beside the line of old Elm trees - a favourite nesting site of a large population of Jackdaws and sometimes Owls. As these trees had holes and crumbling bark they were good roosts for bats, which were numerous at dusk, feeding off insects around the trees. The field between the 'rec' and Stonebridge Lane was 'Moss's field', with one or two horses grazing. At the bottom was 'the pond' which was another good play area, with many stories surrounding it, making it a magical place.

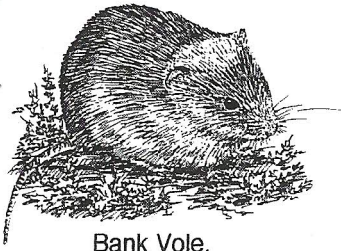
We would cut across to the corner, through the bluebell wood and down towards Hind Lodgers. (1) If not distracted too much, we would then continue past the haystacks which were always built in the corner of the field nearby. Here, threshing time was great fun as we could chase the mice that escaped when the stack was getting down to the last sheaves.

Then we would take the farm track by the stream along to the cow sheds at the start of the dyke. To our left over the stream was The Glebe, which was very marshy and full of snipe and other wetland birds. Within this area was the Newt Pond, aptly named and crystal clear. With the drainage of the marsh, all that was lost, of course.

Common Newts by Graham Easy:
the male, right, is in brightly spotted
breeding colours, with a crest along
back and tail.



Sometimes we would stop at the cow sheds for a while before starting our adventure along the dyke. As now, the width of the top varied, so the path was navigable in single file in some parts and two abreast in others. The slope on the Wilbraham side had some shrub - mostly blackthorn - and the gully to the Fulbourn side also had patchy bushes including bits of blackberry and hawthorn. These, I can remember, were very tasty to a bunch of lads who by then had not eaten for two to three hours. We used to walk along the top to the rifle butts and further. Sometimes, without realising, we got as far as the Newmarket/London Road, now the A11, before we decided it was now mid-afternoon and we had better be making tracks back. I remember that to keep us going we would drink from the stream, and pull up a sugar beet, breaking it in two to eat the clean bit inside. We would often not straggle back home until teatime, but our parents did not seem too concerned.



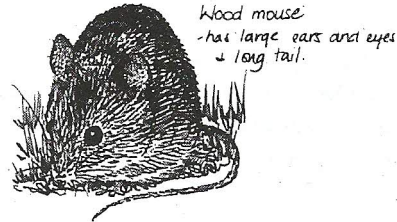
Bank Vole,
by Sarah Wroot

There was an abundance of wildlife there. There were hundreds of rabbits; but I remember the sorry state of those which had 'mixy', or myxomatosis, the virus introduced in the fifties to control the rabbit population. There were hares, occasionally stoats and weasels, and smaller furry things, such as voles and field mice, scurrying around. In the fields, especially in winter, were great flocks of lapwings, whilst overhead in spring and summer skylarks sang high above.

We developed an interest in 'cartridge hunting', which involved scouring the countryside, looking for spent cartridge cases to add to our collections. We built up collections of over 100 different kinds and makes - one lad with over 200! Very impressive. We had this odd sort of reasoning that the more obscure, far away, and difficult the place was to get to, the more likely we were to find a cartridge case that nobody else had got!

The craze developed into collecting 'bullets' when we learned that halfway along the dyke was this cut where an old army rifle range existed. The cut, at 90 degrees to the dyke, slicing straight through from Wilbraham direction towards Worsted Lodge, was in fact an old railway branch line, long since gone. (2) At the start of the Second World War, the cut had been bridged with a mound of earth in order to create a rifle range. Targets were put up against the side of the mound and fired at from the Worsted Lodge side. Since the chalk composition of the bank was soft, the bullet heads would go through the targets into the chalk, and some would still retain their shape. The shell cases could be found on top of the butts, and when 'brassoed' and put together - in a clip if you were lucky - became a prize find.

We spent many days this way, especially in the summer holidays, and discovered many interesting things. The dyke gave us views over the fields, and we were often the only people there. I think it helped develop an interest in wildlife, nature and, as we got older, thoughts about who made these immense earthworks, and to speculate on the reasons why.

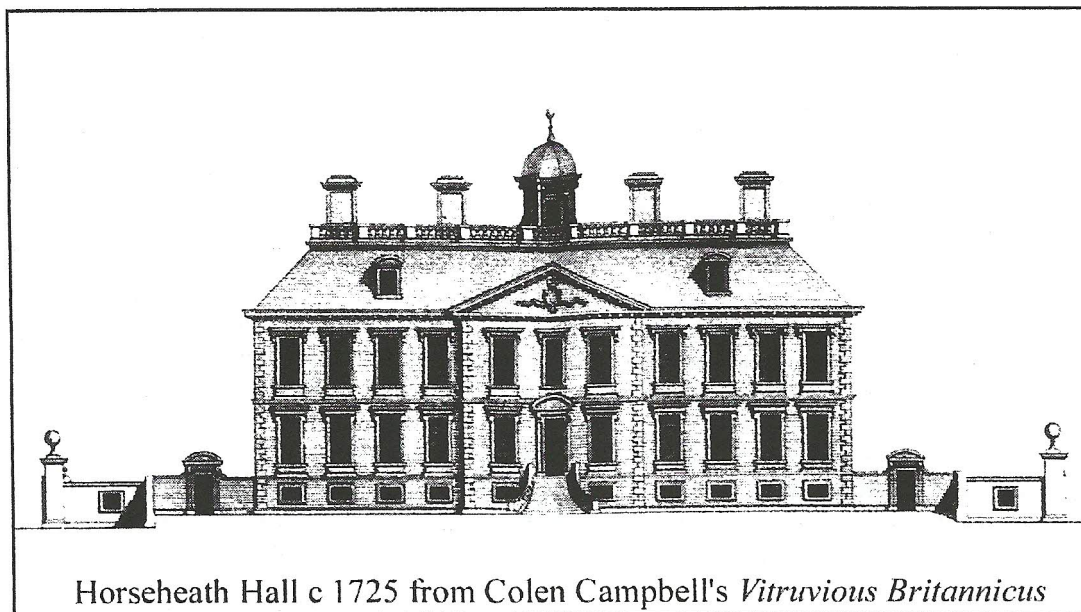


Wood mouse
- has large ears and eyes
& long tail.

- (1) Hind Loders is the name of the green lane which runs from the Balsham Road, near the White Hart, to Stonebridge Lane, or to the Fleam Dyke and other paths through the fields.
- (2) This was the Newmarket and Chesterford Railway, opened in 1848 as part of the London to Norwich network. After Eastern Counties Railway took it over, a different route was preferred, and the Newmarket-Chesterford line was closed in 1851, much to the annoyance of Cambridge racing enthusiasts. See Roger Wolfe's article in your carefully filed copy of Newsletter No. 9, May 2003 or consult A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, vol.5, Eastern Counties. D. I. Gordon. Newton Abbot, 1968

Colin Harris's article left me feeling very wistful. Lost worlds. So it was with great pleasure that I saw a flock of Lapwings wheeling above me as I went to take photos of the work on the Roman Road. There were many more feeding beside Black Headed gulls on the newly turned clods of earth in the fields. Not Snipe, I know, but a sort of consolation prize. Graham Easy very kindly supplied a drawing at very short notice. Julia





Horseheath Hall c 1725 from Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*

The Rise and Fall of Horseheath Hall by Janet Morris

Part 1 With a Sweet Prospect

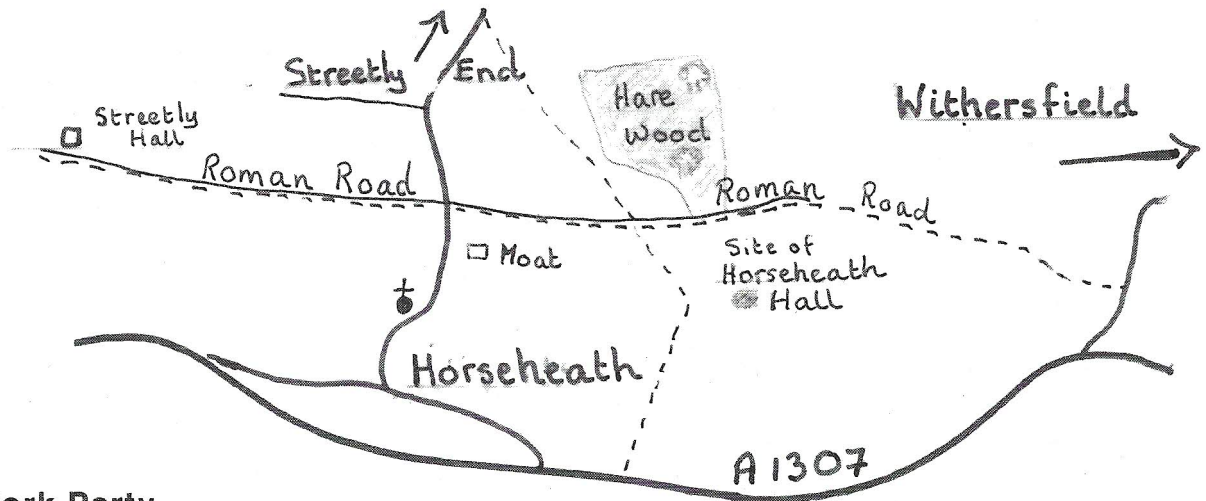
When you next walk along the Roman Road from Horseheath towards Withersfield, take a small diversion and enjoy the sweet prospect, admired by the 17th century diarist, John Evelyn. As you draw level with Hare Wood you will find a public footpath crossing the Roman Road. Downhill to the left is the hamlet of Streetly End; but take the right-hand path and head uphill towards the distinctive Cedar of Lebanon tree. At the highest point, as the footpath curves round and heads off to the A1307, stop and take in the lovely view towards Horseheath village and across the rolling countryside. You are now standing in front of the site of Horseheath Hall and you have just come along all that remains of its carriage drive.

In 1663 William, 3rd Lord Alington, commissioned the gentleman-architect, Roger Pratt, to build a new house to replace the Hall (visited nearly a century earlier by Elizabeth I) which may have been dilapidated and would probably have seemed rather old-fashioned by then. Pratt had spent the Civil War years travelling on the Continent to avoid the storm, and had come back with lots of new ideas, many inspired by the classical architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, that appealed to a prosperous gentry in the more stable times following the Restoration of Charles II. Horseheath Hall, which was one of only five houses known to have been designed by Pratt (none survive in their original form), was at the forefront of English Country House architecture and the height of modernity.

The site chosen by Pratt for the Hall was in the middle of the mediaeval deer park, separated from the village and elevated above the surrounding landscape - it was certainly intended to make something of a statement. The house was built of red brick with white Ketton stonework. It was symmetrical in design with a central pediment containing the Alington coat-of-arms and of a double-pile, construction i.e. two rooms deep, as opposed to the conventional single room depth of mediaeval and Tudor houses, for Pratt considered that this made the house warmer in winter and cooler in summer. However, perhaps his most influential innovation was to relegate the domestic offices and servants to a semi-basement, thus creating the divide between downstairs, and upstairs, which we now consider so characteristic of country house life. This arrangement allowed the hall, which had previously been a communal space for all the household (particularly for meals), to become an impressive entrance. The slated roof sloped to a parapet with a stone balustrade and had an octagonal cupola, possibly used as a sort of summer house for taking tea and admiring the view, which was topped by a large copper ball brought back by an Alington ancestor from the Siege of Boulogne in 1544.

Pratt also seems to have laid out the gardens. Recent archaeology has revealed enclosed compartments or walled gardens which are typical of the 17th century. These would probably have had gravel paths surrounding grass plots with trained fruit trees (Pratt ordered plums, pears, peaches, nectarines, apricots and figs) and flower beds along the walls. There would have been a kitchen garden and orchard and a bowling green for some leisurely recreation. The surrounding park may well have been planted in a similarly formal manner, as Evelyn, who visited the Hall in 1670, commended at least one stately avenue of trees as well as the sweet prospect, although he found the water defective! The Alingtons did not enjoy their new house and gardens for long. William died in 1684 leaving his young son, Giles as heir. The estate was then initially leased to John Bromley, a sugar planter from Barbados, and subsequently sold to him following the death of Giles in 1691, aged just 11. The Alington family had lived in Horseheath for some 300 years so this marked the end of an era.

FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED NEXT IN PART 2 - COMING SOON!

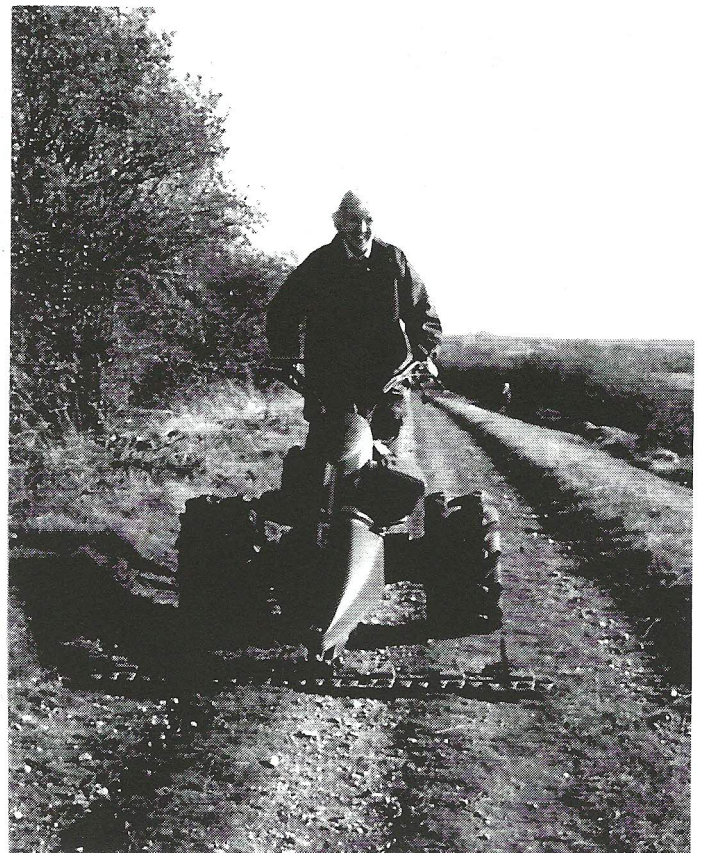


Friends' Work Party

On Sunday 15th February, a Friends' Work Party raked up the small brushwood left after Iain Hysom had done the main clearance, and also raked up a substantial length of scrub regrowth cut that day by Naomi. The day began in drizzle and turned to a brief downpour, but then cleared slowly to brilliant sunshine mixed with lowering grey clouds. Unfortunately, I forgot my camera, and so cannot pay a visual tribute to John Ady, Mike Albutt, John Dawson, Richard Fowling and Helen Chubb, David Seilly, Hazel Smith, Cassie Sparks, Liz Tym, Ann Waldock, and, of course, Naomi Brookes.

In lieu, here is Carol Bard in command of the Bank Commander, as promised in the previous newsletter, but not, alas, in digital brilliance. Many thanks to Mike Albutt for identifying why it is that I cannot print vertical photographs off disc. As usual, it seems likely that a high-tec. problem can only be solved if I can throw money at it: a modern version of the Dane geld! Julia

Carol Bard is one of the regular Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers who have done so much work on this and other sites managed by the Cambridge Green Belt Project.



An Invitation from a Friend

What follows is nothing to do with the Roman Road or the Fleam Dyke, but the author is an early member of the Friends and a lot of us share her desire to preserve what is left of our once abundant wild life.

Oxborough Hythe Nature Reserve

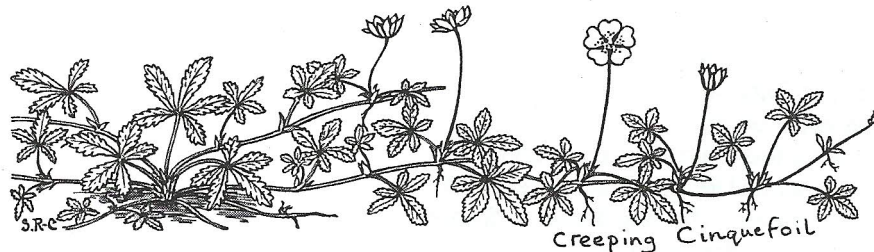
by Josephine Brearley

I had often thought how marvellous it would be to own a piece of rural England, so when the opportunity was recently presented to me, I jumped at it. I am now the proud possessor of 12 hectares (30 acres) of rural Norfolk.

My land was designated a County Wildlife Site in 1985. It is traditional Norfolk pasture land, which includes a fair bit of scrub, mostly hawthorn and blackthorn, enclosed by hawthorn and ash hedgerows. It is one mile from the National Trust estate of Oxborough Hall, and was part of the estate until 1951. It has been grazed for very many years, usually by cattle but occasionally by sheep. It is surrounded by arable land, neglected woodland, set-aside and drained marshland on the edge of Old Fen in the Wissey valley. It is interesting visually with its mounds and hollows, varying from 1m to 8m in depth. Some hollows are probably old marl pits, though they may have started life as pingos, hollows formed in the ice-age, and they are species-rich grasslands. These and other depressions usually flood naturally and the water attracts numerous over-wintering birds. Soils vary from peats to sands to chalk and marl, mostly in glacial drift overlying chalk, and these create varied habitats.

The whole site is very rich in wildlife, especially plants, with about 150 different species, birds (including nightingales) and butterflies. I am sure there are many other interesting bugs and beasties lurking there. If any of you would like to help me discover some of these other treasures, I would be delighted to hear from you. (tel: 01223 245421) or write to 14 Topcliffe Way, Cambridge CB1 8SH. If somebody would like to arrange a "day out", only one hour's drive from Cambridge, I would be happy to welcome you on site and show you round. "Ragwort Pullers" needed later.

Josephine A. Brearley,
22nd January 2004



Pain Free Recruitment Strategy

When you have read as much as you want of this newsletter, you have several options. You can file it in your deeply impressive and extensive filing system. You can add it to that pile of quarterlies which we all have somewhere near an armchair. You can put it in the recycling box, or, you can pass it to a neighbour. I understand that quite a few of you do this and as a result subscriptions from new members continue to arrive on my door mat. A new member who has just joined the Friends by this route wrote to say:

I took a local mate walking through the Fulbourn Nature Reserve and up to the first part of the Dyke, where the scrub has been cut back. It sounds rather foolish, but I was absurdly moved to see the narrow shape of the ridge emerging. Last time I walked there, I had no idea of its true structure, owing to the thick cover of scrub and undergrowth.

Congratulations!

On another occasion recently, I saw a pair of buzzards soaring over the area near the Ambush.

Cassie Sparks, 21st January 2004



Membership



If one takes an optimistic approach concerning the 20 or so members who have not yet paid their subscription for 2003, but I am sure will soon do so, our membership stands at about 250, including 8 of the 9 Parish Councils for the villages along the Roman Road; the West Wickham District and Local History Club; Linton Village College and Linton Village College Science Department. Subscriptions are due in April. If you would like to pay by Standing Order, please let me know. The subscription remains at £5 a year per household or £10 for Corporate Members. This covers the production and postage of the newsletter, office expenses and other small bills, leaving a small surplus, which this year was used to pay for extra work on Fleam Dyke.

Horse Sense: a suggestion by Vera Carroll

We walked along the Roman Road last week, 24th January, starting at the Cambridge end. Do we have any riders amongst the Friends? I am wondering if we could have a dialogue about riders not using the whole width of the track, but leaving one side "unchurned" for walkers in this muddy season of the year.

Vera Carroll also commented on the fly tipping at the entrance, just past the new barn. If you see rubbish which has been dumped anywhere, could you help us by reporting it?

Large quantities of builders rubble, dumped cars, old fridges, etc.,

please phone South Cambridgeshire D.C. Environmental Health Department on 01223 443146

The average unsightly mess:

please phone South Cambridgeshire D.C. Commercial Services on 01223 443484

Calling All Local Historians

Does anyone know why the **Ambush** on Fleam Dyke is so called?

When exactly were the Rifle Butts set up in the disused railway, and by whom? The Home Guard?



Annual General Meeting

Thursday April 8th at 7.30pm
at the Six Bells Public House, High Street, Fulbourn

There will be a brief business meeting, followed by illustrated talks on

Wetland Nature Reserves

Dr Stephen Tomkins, Head of Biology, Homerton College, and
Roger Beecroft, Wildlife and Countryside Services Consultant
will speak about **Kingfishers' Bridge**, a privately owned Wetland Reserve,
and

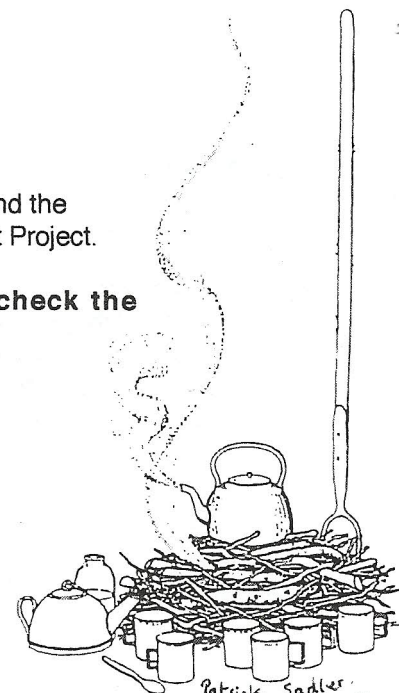
Adrian Colston, Property Manager of **Wicken Fen**, will speak about
the planned expansion this famous National Trust Reserve

Work Parties and Events

The Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers will be working on the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road this winter, as well as on other areas managed by the Green Belt Project. Good exercise in the fresh air/rain, and pleasant company over a picnic lunch.

Please ring 01223 712410 if you intend to come, in order to check the meeting place.

- Wednesday 17th March Clearance work on Fleam Dyke**
Wednesday 14th April Mowing and raking on Fleam Dyke
Wednesday 21st April Mowing and raking on the Roman Road
Wednesday 28th April Mowing and raking on the Roman Road



Sun 7th March, Helpers Wanted for Fulbourn Nature Reserve
First Sunday of every month. 10.0 am to 12.30 or so. Meet at Stonebridge Lane.
Contact: Nigel Copeman, e-mail: ncopeman@tinyworld.co.uk or phone Julia Napier.

Sunday 18th April, Friends' Work Party on Fleam Dyke
It is important to keep mowing and raking off the coarse grasses and woody regrowth in the newly cleared areas of the Dyke. Meet at 10.0am, Stonebridge Lane, Fulbourn. Stay for a couple of hours, or bring a picnic and work a bit longer.

Thursday April 8th 7.30pm A.G.M. at the Six Bells Public House, High Street, Fulbourn. Brief business meeting, followed by talks on Kingfishers' Bridge Wetland Reserve, and Wicken Fen National Trust Reserve. details on page 7

Talks Organised by the Cambridge City Group of the Wildlife Trust

These talks are held in the Gilmour Building of Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Please note that the entrance is via the drive beside 47 Bateman Street, **NOT** at the Bateman Street gate of the Botanic Garden. All talks are at 7.30pm. Entry: £1.50 for members of the Wildlife Trust, £2.50 for non-members

Thursday 26th February Iceland's Wildlife
An illustrated talk on the wonders of Iceland by **Michael Allen** of Wildlife Travel.

Thursday 25th March Arctic Wildlife
An illustrated talk by the well known conservationist, wildlife expert and author, **Bryan Sage**.

Thursday 29th April Farming and Wildlife
An illustrated talk by **Tim Parish**, Chairman of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Service in Cambridgeshire

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