

Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Twenty Four May - August 2007

Sixth Annual General Meeting, 12th April

As usual, this was held at The Six Bells Public House in Fulbourn. All the Committee were present, except for David Barden, who had leave of absence to get married. Our congratulations and best wishes to David and Katharine, and to Iain and Susie Webb, who were also married this spring - "the only pretty ring time, when birds do sing"

Over 70 people attended the meeting, and although Hugo White, the Landlord, brought in all the spare chairs from the restaurant, some people had to be turned away but others chose or offered to stand. The reason for this increased enthusiasm was not the thrill of the A.G.M. but because our members and also members of local history societies were very keen to hear Sam Newton's talk on the Fleam Dyke, and with good reason.

Chairman's Opening Remarks

Sam Agnew welcomed everyone to the meeting and summarised the achievements of the Friends during the previous year. We have used every penny of our Lottery Heritage Initiative grant. Five Information Boards and at least 4 dog bins will be installed on the Roman Road by the end of July; we have printed 5,000 more of our Roman Road leaflets. (Available from the Tourist Office and from the Cambridge Preservation Society at Wandlebury.) There were 4 work parties during the winter season. A fortnightly Butterfly Transect walk on the Roman Road has been organised by Roger Lemon, and the Fleam Dyke Transect walk begun last year will now be done every week.

Our presence on the Steering Committee for the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke has enabled us to continue to press for a Traffic Restriction Order on the Balsham end of the Roman Road. This winter saw the installation of notices requesting voluntary restraint by motor cyclists, and 4 x 4 drivers. This is an essential step in the legal process leading towards a temporary or permanent TRO on the site. Roger Moreton, the Ramblers Association, commented that although slow and dispiriting, this process really could secure a TRO in the end. In addition we have a continuing membership of about 300 individuals.

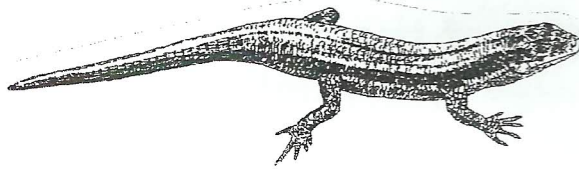
The Big Clearance

Sam then invited Peter Grubb to summarise the result of his discussions with Tim Barfield of Natural England. Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to adopt the most effective solution, which is to reduce fertility by seeding the site with *Bromus erectus*. This grass has the interesting capacity to reduce soil fertility over a period of years, even if it is not mowed and raked off or grazed. It was agreed that most scrub regrowth will be treated with a suitable chemical, which was done in June. Two areas on the south-east of Deadman's Hill, (the highest point of this section of the Roman Road) were to be excluded from this treatment and the scrub allowed to regrow. These sections are marked with posts on the south hedge. Apart from that, the plan to flail the regrowth three times a year will continue until 2008. This decapitates any of the flowering plants we should like to see, such as common knapweed, which is frequent to abundant in most areas of the cleared section and the few surviving chalk grassland flowers such as hoary plantain, salad burnet and restharrow. It is therefore inevitable that site will develop into the mesotrophic grassland such as can be seen on any roadside. Local farmers have offered to plant tall shrubs in two field corners.

4 Report by the Green Belt Project Manager

Iain Webb summarised the routine work done this year by the Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers and the Friends, which consists of mowing, raking off and clearing scrub regrowth. He was pleased to be able to say that all the target areas of the two linear sites were in good condition, with an increasing quantity of calcareous flora. He gave examples of the interesting species noted during the year: the common lizard seen for the first time on the Roman Road north of Worsted Lodge; green hairstreaks seen again last May; chalkhill blues established, we hope, on the Fleam Dyke; and, seen in August on the Roman Road, the wood ant, a rare species with a large glossy black head and a most interesting life style. Iain doubted our passion for ants. Prove him wrong, Friends!

Common Lizard, drawing by Sarah Wroot



5 Report by the Treasurer

Mike Albutt presented the accounts to the meeting, which accepted them without question, even though the secretary had clearly attempted to make off with £230 40. Paul Williams had been prepared to audit our accounts for us last year, but he was very busy, so Louise Bacon suggested that we should appeal to Kevin Harris, who audits the Bird Club accounts. Kevin Harris very kindly checked and approved them, which is a valid alternative to a full audit.

6 Election of Committee Members

Sam Agnew said he did not want to outstay his welcome, but he was happy to serve for another year. He was unanimously re-elected. He thanked the meeting and introduced our three new committee members: Peter Grubb, Roger Lemon and David Barden. He then proposed that the rest of the committee should be elected by general consent, which was done. Sam thanked all the members of the committee for their help. During the interval, Jane Robson took subscriptions, and welcomed new members.

After an interval for refreshments, which thanks to Hugo White included bar service, those who were able to sit down did so. Our apologies to those who could not. There was no way of knowing how many people would come, and no suitable alternative hall..

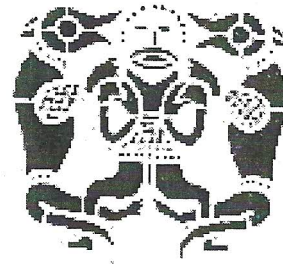


Work Party on the Roman Road, 4th March. Still staggeringly cold, which is why we were teasing Iain Webb about his amazing ability to wear shorts in all weathers.

Left to right: Cassie Sparks, Ann Waldock, Iain Webb, David Seilly, David Barden and Richard Fowling.

The Fleam Dyke and the Founding of the Kingdom of East Anglia,

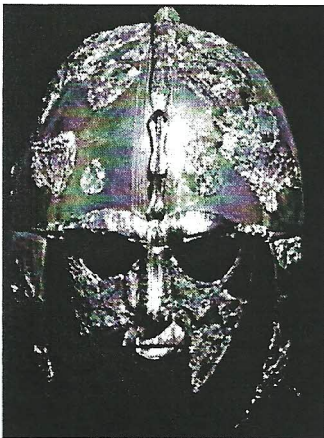
by Sam Newton



Sam Newton's talk on the Cambridge Dykes included a slightly dizzying range of references to historical and legendary figures, and to a series of small kingdoms with fluctuating borders and allegiances, which through battles and alliances gradually settled into the Kingdom of England. The Devil's Dyke, the Fleam Dyke and some smaller defence barriers played a major part in this story.

Dating from the time of the formation of the kingdom of East Anglia during the fifth and sixth centuries these earthworks formed successive defensive lines facing south-west, with their flanks secured by forest and fen. Known as Dykes or Ditches, they include Bran [or Heydon] Ditch, Brent Ditch, Fleam Dyke, Devil's [or St Edmund's] Dyke, and the Black Ditches. Because the fens have largely disappeared and the former wildwood has been lost, the strategic design is no longer clear; but at the time of their construction these defences ran across the chalk ridge 'from the water to the wood'.

The great height and length of the Devil's Dyke and the Fleam Dyke implies a considerable degree of skill in planning and building. For example, the angle of both dykes was chosen to make them resistant to weather. The building of this major strategic line must have been a royal undertaking, utilising the resources of the whole kingdom. By analogy with the building of the mid nineteenth-century railway embankments, it may be estimated that it would have taken about a thousand men a year to build a single one-mile section.



Sam Newton has a wonderfully inclusive approach to his subject. His knowledge of Anglo-Saxon history, literature and archaeology illuminates one's mental map of East Anglia. All sorts of ruins and legends are connected as he speaks, and there emerges a picture of a powerful dynasty of Saxon kings who ruled Suffolk and Norfolk, built great religious monuments and left a wonderful treasure trove in the graves at Sutton Hoo. Until someone finds a stone inscribed with the words, 'Here lieth ..', we cannot know exactly who is buried there, but Dr Newton makes a very convincing case for a ruler called Raedwald, and also for his place in our history as the first overlord of England north and south of the Humber from roughly 617 - 625 AD.

Reconstructed Helmet from Sutton Hoo.
British Museum

The burial mound uncovered in 1939 was not the grave of any small time war lord. The objects buried at Sutton Hoo include gold clasps of extraordinarily intricate design, inlaid with hundreds of garnets, and lapis lazuli from India; a set of very beautiful Roman spoons, and silver bowls from Byzantium, engraved with XR for Christos, presumably given to King Raedwald when he was christened in Kent in 605 AD. (It was not a very sincere conversion. On returning home, he erected two altars, one to the ancient gods and one to Christ. Shortly after, according to Bede, he returned to his wicked ways. 'So that his last state was worse than his first.' His wife remained pagan anyway just in case!)

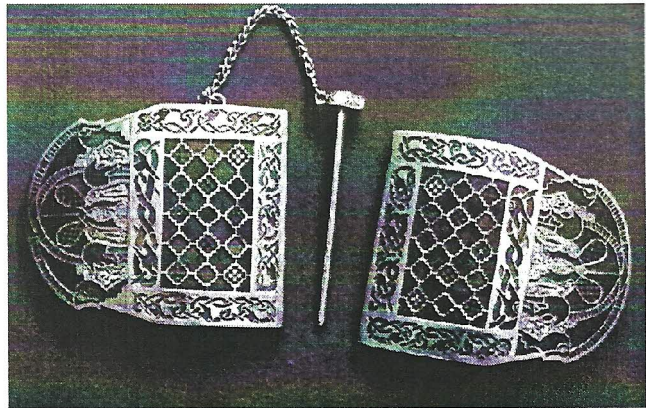
Sam Newton's lecture cruised rapidly past all sorts of ideas and images which did not before seem connected. The Wuffings, whose name means Kin of Wolf or Little Wolf, took their name from Raedwald's grandfather, Wuffa or Wolf. (Offa is a nickname, a variant of Wuffa.) Bardic genealogies show that Wuffa was, rather usefully, a descendant of Caesar and even of the Norse God, Wodin himself. According to legend, the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, were suckled by a she-wolf. It was natural, therefore, that a wolf should be found guarding the head of St Edmund, the last of the Wuffings, following his defeat and death in battle against the Danish Great Army in 869 AD. The animal and man motif from Sutton Hoo, above, may represent a Wuffing defended by wolves.

After the Vikings had done their worst and the Normans had embarked on their astonishing building spree, little remains of the early Saxon forts, churches and monasteries in this area. Here part of a Saxon cross, there remnants of a shrine dedicated to a devout Saxon princess with an implausible name. Yet certain less physically solid things remain. The saintly Abbot Botwulf who built a church at Iken, Suffolk, c 670, is commemorated in over sixty churches, as well as in the town name Boston or Botolph's town. Fragments of wonderful poetry survive, including just one copy of the great epic of Beowulf, which Dr Newton believes to be associated with the East Anglian kings.

In 2006 the Fitzwilliam Museum astonished visitors with a display of illuminated manuscripts, including a darkened room full of Bibles and other religious books from the Saxon period, rampant with artistic invention and gleaming with gold foil: a sudden, vivid reminder that the Saxons did not inhabit Dark Ages. It is just that we have lost most of what they created, except for objects like the Sutton Hoo treasure, and two enormous earthworks.

Shoulder clasp from the ship burial at Sutton Hoo, made of gold, garnets and lapis lazuli. One of the illustrations from Sam Newton's excellent website at www.wuffings.co

British Museum



Meeting at Pampisford Hall

On 26th March, there was a second meeting of the various people who own, manage or have a legal responsibility for or a major interest in aspects of the Roman Road. We are all indebted to Miss Arabella Binney for her hospitality, and to Tim Barfield from Natural England for organising the event. As happened on the first occasion, there was a fairly swift eruption of critical comments from the land owners and managers, one of which I should like to deal with at once. (I hope I may use the collective term of 'farmers'.) I was very sorry to hear that some of the farmers were angered by what they read in the previous newsletter. "I go to all this trouble, and there is nothing but criticism. I never read anything in favour of the farmers."

There are two reasons for this.

- a) There are many walkers and wildlife lovers who loved the peaceful, sheltered path between high hedges with its birds and occasional views of a wider landscape. They did not want a forty-foot wide green track with suburban hedges. Many of them have joined this society. The newsletter represents their views.
- b) I do not attempt to comment on the regular and most useful work of hedge-cutting and mowing done by the farmers all along the Roman Road because I do not know the details, and did not think it was my territory. I will try to rectify some of this now.

When Naomi Brookes first told me of the agreement to cut back hedges and clear scrub, I was delighted. The Roman Road has always been maintained in one way or another by the local farmers and I am sorry that this invaluable work has gone unacknowledged. Indeed, it appears that scrub would not have become such a problem if English Nature (now Natural England) had not intervened in the 1980's, instructing farmers not to follow their usual routine. (I assume the local English Nature officer hoped to provide a more selective mowing regime which would protect the dwindling stock of rare flowers.) The new, more environmentally favourable subsidy schemes offer a more permanent and efficient solution than work done by groups of volunteers, supplemented by contractors paid by intermittent grants. A plan was drawn up. The farmers wanted to help, and started immediately on hedge cutting. Wonderful. I imagined that there would be considered clearance carried out in stages, with rotational mowing such as has been carried out over 15 years by the Green Belt Project.

I only recently saw a copy of the Management Plan that was signed in the autumn of 2005. It seems surprising that it was not circulated. Apart from inaccuracies in the list of significant flora present on this section of the Roman Road, and the continuing reference to the grizzled skipper, which has not been seen on the road for many years, it seems to be to have been a very good plan. One wonders why it was not carried out.

The unfortunate result of this is that farmers who did the work are being blamed by the general public and the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke for doing things that they were asked to do by Natural England and the then Cambridge Green Belt Project Officer.

But Not Everyone Disapproves!

There are some walkers who much prefer a wide open area. 'Marvellous views!' said a man who had moved from London. More to the point, for farmers plagued by rabbits, the clearance work was a totally good thing and did not go far enough. Thick scrub filled with brambles prevents access to rabbit warrens. The acute need to reduce rabbit numbers has, in previous meetings, come up against three apparently immovable objections. The Roman Road is open to the public at all times. It would be unfortunate if courting couples or moth trappers got peppered with shot, so the Countryside Access Officer has to refuse permission. Gas has a tendency to leak into the burrows of various small mammals which we want to protect, so Natural England cannot give approval. Ferreting needs to be combined with shooting. If a ferret gets stuck down a hole, its fond owner tends to dig it out. The County Archaeology team and English Heritage are obliged to refuse permission for ferreting in order to protect whatever may be left in the ground below a very ancient monument. This is when any farmer present says, 'What about the gas pipe line, then?' The Roman Road has indeed been knocked about a bit. Fortunately, the recent meeting at Pampisford Hall produced an agreement that a solution must be found. I understand that the Road may be closed for three weeks in the autumn while shooting is carried out.

Please Do Not Walk on Wildlife Margins!

This was an impassioned plea from one of the farmers south of Worsted Lodge, but it applies to all. Under the former Countryside Stewardship Scheme and now under the Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes a farmer can apply for a subsidy if he or she makes provision for wildlife in a variety of ways. This change in subsidy accounts for the beautiful flowery margins now to be seen at field edges all round the country. What I had not realised is that this margin is not for the public to enjoy or learn from, which seems to me rather strange, but those are the rules. **If the public are seen to be walking on a wildlife margin the farmer will lose his subsidy.** The farmer who told me this said, "I would rather people walked through my crop than walked on the flower margin." Please tell your friends and fellow walkers.



Field Poppy by W. H. Fitch

Progress on a Traffic Restriction Order?

In 2006, after a great deal of trouble and damage from so-called Travellers, against whom Suffolk and Cambridge police had just mounted a large operation resulting in several convictions for serious crime, the farmer concerned levelled that section of the Roman Road at his own cost and, on the advice of the police, dumped a load of builders' rubble to prevent access by caravans. He was soon told by the County Council that he had to remove the blockage because it is the legal duty of the Countryside Access Team to keep footpaths, bridleways and byways open. Instead, signs were put up asking for Voluntary Restraint. The result, as Vera Carroll reported to me and to the CCC in January, was a road almost worthy of Flanders in 1916. In April, the deep ruts were rock hard, but they soon filled with water again and made walking hard. The lower end of the flower-filled bank near Mark's Grave has been permanently damaged, with deep hard-packed ruts, and plants lost. The Voluntary Restraint signs had been taken down early on, and the post thrown in the ditch. So in June, John Cooper, Senior Access Officer for the County, organised a meeting at which James Kiddy of Yole Farm, Sam Agnew, Julia Napier and a representative of GLASS (The Green Lanes Association) met to view the scene.

Although it was quite clear that bikers and 4 x 4 drivers had wrecked a pleasant country walk for the rest of us, the GLASS representative tried to make it appear that two foot deep ruts were not a problem. He had had no difficulty balancing on the slippery crests of the ruts. Look, he was even wearing quite ordinary shoes. He also had a remarkably specious argument as follows: members of the AA break the law on ordinary roads. If a few members of GLASS break the rules on our green lanes, it is no different. Sam pointed out politely that GLASS had 30 members in Cambridge, whereas we represent 300 people. Unfortunately, GLASS and similar associations are well organised, able to afford these large cars, and prepared to fee lawyers to exploit outdated laws and defend their 'right' to drive in good and bad weather on unsurfaced roads quite unsuited to such use.

According to GLEAM, the Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement, there are numerous parish councils which are desperate to have a TRO on all their green lanes. They cannot cope with the damage and they cannot fight endless legal battles. Since parish councils are the basis of our democratic system in this country, it would seem logical for our County Council to act on this knowledge and attempt to find a compromise between the law, and the majority of citizens for whom and by whom these laws are made. John Cooper said he would try to find a way forward. Maybe it would help him if the eight parish councils which are Corporate Members of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke made their views known to the County Council.

And that brings to an end the official business of this newsletter. Time for a detective story.
Julia Napier

The Bedford Gap Mystery

by Janet Morris

....here was trained the celebrated racehorse "Eclipse", and the Bedford Gap was cut in the [Fleam]dyke...for the purpose of his training. In the Jockey Club at Newmarket, I am told, there is a picture of Eclipse standing by this gap – although usually taken to be the gap in Devil's Ditch.

These are the words of the Linton antiquarian, Dr William Palmer from a lecture he gave to Linton WI in 1921. I have long thought that this tantalising snippet of information warranted some further research – was Bedford Gap really cut for Eclipse and what about the painting? So, prompted by a request from the Secretary/Editor for an article for this newsletter, I decided it was time to do something about answering these questions.

I began with Eclipse who certainly turned out to be a 'celebrated racehorse', descended from no less than two of the three horses who are considered to be ancestors of the modern thoroughbred racehorse: Godolphin Arabian and Darley Arabian. (See Newsletter, Feb. 2007) Eclipse was foaled in 1764 (during a total eclipse of the sun) at the Windsor stables of the Duke of Cumberland. He was sold after the Duke's death in 1765 and his eventual owner was a rather colourful character and hard gambler, Colonel Dennis O'Kelly. Eclipse ran his first race in 1769 and went on to comprehensively win all his races for O'Kelly before being 'retired' to studs in Surrey then Middlesex in 1771 – some 80% of today's thoroughbreds apparently have Eclipse in their pedigree! There he died of colic in 1789.

I have found nothing to date to indicate that Eclipse was ever permanently based in this area but he did race at Newmarket on more than one occasion. So, could he have spent any time in training near Fleam Dyke? It would have to have been sometime between 1765 when he left Windsor and his retirement from racing in 1771 and there was certainly a racing stable next to the Dyke at The Valley or Valley House (now Valley Farm) at that period. In 1763, Jenison Shafto of West Wrattling Park leased this area of unenclosed chalk heathland from Jesus College precisely to build these stables - the short, springy turf along the Icknield Way (A11) 'corridor' to and around Newmarket long being considered ideal for training and racing horses. Shafto, who contemporary William Cole described as 'the chief and great support of Newmarket, being reckoned the nicest calculator and most artful gamester of any on the turf', already owned another stables nearby at Oxcroft Farm, which must mean that a great swathe of land adjacent to the Dyke was once given over to the breeding and training of racehorses. Could Eclipse have been one of them?

Well, this is where a problem arises and the usually reliable Dr Palmer seems somewhat adrift. Cyril Fox, his partner in the archaeological excavations at Fleam Dyke in 1921, said in his report in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* that Fleam Dyke was cut in 1763 – the year Shafto

acquired the lease but the year before Eclipse was born! Unfortunately, he gives no source for this statement but this date has also been given, again without a reference, in the West Wrating entry in the Cambridgeshire *Victoria County History*. Nor do the archives at Jesus College seemingly contain any mention of the creation of a gap in the Dyke so the origin of this 1763 date remains unclear. Jenison Shafto did set out a trial race course to the east of The Valley and this is shown on John Chapman's map of Newmarket Heath dated 1768. The map goes no farther west than The Valley House so does not show Fleam Dyke itself but if the course continued in the same direction to and through Bedford Gap it would have had to cut right across the horse paddocks and this would seem unlikely. On the other hand, there could have been a second trial course to the west and Bedford Gap would certainly have been wide enough for this.

What about the name 'Bedford' Gap? Does that help? As is common with those who gamble heavily, Jenison Shafto lost more than he won and took his own life in 1771. It is not clear whether The Valley passed to his brother, Robert, along with West Wrating Park, at this time but in 1793 the 5th Duke of Bedford took over The Valley part of the estate. The name most probably dates from this period but if the Gap was cut then it obviously could not have been for training Eclipse who had by then been dead for some four years. However, just because the Gap received its name then does not mean it could not already have been in existence. So, a bit of a brick wall.

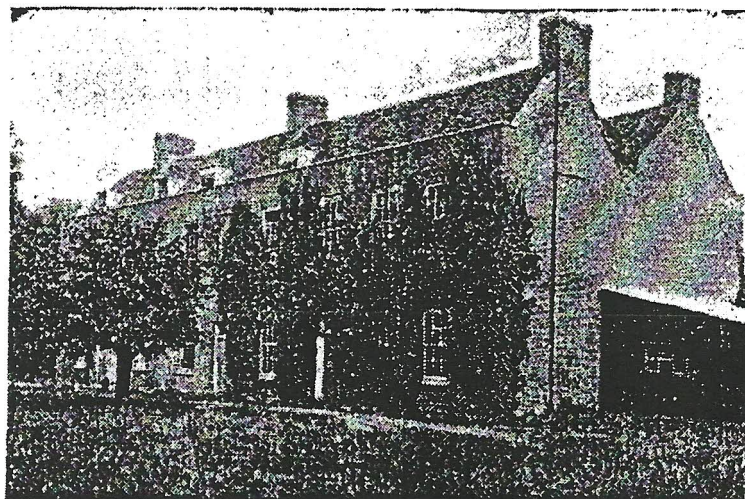
What about the painting in the Jockey Club? In its recent catalogue of paintings, there is one picture of Eclipse by J. N. Sartorius, which could have a dyke in the background and this could be Fleam Dyke but, apart from the fact that many of the backgrounds in these type of paintings are rather idealised anyway and often appear in more than one painting, this particular one was done in 1790, a year after Eclipse's death and therefore cannot be considered as any sort of evidence. It seems that the Bedford Gap mystery, as regards its dating and purpose for construction, is no nearer having a definitive solution. It does not seem very likely that it was cut specifically for the purpose of training the legendary Eclipse - the earliest date given (1763) pre-dates the horse and the date for the name (1793) post-dates him - but it may have been cut for the training of other racehorses. If anyone has any further information or suggestions I would love to hear from them.

April 2007



Bedford Gap today demonstrating that it was certainly wide enough for a trial race course. Oil-seed rape in foreground. All to the right.

Valley Farm from Dr Palmer's
The Neighbourhood of Linton 1921.
The house was rebuilt in the late 1920s



In the Good Old Days, on Mutlow Hill ...

by Bill Clark

In the February newsletter, there was a second item from Bill Clark, former Head Warden at Wandlebury, giving the dates for the building of the disused railway and the London to Newmarket train timetable which was published in 1848. He also included this vivid description of a prize fight. Both these items were published in the Fulbourn Chronicle of 1982, the editor of which had gathered the information from the Cambridge Chronicle.

One of those cruel and unchristian exhibitions called prize-fights, took place on Wednesday last, at New Shardlowes, about one and a half miles from Fulbourn. The parties and their friends and employers, with 300 persons concerned, came from the great nursery of gamblers, blacklegs, and pickpockets, by express trains for the purpose. The fight, which lasted two hours and a half, was witnessed by fifteen hundred well-dressed people, artists and labourers. The victor beat his antagonist so powerfully that the latter was carried off the ground, lifted more dead than alive into the railway-carriage, where he sat grinning "horribly, a ghastly smile" at his successful employers: for who can solve the mystery of gambling, or understand the feelings which prompt the gambling societies and the lovers of "game" in men to make the same use of them as of bears and badgers, dogs and cocks, for their amusement or gain, or for both; and who can understand the almost equal degradation of the courageous but mistaken men that hire themselves to such people, and get a very precarious livelihood at the very great risk to their own lives To illustrate the character of the attendance, we may add that the referee himself had his pocket picked by some of his companions, losing both his watch and purse.

Bill adds: As regards the prize fight on New Shardlowes, I wondered 'Why New Shardlowes Farm?' And then wondered if it is to do with Mutlow Hill being on the edge of the farm and in easy walking distance of Balsham Station - others call it Balsham Road Station. They would need a steep slope for that amount of folk to be able to see the goings on. So watch out for gold sovereigns when next a work party is on Mutlow. Could it be a way of encouraging helpers to attend! And isn't it interesting reading between the lines of the Cambridge Chronicle's correspondent? It was still not too out of the way to be cruel to bears, badgers, dogs and cocks. He would probably have been quite happy to put a sovereign or two on those out-comes.



Unfortunately, such violence continues, if without legal sanction.

For several weeks during the winter, anyone walking from Wandlebury to Worsted Lodge had to pass the stinking corpse of a badger which had not only been caught and killed but also skinned. This was not just sad and smelly. It was Wildlife Crime, and should be reported to the police with a specific request that the offence should be referred to the designated Wildlife Crime Officer. Steve Parnwell of the Badger and Otter Group was formerly the Wildlife Crime Officer for Cambridgeshire and set up a system to attempt to deal with such crimes. He points out that cruelty to animals does not stop there.



Julia Napier

Badger. Natural England Image library

Nature Notes

Sheets of Rock Roses and Thyme on Fleam Dyke

In the section between the A11 and the Bedford Gap, there has been a really amazing increase in the abundance of these two species, which have spread down the banks on both sides, with a great deal of the starry white squinancywort at the top of the bank, and lots of carline thistle on the lower foot path (east side). There are so many, in fact, that a micro-moth has arrived to exploit the abundance, and many of the plants have had their heads eaten away. The big programme of scrub clearance, followed by annual mowing and raking off, is showing remarkable results. The presence of sheep on the site in 2003 made a big difference, although the relentless grazing and manuring of the top of the bank was damaging.



Rock Rose, from
Flowers of the Field,
C.A. Johns

Mutlow Hill has also become progressively more flowery every year: a tribute to regular mowing and raking off. However, old man's beard, the wild clematis, remains extremely persistent, so Rachel Gray and I conducted a small experiment after the autumn mowing had been done. We recut the tops of the plants over an area of about 15 x 5 yards and painted the surface with a strong mix of Root Out. There was very little regrowth this spring.

Unfortunately, the active ingredient in Root Out, Ammonium Sulphamate and all products containing it are being withdrawn. It can continue to be sold until 22nd November 2007, but it can be stored and used until 22nd May 2008. (Royal Horticultural Society website.) I understand that this is because the E.U. requires more extensive testing for safety than is carried out at the moment, and the manufacturers cannot afford the expense. Advice on alternatives is available from the RHS, which suggests products using glyphosate or triclopyr, specifically SBK Brushwood Killer, which has the advantage of being harmless to grass. However, glyphosate is the only chemical which does not linger in the soil.

Increase in Flowers on the Roman Road

On the northern section of the road, from Copley Hill to Worsted Lodge, the flowers were wonderful this summer. There were rock roses in full flower all the way along, especially on the east bank and several areas with abundant small scabious. Many flowers have spread and increased in quantity, particularly dropwort and bladder campion. The beautiful dark blue tufted vetch has appeared in more places, or so I thought. It is not specific to chalk grassland, of course, but it is a pleasure to see.

If you continue southwards from Worsted Lodge, up to the big sycamore at the top of the first rise, you pass long stretches of verge, especially on the east side, where the target flora has increased steadily. There is a wonderful increase in lady's bedstraw, small scabious and the slender yellow spikes of agrimony. The spread of restharrow is astonishing. In 2004 and 2005, I watched one or two small patches expand a bit. I was not able to visit the site in the summer of 2006, but there appears to have been a sort of restharrow take-over bid, with the plant cruising up the centre of the path and filling up empty edges. I do hope some of the pretty pink flowers survive the July mowing, and I understand that a better system is being considered by the Countryside Access team.



Agrimony
by W. H. Fitch

A lot of clearing and mowing on both these sections of the Roman Road was done in the 1990's by Sharon Hearle and the Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers. Iain Webb has continued the work, and the areas cleared of scrub with money from our Lottery grant between 2004 and 2006 have improved so much that you would never think how few flowers were there before. The area near the scots pine,

which was cleared in the nineties, is particularly good, with a lovely patch of quaking grass and lots of restharrow. There are also, of course, along the whole Roman Road, several plants which are very common, but very beautiful and useful to insects: greater knapweed, common knapweed, lacy white hedge bedstraw and the yellow umbellifer characteristic of chalk soil, wild parsnip.

After the big sycamore at the top of the rise, however, there is little to celebrate. The thick scrub has been replaced by a sea of thistles of all types, burdock and a thicket of the biggest plants of wild parsnip I have ever seen, some over six feet tall! Even if this section was mowed and raked off twice a year, it is hard to see how such a level of soil fertility could be reduced quickly. Further south, beside the Gunner's Hall path, a section of scrub was taken back to the hedge in 2005 and the residual flora then present has spread quite well, with lady's bedstraw, bartsia and some bird's-foot trefoil. On the rise up to Deadman's Hill, the highest point, the remaining layer of chippings has suppressed some weedy growth, and Tim Barfield's treatment in June with glyphosate has killed the hawthorn and blackthorn regrowth. The hill is free draining, of course, and the soil there is quite sandy, so fertility should be slightly less of a problem. Also the hill section had an existing stock of common knapweed, with some hoary plantain, burnet saxifrage and salad burnet seen this winter, but the range is small. Even after the change to rotational mowing in 2008, which is part of the current plan, we were expecting this area to be mowed in July under the legislation for the maintenance of rights of way. Fortunately, the recent NERC Act, proposes that compromises should be reached in cases where rights of way legislation and the needs of biodiversity are in conflict. Not having managed a visit this week, I rang Patricia Lambert who said the latest by-ways cut had been much less drastic.

Purple Milk Vetch

David Barden is our Watcher for this rare plant. He sent the following note after a visit to Fleam Dyke on the 5th May 2007.

Astragalus danicus: a good scattering of plants (estimated as 50-60) on the section between Mutlow Hill and the old railway (TL545.544). There is a stretch over one metre long immediately NE of the footpath on the top of the dyke, and about 10m NW of the (now fallen) dead pine tree; more-or-less opposite the large rosa/clematis patch on the SW-facing bank. Most of the plants were very small (perhaps suffering from exposure and/or slight trampling due to the proximity to the path), and the majority (if not all) will be unlikely to flower this year. The plants I've noted before (on the anthill next to the path just NW of the pair of steps SE of the old railway) are still present, and one robust plant was in flower.

The plant still survives on the Roman Road in a few places, but it is not recorded south of Worsted Lodge. JN

Pyramidal Orchid

In 2005, David Harthill sent me a note to say that he had seen 12 pyramidal orchids on the Fleam Dyke, all on the eastern side, between the A11 and the Bedford Gap. Since then Rachel Gray has been our orchid and autumn gentian Watcher. Last year she reported seeing only 4 of these orchids, and this year, although she went twice in June and early July, she could only find one after a long search. A more recent visit accompanied by a sharp-eyed son, found only that one with its spike chewed off. By contrast, they were flowering in abundance on the top of the Devil's Dyke in late June, as were the lizard orchids. The autumn gentians were also down in number last year with only a few spikes emerging, or left unchewed by rabbits.



W. H. Fitch

Orchids are the unreliable film stars of the botanical world, behaving unpredictably and failing to turn up on time. I have been told, and told others, that they only flower once. However, this is not correct and appears to be a common misunderstanding. The safest thing seems to be to ask an expert for an article. Any offers?

Meanwhile, a quotation from Britain's Orchids by David Lang (Wild Guides) will provide an answer to be going on with. "Orchids are perennial, and during the winter die back to an underground tuber or root system, from which fresh leaves arise each spring.... Many orchids are monocarpic - that is they flower once and then die - being entirely reliant upon seed production for future generations. Other species will flower repeatedly over a decade or more, although not necessarily every year."

Bird Records, please!

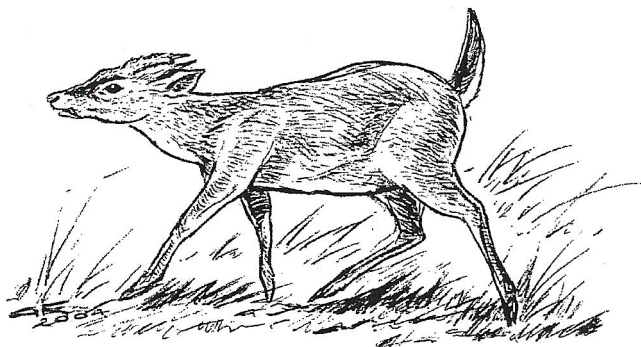
In 2001, Ivan Jones and Graham Young did a winter walk and a summer walk of the Roman Road, (Newsletter Two August 2001), and sent me notes from his winter walks on the Fleam Dyke in 2002 (Newsletter Five). In May 2004, Iain Webb, David Barr, Naomi Brookes and Rebecca Burt recorded birds seen and heard from the Gog Magog Hills to Mark's Grave. (Newsletter 14 August 2004), but we have not managed to achieve a systematic survey of birds on these sites. Since there has been a lot of scrub clearance, with an increase in flowering plants and grasses, it would be interesting to have had some sort of consistent recording. Quite a few people walk part of these linear sites regularly. If any of you would like to keep a simple record of what you see and hear on your walks over a whole year, I should be glad to receive them, especially if they could be sent in electronic form!

Grass snake

On June 22nd, David Bryce wrote to me about a walk along the Roman Road from the Hildersham-Balsham Road to the Fulbourn Road, with an interesting list of the birds and butterflies he had seen. It was the first time he had visited the site and he was impressed by the plant diversity and hence the different butterflies, which he says made the walk very interesting indeed. He saw the marbled white which I and Roger Lemon had seen in that rare sunny week, (see below) and he also saw a grass snake near the Golf Course, which is a first for our records.

Corn Bunting

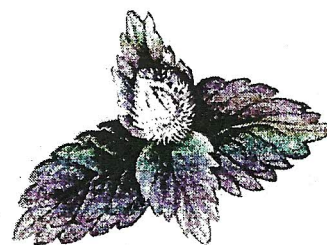
He was surprised to hear a corn bunting calling from a large beech tree on the way towards Copley Hill. Other bird lovers such as Margaret Rishbeth, Ivan Jones and Graham Young have also recorded the occasional corn bunting on both sites, and Iain's 'team' saw a total of 4 corn buntings on their walk along the Roman Road. I reported this to Louise Bacon at the Cambridge Biological Records Centre. She has received reports of corn buntings from various sites in the county, but as with almost all wildlife except for grey squirrels and muntjac, numbers are worryingly low. However, even here there is a ray of sunshine. Rumour has it that the demand for venison exceeds the official supply. Simultaneously there appears to be a reduction in the number of muntjacs, and it has been a very good year for oxlips.



Muntjac, drawing by Graham Easy.
No wonder it looks nervous!

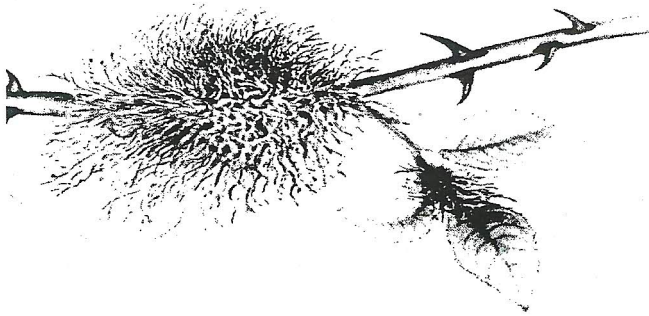
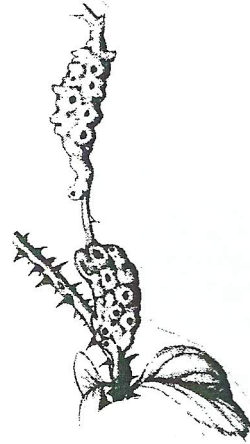
Amaze your Friends!

If you walk along the newly cleared area of the Roman Road from the Gunner's Hall path to the Hildersham Balsham Road, you will see several large patches of the beautiful blue germander speedwell with a strange furry bud instead of the seeds which you would expect to find in June or July. These are caused by a midge gall. If you split one open with your handy pocket-knife, or the universal thumb nail, you will find little orange grubs. This gives you the chance to remark to your friends in the manner of Sherlock Holmes, "Ah yes. It is as I thought. *Jaapiella veronicae*."



The laminated Field Studies Charts published by the Field Studies Council (£3 approx.) offer beginners' guides to all sorts of British species but A Guide to Plant Galls in Britain seems to me the one which offers the most instant rewards because the galls are so individual and so easily recognisable.

Those little red things in the middle of the wild carrot flower? *Kiefferia pericarpicola*, a midge gall. The rose leaf-roller that has invaded my roses this year? *Blenocampa phyllocolpa*, a sawfly. Those strange swellings full of holes on a bit of dead bramble? *Diastrophus rubi*.



And, of course, the familiar but extraordinary phenomenon known as Robin's Pincushion, caused by the gall wasp *Diplolepis rosae*. What happens next is one of those "Isn't Nature marvellous" stories, as a virtuous house-building gall wasp is exploited by vegetarian squatters who are in their turn eaten by two or three other species of parasitic insects. When you next see Robin's Pincushion, otherwise called the Bedeguar Gall, remember that what is going on inside is worse than the television series of 'Neighbours from Hell', and, for a bonus, *Diplolepis rosae* males are very rare and the female wasp produces eggs without mating.

Marbled Whites on the Roman Road again

On 20th June, I was walking back to Lodge Farm after doing a transect walk, when I saw first a marbled white male, and then a pale version of a clouded yellow. Marvellous! A new species for the Roman Road and a sign of happy butterfly days ahead! But, no! Just torrents of rain and all of us learning the name of a new menace: a change in the Jet Stream. No more marbled whites for us, I thought.

So I was astonished to see on July 24th not one but two marbled whites, male and female, in the same place at the top of the first rise as you walk up from Worsted Lodge to Wandlebury. Could the male have survived a whole month since I last saw it and still looked so handsome? I think not. Confirmation would be welcome. In any case, do take the same walk as soon as you can. The flowers are lovely, and a testimony to the work done by Sharon Hearle, Iain Webb and the Mid-week Volunteers over the last 15 years.



Marbled White on Field Scabious
drawing by Graham Easy

Mistakes and Apologies

Trainee mathematicians among you will have noticed that the newsletter published in February 2007 as Number 22, was actually Number 23. This edition is clearly on its way to being an amalgamation of the May letter and an August letter. Since we all have too much paper to read, the editor hopes to be forgiven.

But there is worse!

In Patricia Lambert's records of birds on the Roman Road, field fares and redwings were described as 'nesting' in the hedges and scrub, whereas they were of course 'resting', or would have been if the big sheltering hedges had been there last year. Apologies from this non-birder.

And, Good News! Information Boards and Dog Bins Now in Place

Our thanks to the united muscle power of Sam Agnew, Mike Albutt, Nigel Copeman, Mark Ricketts and Iain Webb.



Iain, Nigel and Julia at midnight with a semi-visible information board. Add some 'brightness' and we are more visible, if not at our best, but the board is invisible. Enough!

Where?

- One is at the junction between Babraham Road (Lodge Farm) and the Roman Road.
- A similar one is at Mount Lodge on the north side of the Worsted Lodge intersection with the A11.
- A slightly different board is on the south side of the Worsted Lodge intersection.
- There is a fourth board at the earth bridge where the Wood Lane footpath from Balsham crosses the Roman Road. This footpath is about 300 yards to the east of the Balsham-Linton Road, and it was placed there in the hope that it will not be damaged by the 4 x 4 drivers, bikers and other unwelcome visitors.
- The fifth board is in on the Haverhill side of the West Wickham-Horseheath Road where a metalled track leads past Hare Wood and the cedars of the vanished Horseheath Hall. It was hoped to install a board on the north side of the Roman Road at all points, so that Cambridge appears to the left of the reader. However, the northern verge here is needed for access by farm machinery, which is obviously of over-riding importance.

We are most grateful to all the landowners concerned for their permission to erect these information boards and install dog bins. There are now smart green dog bins at the Shelford Road (Worts' Causeway) junction with the Roman Road; at the Lodge Farm junction; and on both sides of the A11 intersection. Jon Gibbs, the Head Ranger at Wandlebury, has agreed to empty the bins for us, which is wonderful. We are waiting to hear if South Cambridgeshire D.C. will be able to empty bins at the Hildersham-Balsham Road and at the Horseheath end of the Roman Road, as previously agreed before the relevant budgets was threatened with a cut. However, Nigel Copeman and Sam Agnew have installed the Horseheath bin anyway, as Sam Agnew has agreed to empty it if necessary. This is rather beyond the normal duties of a Chairman, and is very kind of him.

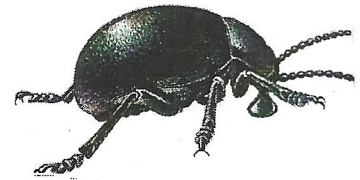
Information about What?

The panels were designed for us by Shelley Signs, Shropshire, who took on the order at rather more than the last minute when it became clear that the artist we had hoped to work with was not able to comply with our specification. Basic information about the history and archaeology of the Roman Road and its importance in terms of flora and fauna is conveyed in blocks of text which remain the same on all panels. The map is a simplified version of an Ordnance Survey map, with some of the many footpaths round Horseheath cut out in the interests of clarity. For the same reason it does not include details of the Harcamlow Way. I hope long distance walkers will forgive this ruthless streamlining!

The colourful pictures of flowers, birds and butterflies (with a token bee and two token beetles!) were chosen to help walkers learn more about the site. The selection varies as the flora and fauna of the Road varies, although this was impossible to do with any exactitude. In the middle of each panel is a box with historical information relevant to that section and each panel has a bloody-nosed beetle at the bottom.

Why the Bloody Nosed Beetle?

Because it is everyone's favourite beetle and the artist liked it! This easily recognisable black beetle is a member of the family of leaf beetles. It can often be seen in spring, plodding steadily across areas of bare soil on the Roman Road, so it is shown plodding along the bottom of our boards. If alarmed it sheds a drop of 'blood' from its nose. Ladybirds also do this, and certain caterpillars spit alarming green juice. (The puss moth larvae spit formic acid.) Yet even when you know it is harmless, the effect is startling.



The panels are guaranteed for 6 years, which in effect means a lot longer. Spray paint can be removed with a special solvent. The surface is fairly tough but it can be scratched by the sort of person who carries a Stanley knife for this purpose. However, if that happens, water will not enter the adjoining surface. If, or rather, when a panel has been decorated by bird droppings or aphid honeydew, a wet cloth and washing up liquid is all that is needed.

Adopt a Board!

These days you can 'adopt' a snow leopard if that is where your heart lies, so if anyone feels moved to 'adopt a board' and keep it clean, we should be delighted. Let me know.



Work Party on the Fleam Dyke, November 19th 2006.
Both autumn work parties were amazingly warm!

Rachel Gray, Helen Chubb and David Waterhouse taking a break. Richard Fowling, Iain Webb and David Seilly were still mowing and raking.

Join us next autumn!

In Memoriam

Roger Clarke 1952 - 2007

When the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke were set up in April 2001, Jane Fenton offered to become our Treasurer for the first year and when we needed an auditor for our accounts, Jane asked Roger to do the work for us. This was rather unfair as he was already auditing the accounts of four other wildlife groups, but he very kindly agreed. He did our accounts for 4 years and, in addition, gave us a wonderful talk about hawks and owls. So it is with great regret that we learned that he had fallen victim to lung cancer, although he had never smoked. His death on 28th January at the age of 54 deprives the world of Natural History of a remarkable expert on birds and raptors for whom a small accountancy practice was a way to spend time watching Montagu's Harriers. He is known more particularly for his scientific work on raptor feeding ecology. As a non-birder, this did not mean anything much to me until I saw his work bench with the pellet of a Merlin being gradually sorted into the skeletons of a dozen larks. Roger Clarke was also a musician and a collector of wildlife art. His death is a loss to ornithology world wide, and more especially to his widow, Janis and his children, Mostyn and Bethan. JN



Robert Finch 1939 - 2006

Another friend of the Friends was Robert Finch who was an early committee member and an enthusiastic supporter of the Friends. My thanks to Henry Arnold for permission to use the obituary he wrote for Nature in Cambridgeshire.

Bob Finch, who sadly died of cancer on 18 December 2006, will be fondly remembered by all who knew him, especially by the Cambridgeshire botanists and bryologists who worked with him.

Bob's interest in natural history began when he was young, and this interest was encouraged at Hastings Grammar School. He published his first paper, on the plants of roadside clinker heaps, in the Hastings and East Sussex Naturalist in 1958, when he was 19. From school, Bob went to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he followed his degree with a D. Phil. on the cytology of the genus *Leontodon*. After a year as a lecturer at Newcastle, Bob moved to Cambridge, to work on the cytology and genetics of barley at the Plant Breeding Institute at Trumpington. He worked there, publishing over 30 papers on barley, until 1985, when, along with many of his colleagues, he was made redundant.

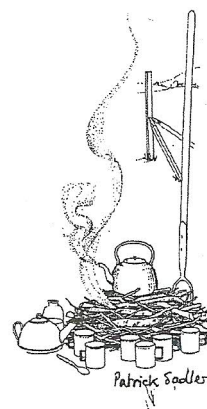
Bob continued to study *Leontodon* at Cambridge, and was also a very keen bryologist (he discovered two species new to Britain), attending many British Bryological Society local group field meetings in Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. Those who attended meetings with him knew that he would always be smiling and always be helpful, especially to beginners who might otherwise be daunted by the problems of identifying bryophytes. Bob was old-fashioned and refused to enter the 'computer age'. Anything he undertook would be done with meticulous care.

I got to know Bob when he spent two years (1987 - 1989) at Monks Wood, working on the Atlas of Bryophytes. It was always a pleasure to talk to him; I never heard him say a bad word about anyone, and the only time he came anywhere near being cross was when he discovered some apparent error in work that he had done himself. I met him from time to time after this period, and always gained something from our conversations. He will be very much missed, by those who, like me, did not know him very well, as well as by those who knew him much better.

The Mid-Week Conservation Programme

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 01954 713500 if you intend to come



Friends' Work Parties and Events

The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke run work parties on four Sundays in winter to help with scrub clearing, mowing and raking on the sites. We meet at 10.00am and walk or share transport to the site. We break for coffee and talk after an hour or so, and then leave towards lunch time or bring a picnic lunch and stay on until 2.30 or 3.0pm. It is a nice way to be out in the open on a winter day and one quickly gets warm even on a cold day. The two work parties before Christmas in October and November 2006 were amazingly warm, as the photograph shows. The two work parties after Christmas were rather cold, (see page 2). The second, on Fleam Dyke, was accompanied with dramatic lighting effects, as sudden gusts brought snow swirling across the countryside for a brief blizzard followed by brilliant sunshine.

Dates have not been fixed yet, but I will email the usual suspects when I know. If you would like to join us, please get in touch.

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: members of the Wildlife Trust, £2; non-members, £3

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|------------------------|--|
| Thurs 27th Sept | That Sinking Feeling - in the North Sea
A talk by Pat Doody on subsidence, coastal erosion and sea levels |
| Thurs 25th Oct | The Fascinating World of Moulds
A talk by Henry Tribe about this essential and beautiful part of the natural world |
| Thurs 29th Nov | Antarctica, Climate Change and You
An update from Jonathan Shanklin on work by the British Antarctic Survey |

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