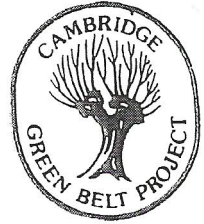


Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Nine May 2003



Our Second Annual General Meeting, at the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn April 3rd, 7.30pm

Present: Committee: John Ady, Sam Agnew, Rob Mungovan, David Seilly, Iain Webb, and 35 members of the society. Apologies were received from Jane Fenton and Robert Finch.

Proceedings: Our Chairman, Sam Agnew introduced William Wall, the Countryside Agency Officer in charge of our Lottery Heritage Initiative Grant. A photograph of Sam Agnew and William Wall holding a large cheque for £24,500 appeared subsequently in the Cambridge Evening News and the Haverhill Gazette. William Wall explained that these rather conventional publicity photographs, known in the trade as Grip and Grin, are important in helping to spread the idea that the lottery money is for everyone, and that all sorts of groups can apply. The photograph shown below illustrates the second point in William Wall's brief speech: that the most important aspect of the project is the time and support provided by the members: the conservation volunteers, the recorders, contributors to the newsletters, committee members, and all the 200 plus members without whose subscriptions we would not exist. Sam then welcomed everyone, and in particular, Nick Grimshaw, the South Cambridgeshire Council Conservation Manager, to the AGM.

Sam Agnew and William Wall with members of the Committee and Friends, demonstrating the Grip and Grin publicity photo. Many thanks to Tony Jedrej, who took photographs for the Countryside Agency, for taking the trouble to send me the disc from which this photo could be printed.



Report by Iain Webb, Green Belt Project Officer

Iain paid tribute to Sharon Hearle, who did so much to improve the condition of the two sites during her decade of work as Green Belt Officer. He then listed work which has been done more recently.

Fleam Dyke

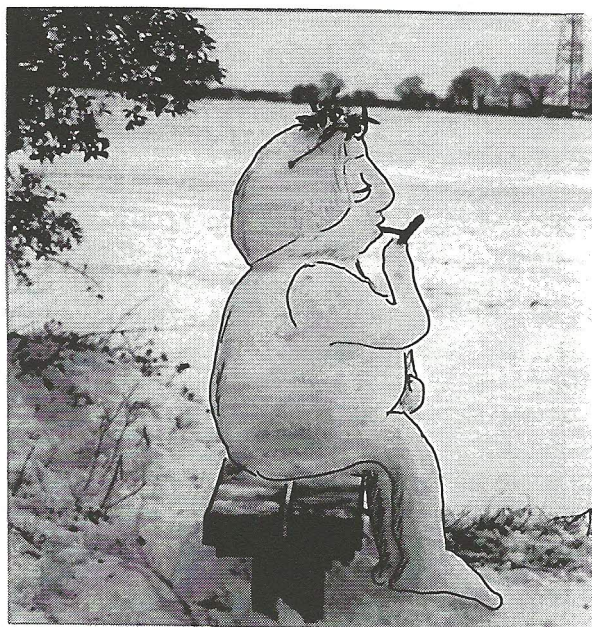
- sheep fencing has been erected in 3 compartments: from the A11 to the Bedford Gap; round Mutlow Hill; and from there to the disused railway. Sheep will be back on the site for the first time in 60 years. They will be closely monitored when they are grazing the richer areas of turf, and if there is danger of overgrazing, they can be moved onto Mutlow Hill, which can be used as a holding area because so little of the original chalk grassland flora survives there.
- Disused Railway to Fulbourn: using the £5,000 Awards for All grant, contractors have cleared the top of the bank for two to three metres on either side for most of the way. There is still almost £1,000 in hand, which could be used to control the regrowth or extend the clearance.

Roman Road.

- further scrub clearance along the north side of the Roman Road from the A11 to Copley Hill, in order to allow the grassland to spread.
- crown reduction of selected ageing beeches on the south side of the same section. If successful, this work will be extended in order to prolong the life of the trees.
- a spring cut using the Bank Commander mowing machine, followed by the Mid-week Conservation Volunteers raking up, has left long stretches of verge looking very good. A bench has been installed at a good viewpoint where the green path from Babraham Road (Lodge Farm) joins the Roman Road.

An Unexpected visitor

The first recorded use of the bench appears to have been by a Roman Snowman, complete with pipe and laurel wreath. Archaeologists and historians may be surprised by the pipe, but Rachel Remnant and her friends assured the editor that this photograph, taken on 31st January, the morning after the Great Blizzard, is authentic. A white figure against a white background does not reproduce well, so the art department had to outline the gentleman's portly figure and philosophical expression with felt tip.



Presentation of Accounts by the Treasurer

John Ady summarised the accounts, which had been audited by a Chartered Accountant, Roger Clarke. Stationery, photocopying and postage comprised most of the expenditure before December 2002, leaving a surplus of £487. It was proposed that the accounts be accepted. Proposer, Susan Jourdain; Seconder, Charles Swithinbank. The members present agreed unanimously. Sam Agnew thanked John Ady warmly for his work, and extended particular thanks to Roger Clarke, who this year also did not charge for his services. Sam then thanked the other members of the committee for their different contributions to the achievements of the society. He felt that the year had been successful in many ways, although for the moment we have failed to persuade the County Council to change the status of the eastern part of the Roman Road, which is damaged by motor bikes, rubbish dumping and visits from 'Travellers'. He hoped that there would be ways to get round the initial refusal.

Re-election of the Committee

Sam stressed that the committee was not a closed shop, and that we would welcome new members. However, to no one's surprise, all the committee members were re-elected, with Iain Webb and Robert Mungovan agreeing to continue as advisers to the group. **It was also agreed that the subscription should remain at £5.** Those present were asked to contribute £2 to cover the cost of room hire and tea/coffee, which they kindly did. I think it was at this point that Sam produced the biggest bunch of daffodils that I have ever seen, and a beautiful plain crystal vase to put them in, and gave them to me with the thanks of the society, which was extremely generous and much appreciated. Before the business side of the meeting closed, Roger Lemon asked for a vote of thanks to Sam for the work he has put in to setting up and running society. The members showed their appreciation by their applause. The second half of the AGM consisted of two excellent illustrated talks.

Julia Napier

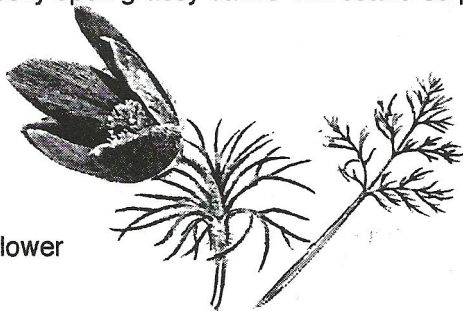


Lady's Bedstraw

The Devil's Dyke Restoration Project

Summary of a talk by James Fisher, the Project Officer

James, who previously worked on the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Project, and on the Sussex Downs, became the Project officer for this important scheme in 2002. The Devil's Dyke or Ditch is a Saxon earth work of the late sixth century, designed to protect the East Angles from the Mercians who lived to the south west. The great earth work runs from Reach to Wood Ditton and is seven and a half miles long. It contains several Nationally Rare Plants: the pasque flower, the lizard orchid and the bloody crane's-bill. It is hoped to obtain a designation as a Special Area of Conservation. As with the Fleam Dyke, the chalk grassland flora has in many areas become submerged by scrub. Photographs from 1920 show the Burwell end of the dyke to have been mostly open grassy banks with scattered patches of scrub.



The Pasque flower

The Lizard Orchid can be 30 - 100cms high. Its long twisting lip is up to 5 cms long.



In 2001 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded £305,000 for restoration work. In addition, matched funding was received from English Nature, English Heritage, Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust and Cambridgeshire County Council, bringing the total level of funding up to £434,000. This money is intended to provide for a Project Officer for five years, and extensive clearance of scrub. The plan is to clear scrub from October to March. Herbicides specific to the woody stumps are applied. Hedgerows are to be left, and gaps planted up with appropriate species. To overcome the problem of erosion of newly cleared chalk slopes, the technique of Hydro-seeding which is used on motorways is being used. A mixture of water, grass seed and jute is sprayed onto the banks. The grass seed was obtained from Therfield Heath, Royston. It is applied at a very low density. This should produce a covering of grasses which is thin enough to allow other plants to emerge from the seed bank. The jute fibres hold the surface together during germination. Inevitably there will be weedy regrowth. The large lottery grant made possible the purchase of a long-arm tractor which can flail a 30ft area of bank, control regrowth, or mow where sheep cannot be introduced in the area of the race courses. Sheep fencing has been installed. The sheep will need water, so a bowser has been bought. The areas of the dyke where a rich flora has survived will be grazed in autumn and in the early spring. The less herb rich areas will be grazed in the summer. Two miles of the dyke are now covered in established woodland. This will remain, but it will be coppiced in some sections to provide a greater variety of habitat. The problem of trees on a chalk earthwork is that they tend to be uprooted during gales and damage the historic monument. There will be a survey in the autumn to check diseased trees, which can be dealt with in various ways: the crown can be taken out, they can be pollarded or coppiced.

Landowners

An important part of the work involves the landowners. For example, the railway line, which was closed in 1960's, has been mown consistently by the farmer, greatly benefiting the wild flowers and associated insects, especially butterflies. One of the farms is now in Countryside Stewardship, which subsidises a wide grassland margin for the dyke, with tree planting and new hedges to compensate for the scrub lost on the dyke.

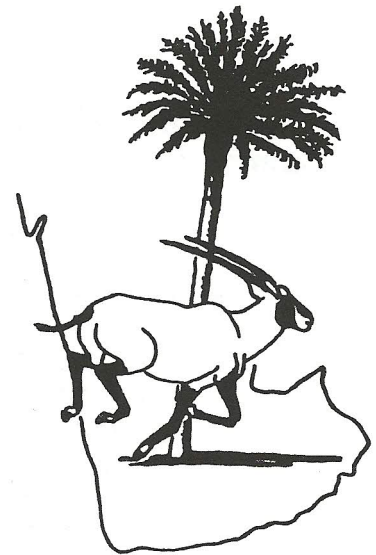
Access

- new self-closing gates to allow access for walkers and for machinery
- ladder steps have been installed. These have a minimal impact on the historically important monument, while preventing the sort of erosion that has occurred at the King's Gap, which was cut in the eighteenth century.
- paths on the dyke will be maintained by the County Council and by volunteers
- there will be walks and talks
- and leaflets, of course

James Fisher concluded by offering help and advice to the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, which we were very glad to accept. His offer to attend committee meetings was gratefully accepted, and his advice is most helpful.

The Planning of Nature Reserves in Saudi Arabia

Summary of a talk by John Ady, World Conservation Monitoring Centre

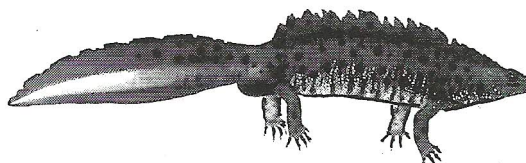


John Ady taught landscape planning to students at the University in Jeddah where he produced master plans for potential nature reserves for the National Commission for Wildlife, making maps to illustrate the plans. These could be used at meetings with people who might be affected by the proposals. The reserves-to-be were often in the few remote fastnesses where hunters have not yet exterminated the wildlife. People inevitably think of Saudi Arabia in terms of sand dunes and camels but there is much more. As well as interesting ruins, there is an unexpected variety of habitats in the mountains.

Since women are not allowed to drive in the Kingdom, John often drove for a remarkable English field botanist, Mrs Sheila Collenette, who published an 800-page pictorial guide to the flora of Saudi Arabia, listing over 2,250 species, each of which she could recognise. Although an amateur, she increased the country's known flora by a third and discovered many species new to science. The photographs taken on these different occasions were a considerable surprise to us all. There were pictures of dry mountains but also of fortified villages among palm trees, and farms in green rain-fed valleys. Here, rabbits and deer endanger our reserves. There, a population explosion among baboons is causing problems. They proliferate on village waste dumps and are not shot by hunters as the meat is inedible, so they have become fearless, playing on childrens' slides, entering houses and raiding the refrigerators. One ingenious solution has been to capture males where possible and give them vasectomies.

One of John's slides showed a good sized river with sparkling ripples flowing between banks lined with reeds and tamarisk. This 50 kilometre river is the treated waste water of Riyadh, but it forms a great new oasis for birds. Other slides showed oleanders and branched doum palms growing in remote canyons, a volcanic implosion crater, traditional mud-walled farmhouses and a mountain stream large enough to hold three species of fish. The mountain escarpment paralleling the Red Sea coast has green cloudforests of juniper and olive, watered by the tail ends of both the Indian Ocean monsoon and Mediterranean storms. In the south are beautiful coral islands with rare gazelles, hundreds of thousands of sea birds, dolphins, mangroves and coral reefs. Unfortunately, the conservation movement has hardly started to take hold on the public conscience. The government designated a controlled hunting reserve over an area in the north as large as Wales to entice Houbara bustards for their falconry, the sport of princes. But rather than engage the support of the local Bedouin, the authorities took over protected areas within it without compensation, and moved in rangers from a tribe favoured by the royal family. The average Saudi still has little interest in wildlife, apart from the national sport of hunting whatever moves (baboons excepted), and such traditional paternalism has not improved the situation, but change, slowly, is coming.





The Lottery Heritage Initiative Grant A bit of History. New Readers begin here.

As readers will remember, Sharon Hearle was lured away by Butterfly Conservation while she was on maternity leave last year. Sharon was the Green Belt Project Officer, a post which is supported by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. In the last decade, Sharon substantially improved the condition of a large number of wildlife sites within the Green Belt, among which were the Devil's Dyke, the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke. It was Sharon who put together the original bid for a large Lottery grant for the conservation of these three Sites of Special Scientific Interest. When the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke were not awarded any money, it was Sharon together with our Chairman, Sam Agnew, who realised that it was necessary to demonstrate to the Lottery committees that a lot of people are concerned about the condition of the two less well known SSSI's. In the absence of a Green Belt Project Officer, the work was split between Mark Ricketts and Iain Webb. Iain is also City Greenways Officer with responsibility for the conservation management of several Cambridge City Nature Reserves such as Paradise Reserve (near Lammas Land), Barnwell East, (near Sainsbury's, off Coldham's Lane), Byron's Pool and several others. Iain is also responsible for a variety of projects such as plant surveys, the Swift survey last summer, and a scheme to get more people to put up bird boxes. He has surveyed the city for Great Crested Newts, and produced a management plan for the 28 miles of small waterways in the city boundaries. This should help to explain the following paragraph and it is my only chance to get a Great Crested Newt into any of these newsletters. It is also the moment to welcome **Naomi Brookes**, the new full time Green Belt Project Manager. Iain will continue to do much of the practical conservation work on our sites.



Local Heritage *initiative*

**Spend, Spend, Spend,
but not Yet!**



In January we received the splendid sum of £24,500 from the Lottery Heritage Initiative. It was too late to book skilled contractors within the scrub cutting season, so it was hoped that we could begin by giving the Roman Road south of Worsted Lodge a good spring mowing and raking. However, if I say that Iain was too busy to fit this in, readers will now appreciate why. Fortunately, William Wall, who supervises our grant, has given us another year in which to complete the work, which need not now be finished until the end of 2006. Scrub clearance along the sides of the Roman Road from Worsted Lodge to the Balsham-Hildersham Road will begin this autumn, extending the work already done, with regular mowing and raking in following years. The aim is to restore the once rich chalk grassland flora in a wide band all along the sides of the track, while maintaining good hedges. Now is the time to go and look at the flowers which are blooming in increasing quantity as a result of previous work organised by Sharon Hearle. Not far from Worsted Lodge there are now good patches of bird's foot trefoil and the much less common yellow rock rose. There are also numerous plants of the beautiful pink-budded dropwort. Hurry, hurry. In the same area, a few weeks ago, walkers may have noticed the brilliant white flowers of Common Star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum umbellatum*. They are not native plants, but they like an open sunny situation.

Good News, Bad News

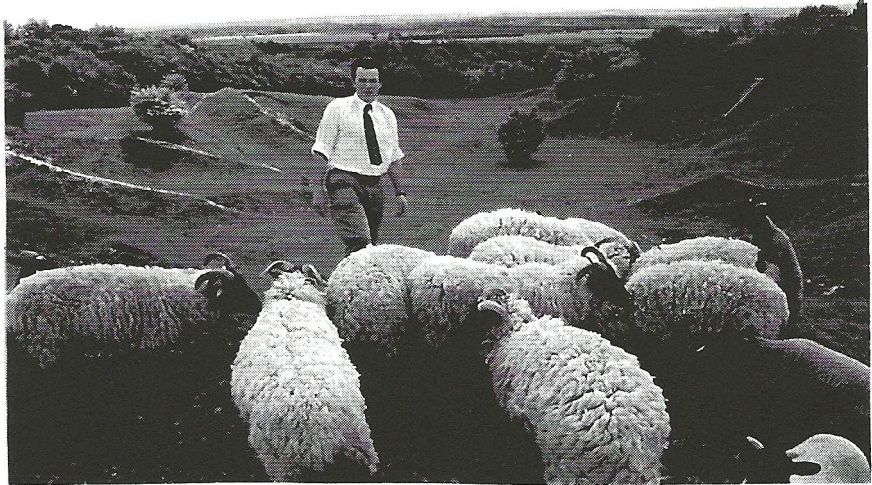
With money from an earlier budget, a long length of scrub was cleared along the north side of the Roman Road between Mount Farm/ Worsted Lodge. Disposing of the brash is always a problem, so this time it was decided to chip the material and dispose of it in the hedge. Unfortunately, someone who enjoys playing with matches found the the temptation too great, and on Sunday 11th May, four chunks of hedge were badly damaged by fire. A fire engine was called. If anyone knows anything else about this, please let us know. In an attempt to prevent the same individual returning for more fun, John Ady and Julia Napier went along on with rakes and levelled the piles of chippings so that they did not appear to be just waiting for a match. The Fire Officer came the next day to inspect the problem, but by then there had already been some rain, and much more was on its way, so there was no immediate need for further action. Since we have money for work on the Roman Road, we can afford to get the main mounds of chippings removed if necessary.

A Dispiriting Statistic, and a Positive Response

The very helpful Fire Officer, Kevin Smith, says that 60% of fires are caused by arson. Rather than just wringing his hands, he works with youth clubs to divert youthful energy into more useful channels.

Norfolk Horn Sheep by Ted Clover

If you thought the owner of a flock of Norfolk Horns and a name like Ted Clover was a gnarled ancient in a smock, with a floppy hat and a gap toothed grin, think again. Orwell Pit in the background.



The Norfolk Horn is one of the oldest breeds of sheep in Britain. It is believed to be descended from the ancient Saxon black-faced sheep once prevalent in Northern Europe. The breed developed in the relative isolation of East Anglia, and although it is named after the county of Norfolk, it was the prevalent breed in Norfolk, Suffolk, north Essex and south east Cambridgeshire. It is therefore quite possible that Norfolk Horns have been seen grazing on Fleam Dyke in the past. However, this would have been many years ago.

The fine fleeces of the Norfolk Horn were used in the Middle Ages for the East Anglian worsted industry upon which much of the region's wealth was based. Sheep were also a critical element of the foldcourse rotation practised in East Anglia, being used to graze and dung both the fallows and corn stubbles to improve soil fertility. Norfolk Horns were and remain well suited to poorer quality, light soils. Flocks were historically concentrated in heathland areas such as Breckland, north west Norfolk and the Suffolk coastal areas

Before the late eighteenth century, relatively little attention was given to pedigree breeding and livestock improvement. When greater attention began to be paid to breed development, contemporary agricultural commentators and improvers did not hold the breed in high regard. Indeed some went so far as state that the otherwise high quality standard of the livestock in East Anglia was let down by, as they saw it, the mediocre character of the indigenous sheep. Some did, however, comment on the excellent flavour of the meat.

Consequently by the late eighteenth century, breeds such as Southdowns sheep were being introduced to East Anglia. These breeds were either replacing Norfolks altogether, or were being used repeatedly to cross with the Norfolk, giving rise to a black-faced half breed. With a matter of a few decades the Norfolk lost its pre-eminence to these crosses which were ultimately to become the Suffolk sheep breed. In 1886, the Suffolk Sheep Society was formed. The Suffolk is now the ram most frequently used to produce finished lamb in Britain, making the Norfolk Horn an invaluable contributor to the modern farming industry.

The number of Norfolks declined through out the nineteenth century, although a few flocks were maintained by breeders to improve and develop the Suffolk breed. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were perhaps only 300 Norfolk Horn sheep remaining. The survival of Norfolk Horn in any form is entirely down to one man, James Sayer, who built up a flock from 1895, and for thirty years from 1919 had the only known flock in existence. Part of this flock was based at the Cambridge Animal Research Station during the late 1940's and 50's and formed part of a study into the inheritance of cryptorchidism, which is a characteristic sign of inbreeding. By the late 1960's the breed was literally on the brink of extinction, with only a handful of seriously inbred individuals remaining.

To increase genetic diversity and to ensure the survival of the breed, careful cross breeding with Suffolks was undertaken in the early 1970's. It is therefore technically correct that there are no longer any true bred Norfolk Horns. However, over the last thirty years the breed has been pure bred and the Norfolk Horn of today has retained much of the character of its forebears. It is a lengthy, long legged and medium weight sheep, with a black face and legs, and short stapled white wool. Both sexes are strongly horned. The wool on newborn lambs is invariably darker or mottled and this changes to white as the lamb gets older. It is a hardy sheep, equally well adapted to the cold dry winters and hot summers of East Anglia.

Since the 1970's Norfolk Horn numbers have risen considerably and there are now around 1,700 pedigree Norfolk Horns in 58 flocks which although scattered across the British Isles are still concentrated in Norfolk and Suffolk. However, the breed is still endangered, and with relatively few individual breed lines, in-breeding remains a problem. Indeed many of the sheep you will see at Fleam Dyke are closely related.

One of the characteristics of Norfolk Horn sheep is that they are excellent foragers with an ability to feed on lower grade pasture and still maintain condition and rear lambs. As a result, they are well suited to graze unimproved land in environmentally sensitive areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), nature reserves etc.

The desperate plight of the Norfolk Horn breed in the 1970s, more than any other breed, led to an increased awareness of the need for genetic conservation amongst traditional farm animals and the consequent formation of the Rare Breed Survival Trust in 1973. Since that time no breed of domesticated livestock has followed the fate of breeds like the Lincolnshire Curly Coat, Ulster or Cumberland to extinction.

Further information about the Rare Breed Survival Trust and Norfolk Horns can be found at www.rare-breeds.com.

Coming Soon to a Saxon Earthwork Near You! Well, sort of.

As Ted Clover says, Norfolk Horns have long legs. When he saw the photograph of the lovely new sheep fencing and stile in the last newsletter, he said to himself, "My sheep are going to be able to climb over that lot," so the fencing contractor added a slightly higher bar to the stiles. Problem solved. Except that members of the public could not get over the stiles either. If anyone found their way barred, please accept our apologies. The offending top bar was removed swiftly by Iain Webb, and English Nature have installed self-closing gates. When this is done, the sheep will be brought to the site and amid a blaze of publicity, or more probably a small article in the Cambridge Evening News, the Norfolk Horns will start chewing away at the long grass and scrub regrowth, we hope. **NB If you see any of the sheep apparently in distress, please phone Ted Clover at his home: 01954 261040. Dogs must be kept on their leads within the fenced areas.**

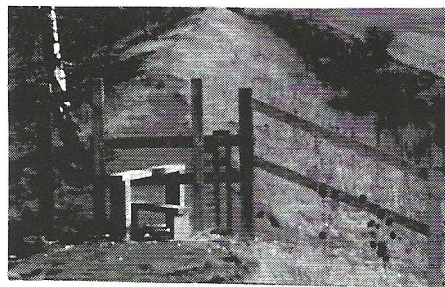


photo by Reger Wolfe

Sampling Invertebrates by Dr Jo Darlington, Entomologist

After a shaky start last year, I shall try to sample fairly regularly through this summer. I collected the first full sample series of the year on 28th March. Some of you already know of my odd habits, but others may not. So please, dear Friends, if you find little dishes of water along the Dyke, do not assume that they are litter and tidily pick them up. And if you are walking a dog, would you please restrain it from drinking the water and/or knocking over the dishes? Thanks very much.

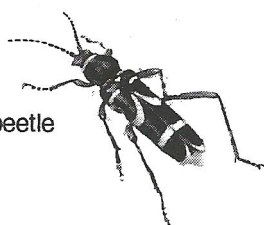
An invertebrate survey can only be conducted in good weather, so the dates have to be flexible, but I am aiming to sample at three week intervals right through the summer and autumn. So far the weather has been kind, and the first four surveys have been carried out on time.

If anyone would like to help, would they please ring me? In particular, **I am looking for someone to deputise for me** on two dates in October and November, when I shall be out of the country. By that time the insect populations will be quite low, so it should not be a huge task, but it is essential to have your own transport. Tel: 01223 424784

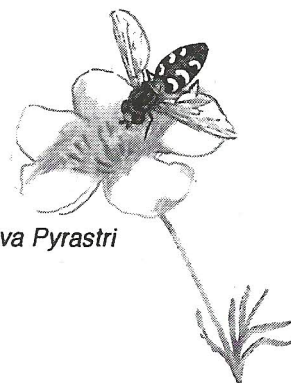
Meadow Grasshopper



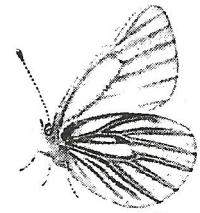
Wasp beetle



Hoverfly *Scaeva Pyrastris*



Notes from my Field Notebooks 1940 - 2003 by Norman Moore



green-veined
white

I frequently walked along the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke when I was an undergraduate (1940 - 1942 and 1947 - 1948), and have done so since we came to live at Swavesey in 1960. The following notes have been gleaned from my field notebooks during those periods.

Fleam Dyke

June 1st 1941

Walked along the length of the Fleam Dyke and saw a pair and three separate Stone Curlews in fields bordering it.

October 4th 1947

Saw a Clouded Yellow Butterfly. (On October 9th 1947, I also saw a pairing couple of the species at the Cambridge Sewage Farm.)

January 7th 1973

Counted 12 large Junipers on the Dyke

June 22nd 1974

Noted Pyramidal Orchid, Sainfoin and Rock Rose on the Dyke

October 13th 1980

Counted 10 Junipers on the Dyke. Saw 2 Dotterels with Lapwings on a ploughed field near the southern end of the Dyke near Balsham

February 1st 1981

Recorded "Some bits of chalk grassland remaining but mainly Hawthorn scrub"

August 4th 1994

Noted 8 Junipers. Made a careful search for Chalkhill Blue butterflies: found none, although two days earlier I counted 91 on the Devil's Ditch between the railway crossing and the tower near the A45. I also recorded Brimstones, Green-veined Whites, Peacocks, Common Blues, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Small or Essex Skippers. (The one I examined closely was an Essex Skipper.)

August 6th 2000

Saw many plants of Ploughman's Spikenard and Carline Thistle. I also saw Brimstones, Peacocks, Painted Ladies, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Essex and Small Skippers.

Roman Road

May 22nd 1941

Saw two pairs of Red-backed Shrikes. Found two nests, one destroyed and one unfinished.

May 30th 1948

Saw a Stone Curlew feigning injury on Grange Farm, Little Abingdon, near the Roman Road

July 27th 1969

At the Cambridge end of the Roman Road, I saw a female Chalkhill Blue Butterfly, as well as many Green-veined Whites, Small Whites, Gatekeepers, Ringlets and Meadow Browns

August 4th 1999

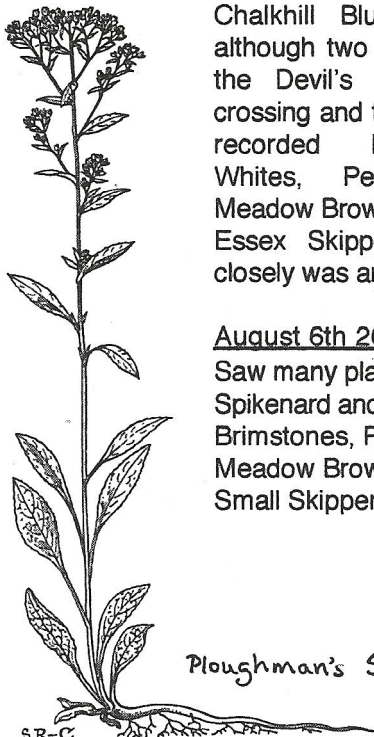
Made a careful search for Chalkhill Blue butterflies south of the A11. I saw none, but recorded Common Blues and Small and/or Essex Skippers. There were very few butterflies of any species at the Cambridge end of the road.

Note

My counts of Junipers on Fleam Dyke were incidental, not rigorous surveys. Since reading Max Walters' recent papers on this species in "Nature in Cambridgeshire" (volumes 43 and 44) it appears that I must have missed one or more bushes in 1980 and 1999, and possibly in 1973.

Norman Moore has been involved in Nature Conservation almost all of his life. He was the Chief Advisory Officer at the Nature Conservancy Council, 1979 - 83, as well as a founding member of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG). As his notes show, he has observed the relentless decline of wildlife in Britain, but he has also done a great deal to produce the turning of the tide which I hope is now indicated by the award of a Gold Medal to the Leyhill Prison wildlife garden at Chelsea, and the availability of grants for conservation work, such as the ones this Society has secured. Norman Moore's latest book, "**Oaks, Dragonflies and People**" Harley Books, describes the creation of his own nature reserve out of featureless farmland in Swavesey. His detailed notes and charts show the successes and some failures which accompany such a venture, and will be invaluable to anyone with a bit of land and a desire to do something to compensate for what we have lost. For example, his mere is visited by 19 species of dragonfly, 15 of which breed there.

Julia Napier



Ploughman's Spikenard

Lines Across the Dyke by Roger Wolfe

I wonder how often walkers of dogs, bashers of scrub, pullers of ragwort, spotters of birds and butterflies (and soon, hopefully, counters of sheep) may have paused to wonder about the history of that other great earthwork which crosses Fleam Dyke at right angles, about 300m NW of Mutlow Hill? A glance at the OS map gives the answer: 'Dismantled Railway', a common enough feature in the modern landscape, but not, like so many others, the result of the infamous Beeching axe. Writing at a time when the railway network was still expanding, the Reverend Edward Conybeare described it as '... a feature almost unknown in England, a deserted railroad'. (1)

Opened in 1848 as the Newmarket and Chesterford Railway, the line was envisaged as part of a direct route from London to Newmarket and Thetford, where it was intended to join the Norfolk Railway's tracks to Norwich; but fierce inter-company rivalry and the collapse of the 'railway mania' caused the scheme to fail. The Eastern Counties Railway took it over, insisting that once a link was completed from Six Mile Bottom to Cambridge, the more direct route which crosses Fleam Dyke should be abandoned. This happened in 1851 (2), although the racing fraternity at Newmarket attempted to get the line re-opened in 1892 in order to avoid delays to the special trains for racegoers, caused by congestion at Cambridge station. Despite the support of the Prince of Wales (the future king George V) the directors of the Great Eastern Railway were not to be persuaded. (3)

This 19th century intrusion is not the only line to cross the Dyke in this vicinity. In late Saxon times, Mutlow Hill was the focus of a network of trackways converging there at the ancient 'moot' or meeting place. It was also the site of the sheriff's court for the three major land divisions or 'hundreds' that abut the site, a use that continued through the middle ages. (4) These tracks, in addition to the nearby crossing point of the Icknield Way, show clearly in aerial photography as dark lines converging on the hill from several directions, (5) but some can be seen from ground level, especially when the chalky topsoil of the adjacent fields has been freshly cultivated (Fig 1). How long will it be before the awful A11 becomes a crop mark for archaeologists to ponder?

The darker diagonal line running up to Mutlow Hill on the right, shows the old trackway



Photo by Roger Wolfe
March 2003

References:

1. Highways and Byways in Cambridge and Ely. The Reverend Edward Conybeare, London 1910.
2. A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, vol. 5, Eastern Counties. D. I. Gordon. Newton Abbot 1968
3. Forgotten Railways: East Anglia. R. S. Joby. Newton Abbot 1977
4. Archaeology of Cambridgeshire, vol. 2, SE Cambs. and the Fen Edge. Alison Taylor. Cambridge 1998
5. The Cambridgeshire Dykes and Worsted Street. Tim Malim and others. Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, vol. LXXXV 1996 (Figs 31-32 p59)

Herring's House by Jane Robson



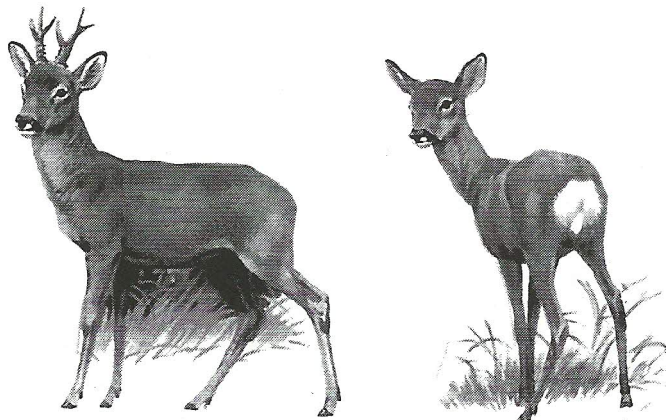
We enjoyed reading Margaret Rishbeth's memories of Herring's House in the last newsletter and seeing Richard Sell's lovely drawing. This rather odd house, where we live, with its unusual height and its lancet windows, was built in about 1863 by John Frederick Herring Junior, painter of horses and farmyard scenes and son of the more famous painter, John Frederick Herring Senior. JF Senior was a coachman who started by painting inn-signs and graduated to racehorses and their attendants. He became a very successful painter, eventually moving from Wilbraham to an estate in Kent. In 1853 his son, also a successful painter, bought the plot of land about a mile outside Fulbourn on the edge of the great Wilbraham River in the area marked as Red Fen in the Fulbourn map of 1800. It cost £275 5s, or 25p. He built the house in about 1863 and it formed part of the marriage settlement in 1865 on his much younger wife, Catherine, also an artist. She survived until 1929 - there were no children and she appears to have lived there alone after her husband died in 1907.

The area round here was full of waterways which have gradually dried up since the early 1900s when the pumping stations were installed and also the general drainage system fell into disrepair. (See Dr Desmond Hawkins' excellent booklet 'The Drainage of Wilbraham, Fulbourn and Teversham Fens'.) People have told us that as children they could boat along the various streams round the house. The land used to flood - hence the height of the house. The living areas are arranged over a high basement and the house is not as large as it looks. The front door is on the first floor, now reached by two long flights of steps, but originally by the curious causeway with arches underneath and the remains of a tiny round sentry box at the road end. (What could it have been for?) The effect is that it has glorious views over the surrounding flatlands, which is unusual for Cambridge. This evening from my kitchen window, I saw three roe deer grazing on the Field below, several hares cavorting and a male pheasant strutting with his females following behind.

JF Junior was said to have dismissed the builders halfway through and finished building it himself, which may account for some of its irregularities. He is also said to have quarrelled with his father about painting, so perhaps he was a bit irascible. However, he or another, drew a beautiful charcoal portrait of two horses along the wall of the hall, which was uncovered fairly recently from under the wallpaper.

Local people tell us that the house used to appear very grim and gothic, closely surrounded by overgrown woodland, and was always believed to be haunted. Children would hold hands and run past as quickly as possible. In the 1940's an electric generator was installed by another irascible owner who only allowed it to be used for two hours every evening. A daughter-in-law of the house complained bitterly of the darkness and cold. (It is now very satisfactorily light and warm.) Water was presumably obtained from one of the numerous wells - there are at least five. The lift from the kitchen is still there, creaking up and down on ancient ropes, though no longer in use. The ruins by the gate are said to be the remains of a brewery, but we know no more than that.

JF Junior must have loved the countryside to have built here and the house is certainly not haunted.



Fleam Dyke at Fen Ditton by Jo Darlington

One sunny Sunday, I was exploring the new foot-and-cycle path which runs from the Green Dragon Bridge in Chesterton to Ditton Lane, then on to Fen Ditton village. On arrival, I consulted the map displayed at the entrance to the village, and was surprised to see a length of ditch labelled 'Fleam Dyke'. Naturally, I went to have a look. It consists of a very wide, shallow ditch, completely ploughed over, running along the north side of High Ditch Road. Could this really be part of 'our' Fleam Dyke? On consulting volume 2 of the Archaeology of Cambridgeshire, pp 29 - 30, I discovered that although the dyke at Fen Ditton continues roughly along the line of the Fleam Dyke, it is actually much older. The date of construction is not known, but it could well have been in the Iron Age. Originally there was a bank as well as a ditch. When the Fleam Dyke was built, the ditch at Fen Ditton was already almost filled in. It was used as a burial site in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Some grave goods were recovered during road works, listed as 'a sword, eight spears, three shield-bosses, a knife, five brooches, a buckle and a pair of wrist-clasps, all of the finds dating to the 6th century'.

Taylor, Alison 1998 Archaeology of Cambridgeshire. Volume 2: South East Cambridgeshire and the Fen Edge. Cambridgeshire County Council Resources Unit. 119pp

And Here is One I found Earlier, a Survivor's Tale by Julia Napier

Last year during a Friend's walk on the Fleam Dyke, Roger Lemon spotted some eggs and tiny caterpillars of the Privet Hawk moth, on privet regrowth. I took two to raise. One died mysteriously, but the other grew huge, and finally pupated in a few inches of soil. Jo Darlington advised keeping it outside in a nest of moss, which stays damp. Roger advised the sealed tin method, which keeps moisture in and parasites out. Not having an appropriate tin, I followed the moss system. However, on the day of the great gale of 27th October, when the Friends Work Party had to be abandoned, everything in my back yard went bowling over, including the flower pot with moss and large chrysalis. I hunted round ineffectually, but had to assume that a bird had found a quality lunch. Two days later, I noticed what appeared to be a late hedgehog dropping - brown and bullet shaped - near my front door. The Privet Hawk chrysalis in its armour plating had bowled round the corner, rolled under the gate and landed up next to the front door step. I greeted it with cries of joy, and anxiety. Had it survived? It did seem awfully dark in colour, and cold, but I tucked it up in moss and put it in a safer container. From time to time during the winter I peered at it hopefully. Not rotten and smelly, anyway. Roger asked after its health in April, and I had to admit that it seemed a bit deadish: flexible, but not moving as pupae do when disturbed. Then suddenly in mid-May it started wiggling about very crossly when touched, and it seemed a good idea to bring it inside so that I could see it when/if it emerged.

On one of the very hot, sunny days in late May, I came down to make breakfast and found that the chrysalis was only a hollow shell. I had hoped that the emerging moth would settle on the window blind, as the Poplar Hawks had done the previous year. No such luck. I wandered round the house trying to guess where a hawk moth might end up in the wee small hours. Nothing. Time for coffee. I swung the tap round to fill the kettle, and there hanging quietly on the sink cloth was over two inches of furry mega moth in elegant shades of buff, brown and grey, with its beautiful crimson-striped body. It was not likely to fly in bright sunshine, so I tucked it under some clematis until I could take it back to the Fleam Dyke, where I found Jo laying out dishes and sweep netting expertly. When she said, "By the way, what happened to that Hawk Moth?" I was able to produce it quite literally from a hat. We selected a hawthorn tree trunk half covered with ivy, and the moth crept up into the shade. When we looked again, it had hidden itself completely.

Handy Hint

In "Caterpillars of the British Isles", the companion volume to Richard South's classic "Butterflies of the British Isles", first published in 1906, there is an article by Dr G.H.T. Stovin on rearing caterpillars, which includes the following useful tip. "If, when the head of the chrysalis is placed on the tongue, a feeling of coolness is experienced, it is almost certainly still alive." Not many people know that.

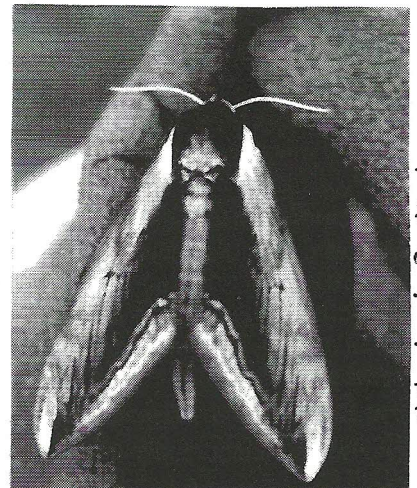


photo by Jo Darlington

Activities: Summer 2003

Sunday 6 July Roman Road Walk

Iain Webb will lead a Wildlife Walk along part of the Roman Road, starting at 2.0pm. Numbers are limited, so it will be necessary to book your place. Please ring 01223 712452

Friday 18 July Moth Trapping on the Fleam Dyke

John Dawson, the moth recorder for Cambridge Vice-County, will set up light traps between Mutlow Hill and the disused railway. 9.0pm onwards. Ring Julia Napier for further information. 01223 213152

Sunday 20 July Fleam Dyke Walk

Iain Webb will lead a Wildlife Walk along the Fleam Dyke, starting at 2.0pm. Numbers are limited, so it will be necessary to book your place. Please ring 01223 712452

14 -15 June The Conversazione

The 84th Annual Exhibition of the Cambridge Natural History Society will be held in the Elementary Laboratory of the Zoology Department, Downing Street Cambridge. 11.0am to 4.0pm, Saturday and Sunday. This wonderful mix of original research and private enthusiasms is always full of interesting displays. Experts in the field of Natural Science and amateurs, adults and children will all find something of interest.

27 - 29 June The East Anglian Garden and Flower Show, Bourn Airfield

Bourn Airfield is just off the A428. The show is open 10.0am - 5.0pm Friday to Sunday. Tickets £6 in advance. Concessions £5. Children under 16 free. Beautiful Floral Marquee with displays by leading nurseries, and a wide variety of plants for sale. Model gardens. Displays by the National Association of Flower Arrangers. Garden supplies. Arts and crafts. Food tent, bar tent and stalls selling edible goodies. Classic cars on show. Free parking with plenty of hard standing.

As part of her aim to provide Cambridgeshire with a first class garden show, the organiser, Sheila Davenport, donates a large marquee for the promotion of **Wildlife Conservation**. I have the happy task of filling it up with interesting displays. (I should add that I am not paid by the show or anyone else.) Many of our exhibitors bring live beasties with them to illustrate their work in studying and promoting the conservation of bats, bees, birds, butterflies, dragonflies, wildflowers and fungi, ferrets and hedgehogs, newts and toads, badgers and otters. There will be watery animalcules and advice on ponds and dry gardens from the Environment Agency and a Master Composter complete with wriggly worms to help you recycle green waste.

In addition, **there will be a stand representing the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke**. If you could come and help for two or three hours, please ring me. You will get a free pass to a very nice garden show as a reward! Julia

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