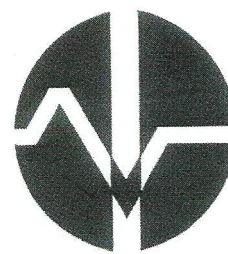


Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, May 2008

Newsletter Number Twenty Six



On Fleam Dyke, north of Mutlow Hill, not far from the Disused Railway, is a sudden dip in the bank. Does anyone know why?

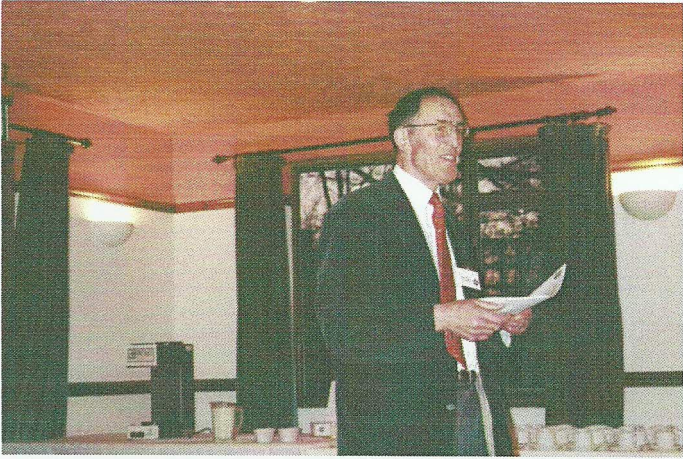
This section has the richest flora of the dyke. The blue flowers mainly to the left of the photograph are Clustered Bellflower. The tall purple flowers are Common or Black Knapweed. The shorter yellow flowers are Rough Hawkbit, and the taller one is Hawkweed Oxtongue, with its typically wavy-edged leaves. The white umbellifer is Burnet Saxifrage. The small white flowers in the background are Eyebright. Purple Milk Vetch grows further along, 'behind you' as you look at the picture. Autumn Gentians emerge here in August and Bastard Toadflax grows among Thyme and other small plants.

The only resemblance between Bastard Toadflax and Common Toadflax is in the narrow leaves. The plant is the sole British member of the Sandal-wood family: a group of mainly parasitic plants, shrubs and trees.

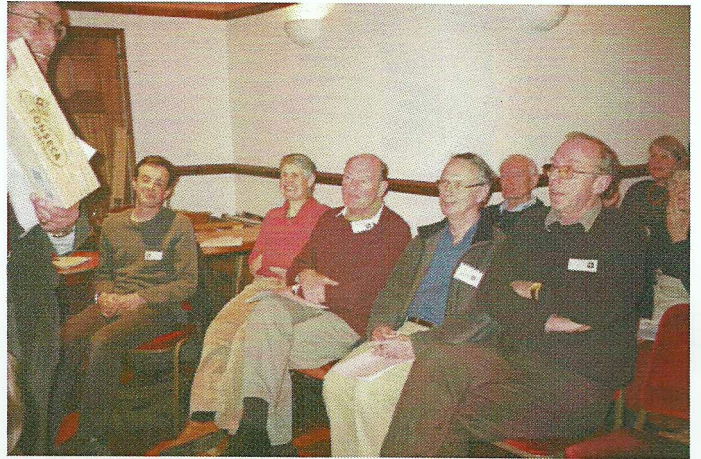
Do go and see the flowers this summer, if you can. Park in the layby on the A11. Follow the footpath up onto the dyke to the left, or go over the footbridge, and it is all yours!

Photo by Jack Harrison

Committee Members and Volunteers 2006 – 8



Sam Agnew, Founder and Chairman of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, at the AGM in April 2008.



Some members of the committee. Front row from left, David Barden, Nigel Copeman, Michael Albutt and Roger Lemon



Mark Rickets, local Wildlife Trust Reserves Officer, helped Iain Webb erect four of the dog bins, May 2007



Fleam Dyke Work Party, November 19th 2006. From right, Helen Chubb, Julia Napier and Rachel Gray



Nov 11th 2007 Work Party mowing and raking the raised bank (agger) next to the Golf Course in order to help the flowers, especially Rock Rose and Lady's Bedstraw.



Iain Webb, back row left; David Seilly, back row second from right, with Cassie Sparks, front left and students from Anglia Ruskin University.



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, May 2008

Newsletter Number Twenty Six

Seventh Annual General Meeting, 12th April, 7.30pm

The meeting was held at the Six Bells Public House, High Street, Fulbourn, where Hugo White looked after us with his usual cheerful efficiency.

Present: Chairman, Sam Agnew; Treasurer, Mike Albutt; Secretary, Julia Napier; Membership Secretary, Jane Robson with committee members: David Barden, Nigel Copeman, Roger Lemon, David Seilly and about 60 members of the Friends.

1 Apologies were received from committee members: Peter Grubb, Rob Mungovan, Iain Webb and other members.

2 Chairman's opening remarks

Sam Agnew welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a summary of the achievements of the Friends over the previous year. The Friends had continued to attend the Steering Group for the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Linear Sites, which is chaired by Tim Barfield of Natural England.

The Management Plan for the Roman Road, which was drafted by Rachel Pateman of the Wildlife Trust, received the close attention of the committee in autumn 2007. Numerous suggestions and amendments were suggested, very many of which are due to the expert knowledge and tireless attention to detail of Professor Peter Grubb. The management plan has now been submitted to the landowners for their comments and, it is to be hoped, their approval. The committee are concerned that despite considerable time and expense the plan is not yet ready to be implemented.

Following several years of hard work, Sam was pleased to report that a **Seasonal Traffic Restriction Order (TRO)** should be in place by the coming winter on the section of the Roman Road between the Balsham-Linton road and Mark's Grave on the West Wrattling to Bartlow Road.

Despite the delay last year caused by the need to find a different designer for the information boards, summer 2007 saw the production and instalment of **Five Information Boards** on the Roman Road. Numerous favourable comments have been received about these boards, which should help walkers to enjoy its wildlife and history. Five dog bins have also been installed along the Roman Road.

3 Report on work parties

David Barden, standing in for Iain Webb, reported first on the work carried out on the Roman Road. Five work parties have been carried out over the winter, with a total of 57 volunteers attending. Mowing and raking has been the main focus of activity, with a concentration of effort of the area just north of Worsted Lodge, north and south of Copley Hill, and the bank just north of the Wandlebury entrance.

The management regime of area of the Road cleared by Natural England in February 2006 will come up for reassessment in 2008, and we will make sure that our comments on this are conveyed to the Linear Sites Steering Group. As regards wildlife, the flora of the bank north of the Wandlebury entrance is now recovering nicely. Rock roses in particular have flourished. Further south, the whole area north of Worsted Lodge has been looking increasingly rich in flora.

On the Fleam Dyke, six work parties have taken place, with a total of 65 volunteers involved. As well as the usual mowing and raking, it has been necessary to deal with some regrowth in places, particularly of Traveller's Joy and Elder, which have proved rather persistent. We have focused on the Fulbourn end of the dyke, on both sides of the disused railway, and the section east of the A11-Bedford Gap.

Wildlife sightings have included a Lesser bloody-nosed beetle near the A11 and a pair of mating Grass snakes by the Pumping Station. This suggests that they may be hibernating there, which is good news for this somewhat uncommon species. Brown hares are regularly seen in the fields along the dyke, and, if you walk quietly you may come upon a Weasel or a Stoat. David also reported that **Purple milk-veitch** is still present in some quantity in two places, one on either side of the gap in the dyke just to the south east of the disused railway, but that the vast majority of plants did not flower in 2007, perhaps because the dry spring made it rather difficult to detect. Finally, on behalf of the Friends, David thanked all who had been involved with the work parties over the year, and said that it was pleasing to see that all our efforts are now showing rewards.

4 Report on Butterfly Recording

Roger Lemon reported that in 2006 the Friends started conducting Transect counts under the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, organised by Butterfly Conservation, which is a much more systematic approach than had hitherto taken place, as well as being part of a national scheme.

Giving the background, he said that the Fleam Dyke transect had started as a pilot study in 2006 with fortnightly counts, but in 2007, with the help of six volunteers, it had been increased to weekly counts from 1st April to the end of September. The area included was from the pumping station towards the Fulbourn end to Bedford Gap, a length of 2,250 metres. On the Roman Road, 2007 was the first year, with just fortnightly counts for most of the season, increased to weekly counts during the peak season when the weather permitted. The section covered here was from Worsted Lodge to a point between the Wandlebury footpath and Wort's Causeway, a distance of 3,225m.

In 2007, on Fleam Dyke a total of 25 species were recorded, with 24 on the Roman Road, 22 of these being common to both sites. Those recorded only on Fleam Dyke were Green Hairstreak, Chalkhill Blue and Small Copper. Those recorded only on the Roman Road were Marbled White and a single Clouded Yellow (*var. helice*).

Unfortunately, overall Chalkhill Blue numbers were down on 2006; they were still present on the Fleam Dyke, but not on the Roman Road where two had been seen the previous year; this may be a result of the poor weather. Other very interesting data were four records of Marbled White on the Roman Road, and we can just hope that they will establish a colony there. The five most common species on both sites were Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small White, Brimstone and Green-veined White. The Small Heath, another interesting species found on rough grassland, was much more common on Fleam Dyke. (55 records) than on the Roman Road (only 2 records).

Roger reported that work is continuing this year, and that the first counts have already been done. Trends in populations of the less common species like the Green Hairstreak, Chalkhill

Blue and Marbled White will continue to be monitored. He said that management work on the two sites, with some scrub clearance, will certainly have helped with the possible recolonisation of the Chalkhill Blue and Marbled White. However, the extensive clearance in some areas may run the risk of adversely affecting the Green Hairstreak, which depends on areas of scrub; for the time being, though, it is still present on the Fleam Dyke.

5 Report on the plan for a long-distance walk

Roger reported that there was a meeting in January of all parties involved, and that a plan for a 25-mile walk had been drafted, taking in the whole length of both the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. A draft guidebook is to be produced, with local hostelrys certain to be given a prominent mention (!); way-markers will also be needed. The name of the walk will be decided at a meeting in April.

6 Treasurer's report

Mike gave the customarily brief statement of the state of the Friends' finances; in summary, although needing a short-term loan from the Wildlife Trust to tide us over a gap between having to use funds before we could claim them, we have come out in the black with a few overdue subscriptions still expected. It was suggested that members might like to pay a little more than £5 a year if they felt like doing so. Mike thanked Kevin Harris for checking our accounts again this year.

David Barden proposed that the Accounts should be accepted, Roger Lemon seconded, and the proposal was carried unanimously. Sam thanked Mike Albutt for producing the Accounts, and there was also a vote of thanks for Julia, accompanied by a very nice bottle of wine!

7 Questions and Comments

- **Congratulations** on the design of the Roman Road information boards. (See back page) While on the subject, Julia apologised for a significant mistake: Lodge Farm is at the end of Babraham Road, not at the junction of the footpath to Fulbourn further along towards Worsted Lodge.
- **Was it possible to claim back VAT** on members' subscriptions? Mike said that the lower threshold of turnover is still too high to allow us to do this.
- As well as getting the pubs along the route of the long-distance walk mentioned/involved, we could organise a **sponsored walk** along the new route - Roger replied that this would certainly be something to consider once the walk was finalised.

8 Election of committee members - new Chairman

After being chairman of the Friends since its inception in April 2001, Sam had decided it was time to pass on the baton to a new pair of hands. **Dr Edmund Tanner**, who was unfortunately not able to attend the AGM, holds a tenured position at the Department of Plant Sciences and is a Fellow of Gonville and Caius College. He grew up in Cambridge and has often walked along the Fleam Dyke, which he loves. He has told Peter Grubb that he wanted to get more involved in local conservation work. At Peter's suggestion, he has agreed to take over as chairman. He was proposed by Sam, seconded by Julia, and unanimously elected. Sam agreed to stay on the committee in an advisory role. He was proposed by David Barden, seconded by Roger, and unanimously re-elected. The remaining members of the committee were unanimously re-elected *en masse*.

Roger then made a speech of thanks to Sam for all the work he has put into the successful establishment and continuation of the society, and presented him with a bottle of vintage port.

Minutes by David Barden, April 2008.

Many thanks from Julia for these and other Minute

Our New Chairman, Dr Ed Tanner

Ed Tanner is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Cambridge, Fellow of Gonville and Caius College. He is a specialist in Tropical Ecology. His field of research is described in the department web site, but as not everyone has a computer, it seemed a good idea to copy the main text here. (With thanks to the University of Cambridge, Plant Sciences Department.)



What limits tropical forest growth - Water, nutrients, temperature or light? We are studying factors limiting tree growth in both montane and lowland forests in the tropics.

Our main current project is a study of the effects of litter removal and litter addition on: tree growth, soil and tree nutrient concentrations, and soil carbon dynamics in semi-deciduous forest at Barro Colorado Nature Monument in Panama. Five years of litter removal and addition, have had marked effects on soil respiration, soil nutrients, leaf and litter nutrients, but no significant effects on tree growth. Our most interesting finding is that the extra soil respiration in L+ plots [plots to which litter is added] is more than the decrease in the L- plots [from which litter is removed]; we attribute this to a 'soil priming effect' where addition of fresh organic matter caused an increase in decomposition of organic matter already in the soil. As tropical soils store almost 30% of global soil carbon and there is twice as much carbon in soils as in the atmosphere, any increase in soil respiration could cause a large change in atmospheric carbon dioxide.

*Sayer EJ, Powers JS, Tanner EVJ (2007) Increased Litterfall in Tropical Forests Boosts the Transfer of Soil CO₂ to the Atmosphere. PLoS ONE 2(12): e1299.
<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0001299>*

We also have a long term project in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, where we discovered that a hurricane increased tree diversity and increased tree growth.

Tanner EVJ and Bellingham PJ (2006) Less diverse forest is more resistant to hurricane disturbance: evidence from montane rain forests in Jamaica. Journal of Ecology, 94, 1003-1010.

£ £ £ £ £ £ £ £ £

Annual subs are due in April!

Please send your "£5 or a little more" to our membership secretary:

Jane Robson, Herring's House, Wilbraham Road, Fulbourn, CB1 5EU

If you would like a Standing Order form, please contact Julia Napier. Details on page 12. You should receive a reminder slip with this newsletter if this reminder applies to you; but the mailing room staff are a bit careless.

Climate Change and Local Wildlife

by Brian Eversham,

Conservation Director of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire,
Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

An Attempt at a Summary by Julia Napier

I had hoped that Brian would be able to send me an article summarising the fascinating talk which he gave us at the A.G.M. Unfortunately, his job keeps him extremely busy, not least because this is the season when anyone involved in wildlife wants to be out looking at it, and Brian is in great demand for surveys. I have myself added to his list by begging him for a survey of Chesterton Railway Sidings. (This 'brownfield site' is due to disappear under concrete despite the fact that it is by far the richest wildlife site in Cambridge or for many miles around. Spread the word.)

Today many species are threatened by extinction, but in fact extinctions are part of our world. There have been thirty such periods in the last million years! Climate change is clearly upon us, but how much we lose is up to us. Earlier generations of wildlife lovers, led by Charles Rothschild, were alarmed by the changes and losses they saw and set up the National Nature Reserves which ultimately became Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

With extensive herbicide and pesticide use in intensive farming the loss of wildlife becomes ever more alarming, and cannot be halted even in old SSSI's such as Holm Fen because it is too small. There is now a general move towards habitat link and the creating of much larger reserves, such as The Great Fen, in which the extinction of a colony of one species can be remedied by individuals from another source within the reserve.

Advantages.

However, all is not bad news. A whole variety of species are moving into the country or moving north: the greater long-eared bat, the Dartford warbler, the green flower beetle, the fruit tree wasp and the wasp spider with its unusual web. Little egrets have startled bird watchers and the edible dormouse is on its way to Cambridge from its first British home in Tring. Butterfly lovers can hope that the Adonis blue and the spotted skipper will appear in Cambridge.

Threats to Wildlife

Aerial pollution leads to the enrichment of soils, making rough grasses and 'weeds' grow faster. Wildlife sites need constant mowing and scrub control, which cattle and sheep do very well, but there is less grazing than there used to be in East Anglia and obliging graziers with suitable animals are hard to find. Our population is increasing, with 200,000 more houses planned.

Some Solutions

Cambourne has shown that it is possible to build hundreds of houses while preserving the resident badgers and great crested newts and even substantially increasing the quantity of wildlife in the area. (Swallows returned to the area almost immediately. Larger reserves can be 'managed' by livestock such as Hebridean sheep, Konnick ponies and water buffaloes. It is possible to provide tunnels and 'green bridges' by which wildlife can cross major roads and railways. For these schemes to be effective it is essential to have good records and therefore to train recorders. The Wildlife Trusts have an excellent programme aimed at training volunteers to identify and record particular groups of species, such as hoverflies or ground beetles, and to assess the significance of a site without being a total expert.

The present situation is obviously extremely dangerous for mankind. Solutions are urgently needed, but some answers could make the situation worse. Wind Farms erected on peat sites will help to destroy the peat, releasing far more carbon. The Severn Barrage sounds like a good idea, but it might well damage the algae which are major absorbers of carbon. Fortunately, there is no such downside to the Great Fen project, which in addition to protecting wildlife, will provide jobs for local people, wonderful green areas for peaceful recreation, an experience of wildlife for city children and a place where flood waters can be absorbed. For people who live in or near Cambridge there is also very good news: The Wildlife Trust has obtained a large grant from the government Growth Area scheme with which it hopes to buy Cherry Hinton East Pit, on Lime Kiln Hill. A lot of work will be needed to fence it and make it safe, but this marvellous reservoir of chalk grassland flowers will be open to us all in the foreseeable future. It is anticipated that the work will take about a year after the purchase is completed, and during that time the site will be completely closed.

These are just a few main points from Brian's marvellous talk, and you will have to imagine all the fascinating pictures he showed us. However, if you Google www.wildlifebcnp.org you can find pictures and details about their many beautiful reserves, and information about weekend courses on a whole variety of species.

Ferreting

The Linear Sites Committee for the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke have agreed to try to increase ferreting in an attempt to help the local farmers. Jon Gibbs, who went out with his ferrets during the winter, has suggested the following plan.

During the summer, Jon will advertise for ferreters in the Countryman's Weekly. People who keep ferrets are keen to give them practice, so he should meet with success. When Jon knows which farmers would like ferreting on their section of the Roman Road, he can divide up the work fairly and avoid clashes.

Could farmers or landowners who would like ferreting to be arranged for their section of the Roman Road, please get in touch with Jon by July 7th.

Equally, if a farmer or landowner does not want any ferreting done along his or her section of the Roman Road, will they please inform him. He can be contacted on 07833 598155, or by email ranger@wandlebury1.fsnet.co.uk For this plan to succeed without problems, he will need a map showing the boundaries of a farm where it adjoins the Roman Road.

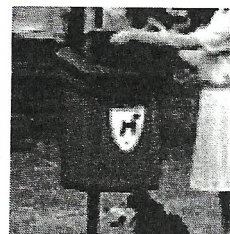
This portrait is here to draw the attention of landowners to the ferreting offer. I hope it works. It is also an excuse to include the famous portrait which is known in English as the Lady with an Ermine.

She is, almost certainly, Cecilia Gallerani, the seventeen-year old mistress of Lodovico Sforza of Milan. Her pet is in fact a ferret, the ancient Greek name for which was *galay*. She is to be found in the National Gallery in Krakow, Poland.



Dog Bin Details

Four of the dog bins are emptied by Jon Gibbs, the Head Ranger of Wandlebury Nature Reserve and the fifth at Horseheath is emptied by Sam Agnew. The Friends are most grateful to them for performing this essential but distasteful task. Jon reports that they are used regularly by dog owners, and also, alas, by the sort of people who think the picture of a happy dog indicates a litter bin. Nobody we know, I feel sure.



Butterflies for Sale

"Dingy Skipper, Eyrinnis tages. Pair

This is a beautiful pair both captured in 1930 at Fleam dyke Cambridge."

Sharon Hearle sent me this Ebay entry. They went for £12 plus postage and packing. I felt sad reading the entry but I assumed that Dingy Skippers had not been rare on Fleam in the 1930s, but when I checked the the butterfly records I have from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, I saw that their last record is from 1905. Val Perrin, the Butterfly Recorder for VC29, 'Old Cambridgeshire' confirmed that this was the last record he had for Fleam Dyke.

Does anyone know of a later sighting?

For those who have not yet heard the bad news, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Monkswood, is being closed down just at the time when we need extensive monitoring of all wildlife in order to adapt to climate change. The Butterfly Monitoring Scheme and some others will continue, but a centre where experts worked together and new generations of naturalists have been trained is about to disappear in order to save the sort of money that is small change the national budget.

The Dingy Skipper has a very unappealing name, but it is only 'dingy' by contrast with the golden orange of the Large, Small and Essex Skippers. Its brown wings are beautifully patterned in a darker version of the Chequered Skipper, which was lost to Britain in by 1977. Dingies, as their friends call them, are to be found all across central and southern Europe, with slightly darker forms in higher altitudes. If you are walking up to the Acropolis in Athens in summer, look for them on the marjoram that has been planted along the marble path! They are rather harder to find in Cambridgeshire, being found only on the Devil's Dyke and a privately owned site in the north of the county. Systematic Transect walks by Sharon Hearle and others have shown clearly that the Dingy Skipper requires a different sward from the Chalkhill Blue, preferring longer grass on the lower slopes of the dyke. It also requires small patches of scrub where it can roost. In future, work parties by members of the Cambridge and Essex Branch of Butterfly Conservation will aim for a mosaic of long and short grass.

Skippers are a halfway house between moths and 'regular' butterflies. In most skippers the wings are the same length as the body and the head is as wide as the thorax, giving them a stubby appearance. This is not true of the Dingy, but it shares with the rest a hooked tip to the antennae. However, it roosts with its wings flat, as many moths do, and does not have the flexible 'swing-wings' of the rest of the group. They are called skippers because they skip! Try catching one! Some years ago I netted a Large Skipper on the Roman Road, just south of Copley Hill where I often see one. I only wanted to admire him, but he was furious, drumming his feet on the container with astonishing force, a true descendant of the butterfly in the Kipling story of 'The Butterfly that Stamped'.

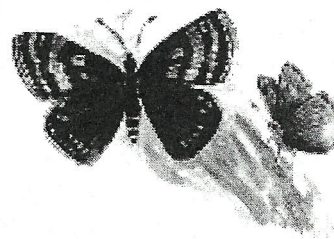
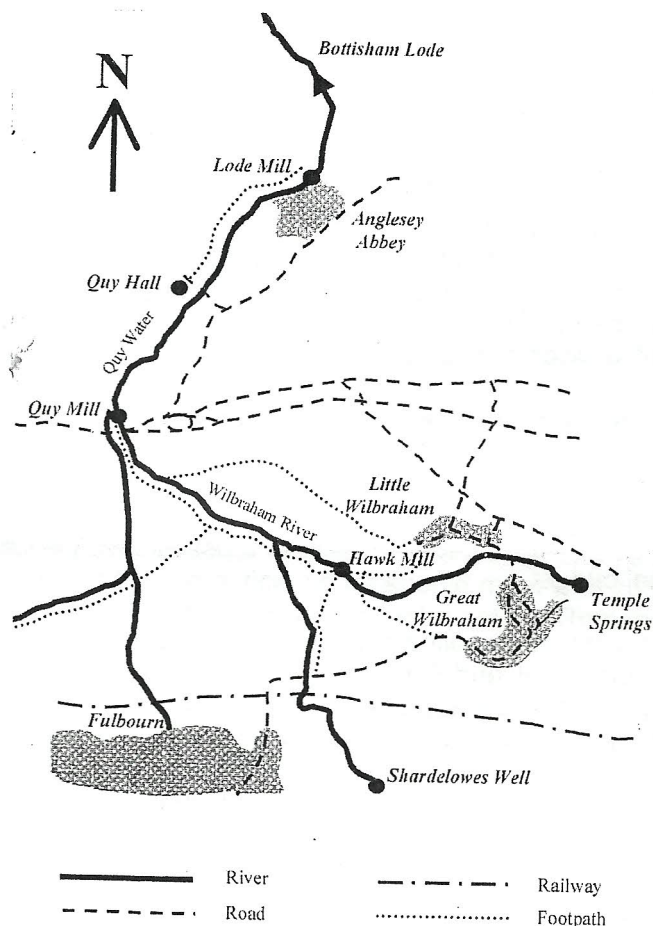


Illustration by Steve Pardue

Wilbraham River Protection Society

by John Smithson

Wilbraham River Protection Society was formed in 1997 as a result of concern felt by local people about the deterioration of the river as an aquatic environment. Our objective is to watch over the Wilbraham River and, as far as possible, to improve its current environmental situation: for instance, we would like to re-establish perennial flow.



Wilbraham River is a spring-fed stream, one of several local streams arising from the low chalk hills to the east and north east of Cambridge where the impermeable Totternhoe Stone stratum in the underlying chalk aquifer (Lower Cam Chalk) comes to the surface. The river has two sources; the springs at Wilbraham Temple, and Shardelowes Well and other springs in the parish of Fulbourn which gave rise to the Great Wilbraham River. This latter was diverted into the Fulbourn New Cut which joins Wilbraham River some way below Hawk Mill Farm. Thereafter the river flows into Quoy Water at Quoy Mill, on to Bottisham Lode and ultimately into the River Cam.

The Lower Cam Chalk aquifer is the major water resource for Cambridge Water Company: 95% of water supplied is abstracted from this aquifer. Abstraction from the aquifer compounded by periods of low rainfall causes the spring flow to stop with the result that there is no natural flow in the river over extended periods. This was recognised by the Environment Agency's predecessors and as a result the Lodes - Granta Groundwater Scheme was established in 1989. This involves pumping water from Dungate Farm West Wrattling to the Wilbraham Temple springs and to an outfall below Shardelowes Well.

However this solution has proved to be inadequate to sustain the flow in the river. In 1999 the WRPS commissioned a study of flow depletion in the river which highlighted the fact that since the early '90s there have been long periods when there has been no flow whatever.

As a result of man's intervention over the centuries, the Wilbraham River and surrounding land drainage system is complex, with distinct high and low level sub-systems. For instance, the Wilbraham River New Cut is a man-made high level sub-system (pre 1797 Enclosures). Over the high level stretches, run-off from fields does not make any contribution to flow and because the chalky river bed is naturally porous, the groundwater level must be sufficiently high to prevent flow leaking away for the river to flow along these stretches.

The high level sub-systems were created to serve local mills (the Wilbraham River /Fulbourn catchment used to support three water mills). This fact and anecdotal evidence suggest a perennial flow of water, as was the case in living memory, when it was a significant feature of the local environment, rich in wildlife. However, because the flow is no longer perennial, species such as kingfisher, reed warbler (shown here), redshank, moorhen and mallard are rarely seen, and the delightful water vole has all but disappeared. In 2002, the Wilbraham River Protection Society commissioned a study of the flora and



fauna of the river corridor, and we hope this will form the basis of future efforts to re-establish the former bio-diversity of the river. It is interesting to note that the Wilbraham River/Fulbourn catchment contains two wetland SSSIs - Fulbourn Fen and Little Wilbraham Fen and another SSSI - Great Wilbraham Common. In addition, a stretch of river below Hawk Mill Farm has been designated as a County Wildlife Site.

A number of public footpaths provide access to the river. Several in the parishes of Little and Great Wilbraham and Fulbourn converge on Hawk Mill Farm to join the footpath which runs alongside the river to Quy Water bridge on the A1303. Access from Teversham may be gained by a path along the old bed of the Caudle Ditch, the ancient watercourse that marked the Parish boundary. Another footpath follows the Long Drove to join the riverside path by way of a permitted path and a footbridge over the river. Both this and the riverside path pass close to the reed beds that are an important feature of the SSSI at Little Wilbraham Fen.

The possibilities of regenerating the previously rich habitat created and supported by the river have been highlighted over the last year or 15 months. During this period, the rainfall and meteorological conditions have been such that the groundwater levels have been consistently high, with the result that the river has flowed continuously since January 2007. The resulting resurgence in aquatic plant life has been clear, and members of the WRPS Committee have reported sightings of animals such as badgers, kingfishers, moorhen, woodcock, wild duck, canada geese and Muntjac deer.

Clearly, Wilbraham River is only a small stream, but we think it is a significant one because it is probably the first river in the area to react to lowered groundwater levels. We are liaising with both Cambridge Water Company and the Environment Agency to try and find a sustainable way to abstract necessary water supplies from the Lower Cam Chalk so that Wilbraham River and its environment does not suffer. We are very pleased that our contribution to the Environment Agency's formal consultation of the Cam and Ely Ouse Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) resulted in the statement that *'problems in the Little Wilbraham River are recognised in the CAMS and have been*

highlighted for consideration as an important local feature...The river has been included in the 'Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) Programme' and if necessary, solutions to improve the abstraction regime in the area will be implemented'.

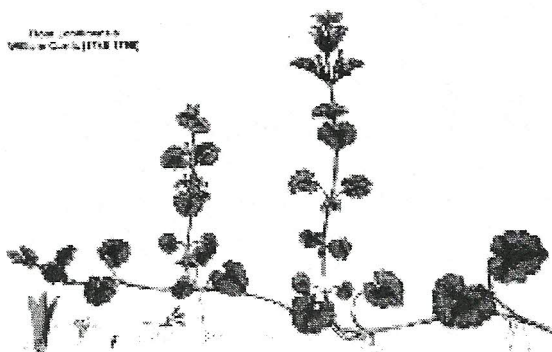
If you are interested in our work and would like to become a 'Friend of Wilbraham River', please write to the Chairman at the following address: John Smithson, Chairman WRPS, Holly Cottage, 18 Church Street, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge, CB21 5JQ

There is as yet no annual subscription. It is enough to know you are interested!



Flowers Have you noticed?

In recent springs you may well have noticed that the verges all round the Four Wentways intersection are suddenly a beautiful shade of violet-blue. The plant carpeting the area with these flowers and their dark green or purplish-green leaves is *Glechoma hederacea*, commonly called **Ground Ivy**, a member of the mint family. It can be briefly confused with Bugle, *Ajuga reptans* or Self Heal, *Prunella vulgaris*. Where the high hedges on the east side of the Roman Road near the Hildersham Road have been cut back, there were sheets of it spreading into the open ground.



Medical Botany by William Woodville, 1794

Why is there suddenly so much of it?

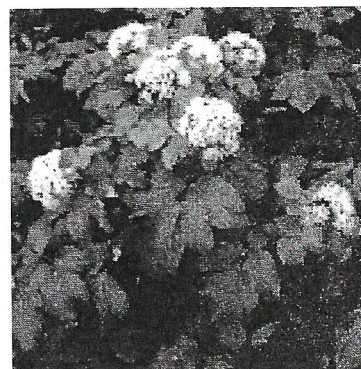
The answer is **Rabbits** and not enough predators: foxes, stoats, weasels, or human beings hunting for something to put in the pot. The animal predators also enjoy the eggs and young of pheasants and partridges, so some gamekeepers will shoot foxes and trap stoats and weasels illegally. In addition, several mild winters have led to an explosion in the rabbit population. They are now to be seen grazing everywhere in broad daylight, fat as domestic bunnies in a cage. In addition to making serious inroads into cereal crops, they strip the new leaves of grasses growing on dry verges; but they find the scented leaves of Ground Ivy distasteful.

Space Invaders!

A plant which, for me, is much less welcome is **Hoary Cress, *Lepidium draba***. It is spreading thickly along roadsides. The flatish heads of cream-coloured flowers provide nectar for small flies and wasps, but the roots spread fast under adjoining plants and the grey-green leaves smother all competition. Look for it at the corner of the former Fulbourn Hospital land, next to Tesco's, where it is invading the wildlife area. The seeds are wind borne, so it spreads easily into gardens and churchyards, where it quickly takes over the gravelled surface of an old grave.



The north side of the Cherry Hinton Road has been taken over by **Alexanders, *Smyrniolus atriplicifolius***, a handsome yellow umbellifer with rich green leaves which look and taste a little like celery. Formerly seen only near the coast, it is one of several plants that now thrive on the salt which is spread on the roads in the winter. I would call it an attractive addition to our common flora except for its capacity to do a Murdoch style take-over. Because it grows fast in spring, it shades out anything else. It flowers early and seeds abundantly. As the plant dies back, the seeds fall on the empty ground around the mother plant. Other nearby roads are beginning to be dominated by this one species. Should something be done?



Talks run by the Cambridge City Group of the Wildlife Trust

Please Note. From September 2008 to April 2009, these lectures will take place in the church hall of St John's Church, Hills Road, on Wednesdays.

The church is on the corner of Blinco Grove, opposite Homerton College. The Gilmour Building will close in July and be replaced by the Sainsbury Laboratory of Cambridge University Plant Sciences Department.

All welcome. Entry: £2 for members of the Wildlife Trust,
£3 for non-members

Wednesday 24th September, 7.30pm The Flora of the Fenland Ditches
an illustrated talk by Tim Pankhurst, Fenlands Officer for Plantlife
International - the society for the conservation of plants and their habitats

Wednesday 29th October, 7.30pm Illustrated talk on Chernobyl
by **Professor Sir Dilwyn Williams**, a pathologist who has visited Chernobyl and who can speak with authority about the current situation, the remarkable wildlife 'reserve' and the implications for future uses of nuclear power.

Wednesday 26th November, 7.30pm The Woodland Trust
an illustrated talk by **Peter Vince**, a keen supporter of the campaign to restore our 'ancient' woodlands and plant 12 million more trees by 2012.

All welcome, members & non-members. Members £2 Non-members £3
Tea or Coffee provided in the interval.

Credit where credit is due

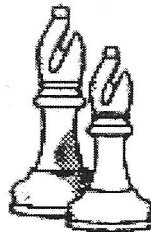
My thanks to **Jack Harrison** for his beautiful photographs of the flowers which grow on chalk grassland and to **Mike Albutt** for helping me produce four pages of colour photos.

I have recently made the happy discovery that the cost of colour printing has halved, which means that we can afford to have more colour in future editions!

And a final Thank you to **Copy Studio**, patient, helpful and efficient as always.
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The Roman Road north of Borley Wood, badly rutted by bikers and 4 x 4s in the winter of 2006. Some ruts were 30cms deep. We hope for a seasonal TRO this winter.



Cleared a decade ago, this section of agger was cleared again in 2006. High fertility and very wet weather produced man-sized Wild Parsnip plants.



David Waterman on the Fleam Dyke, Fulbourn end. This bank, cleared of scrub in Oct. 2003, has been mowed and raked annually without significant improvement.



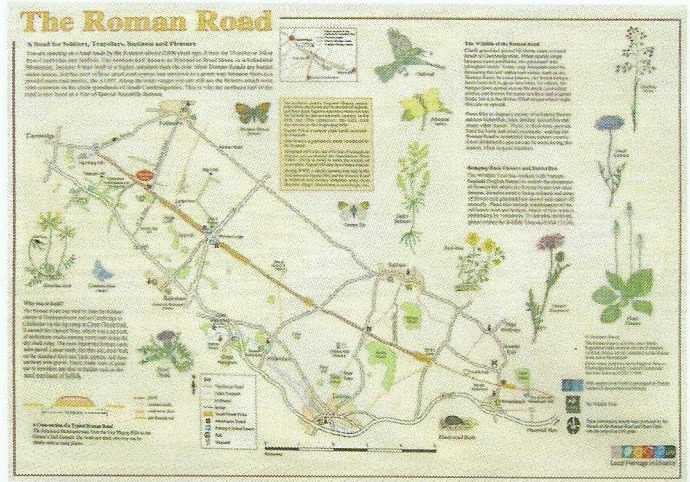
Dead Man's Hill looking towards Cambridge, June 2008, now an open green way with good views. Coarse grasses predominate, plus Knapweeds, Agrimony and Red Bartsia.



The Roman Road near the Horseheath-West Wrating road. Cowslips and stitchwort make this the prettiest spring ditch on the Roman Road.



The End of the Road! Well, not quite, the farm track runs south-east towards Haverhill. The cedars on your right are all that remain of new Horseheath Hall and garden.



Fleam Dyke just beyond Mutlow Hill looking west towards Fulbourn. Lovely flowers to be seen all summer. The photographs below were taken by Jack Harrison.

One of the five information boards designed by Shelley Signs, Shropshire. The design is the same for each. Local historical information and the wildlife illustrations vary.



The sheets of yellow flowers consist of Rock Roses, above, Horseshoe Vetch and other yellow flowers



As well as being a beautiful sight in May, Horseshoe Vetch is the food plant of the Chalkhill Blue.



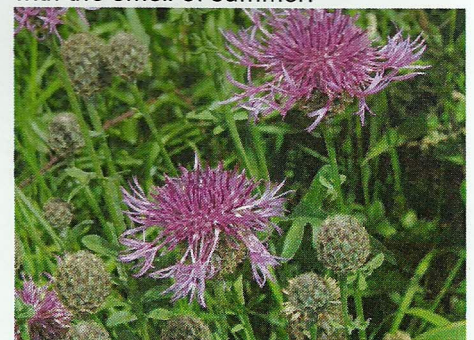
Lady's Bedstraw carpets the slope, flowering slightly later, filling the air with the smell of summer.



In 2005, a dozen Chalkhill Blues re-colonised the Fleam Dyke, not on this slope (above) but south of the A11.



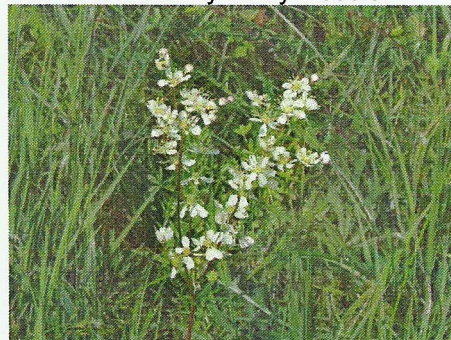
Meadow Browns on Field Scabious. Field and Small Scabious are nectar-rich and visited by many insects.



Greater Knapweed grows in the thicker turf beyond the disused railway: a rich source of nectar.



These are the dried flower heads of the Carline thistle. Chalkhill Blues and bumble bees compete for its nectar.



Dropwort flowers freely on the Fleam Dyke south of the A11. A few have survived north of the disused railway.



After scrub clearance in 2003, the Clustered Bell has flowered again on the northern bank of Fleam Dyke.