



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

February 2011

Newsletter Number Thirty Four

Sam Agnew Retires

In April 2008, Sam Agnew stood down as Chairman of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. However, he continued to attend committee meetings, at which his experience and advice has always been very helpful. He also continued to attend the meetings of the sub-committee which was set up in order to help Roger Lemon to establish the route of the proposed Long Distance Walk and to write an accompanying booklet. Sam walked the route with Roger, as did Janet and John Moreton, and helped to dig in waymark posts and fix the waymarkers to the numerous posts.



Sam Agnew and Roger Lemon in action, putting in posts for the waymarking discs. This post is between Hare Wood and Over Wood, between posts 12 and 13 on the map in the booklet.

Unfortunately, some people seem to think that we will not miss one or two nice new wooden posts.

The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke would not exist if it had not been for Sam's interest in wildlife conservation. He was for many years a Councillor for the group of villages centred on Linton and Horseheath. He worked on a variety of conservation projects supported by South Cambridgeshire District Council and became Chairman of the SCDC Conservation Committee. In this capacity he met Sharon Hearle, the Project Officer for the Green Belt Project, which had been set up in the early nineties to look after an assortment of wildlife sites in the Cambridge Green Belt. Sharon had applied for a large Lottery grant to pay for extensive conservation work on the Roman Road, the Devil's Dyke and the Fleam Dyke. However, the Lottery office had awarded a large grant for work on the Devil's Dyke alone. The Devil's Dyke was deemed to have significantly more popular support than the Fleam Dyke or the Roman Road and therefore deserved public money.

Sam discussed this problem with staff at South Cambridgeshire District Council and others, and soon realised that a local group might be a catalyst to enable grants and support to be obtained from SCDC and other grant giving bodies. After a number of discussions with Sharon, the benefits of a Friends Group began to form in his mind. Sharon thought it was a good idea and said it would receive her full support. Sam then booked the Function room at The Six Bells Public House,

Fulbourn, and got Sharon's poster printed. Another councillor showed Sam a possible constitution which they could copy. The meeting at the Six Bells took place on 1st February 2001 and was attended by 78 people. Tim Malim, the County Archaeologist, gave a talk on the sites and Sharon Hearle explained why the chalk grasslands were so important and how much our help was needed. Sam Agnew conducted the meeting skilfully, eliciting offers to help on the committee, and the proceedings ended with a unanimous vote to form the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke.

At this meeting, Sharon Hearle agreed to stand on the committee, Jane Fenton offered to be Treasurer for a year, and Julia Napier offered to write the odd article on butterflies for any newsletter. Sam offered to be Chairman, if the meeting agreed, which they did enthusiastically. It is a tribute to Sam's ability to get things done that a few weeks later Julia found herself, as secretary, adapting the constitution of the Friends of the River Shep to fit our new group! (Liz Kendrick's generosity in allowing us to copy theirs saved us a great deal of time and effort.) At a second meeting in the Six Bells on April 5th, the constitution was adopted, and the subscription was set at £5, so that lack of money should not prevent anyone from joining. About 40 of those present signed up for membership and handed over their money, and we were in business. Sam's experience in committee work helped us to become established as quickly as we did, and from then on Sam chaired all the committee meetings and moved things forward steadily. He was always good humoured, very encouraging and good at thanking people for their work. By the end of the year we had doubled our membership, run two work parties and secured our first Lottery grant. When in early 2002 Donna Radley of English Nature set up a round table meeting for the different authorities responsible for the linear sites, the Friends were invited as well. Sam and Julia attended almost all subsequent Linear Sites meetings, and joined from 2006 onwards by Professor Peter Grubb, we were able to contribute significantly to discussions about the management of these sites.

From the beginning, Sam had two particular ambitions. The first was to get a Traffic Restriction Order on the Horseheath end of the Roman Road, and the second was to get some sort of walk guide similar to the famous pictorial guides written by Alfred Wainwright. The first ambition was achieved in 2009 when Sam's persistence was rewarded, and Cambridgeshire County Council agreed to a seasonal TRO for this section of the Roman Road. The second ambition was achieved in two ways with the production of leaflets describing the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road and their wildlife, and then the launch of the Fleam Dyke and Roman Road Walk in September 2009, the splendid booklet for those using it, and a celebratory long walk led by Sam and Roger Lemon.

In the autumn of 2010, Sam decided to retire from the committee. I feel sure that all our members will join me in thanking him for having the initiative to set up this society, which has done so much already to protect and enhance these beautiful wildlife sites.

Julia Napier



Corn Bunting with young. Drawing by Graham Easy

Roman Road and Fleam Dyke records 2011 by Roger Lemon

This year we achieved fairly good coverage, with data from 23 of the 26 weeks on both sites. It was a very interesting year of mixed fortunes. On Fleam Dyke we recorded 24 species, compared with 23 in 2009, the additional species being the Dark Green Fritillary, one of which was sighted in week 14. On the Roman Road there were also 24 species compared with 22 last year. We recorded the first Marbled Whites since 2007, with 5 records, and the first Chalkhill Blues listed in our transect counts in 2007, with 2 records.



Marbled White
drawing by Graham Easy

The first two Chalkhill Blues seen on the dyke since the 1970s were recorded by Roger and Stella Wolfe in August 2005, but were not seen by a transect recorder, so could not be counted.

The Chalkhill Blues on Fleam Dyke were the highlight of the season with a 6 times increase in numbers compared with last year, the index rising from 23 to 136. Overall, butterfly numbers dropped significantly on both sites compared with 2009, down by about 25% on Fleam Dyke and 50% on the Roman Road. Many of the more common species showed very large reductions in numbers.

Among the Vanessids, all except the Red Admiral showed sharp declines, particularly the Peacock, which was down to about 20% of its 2009 numbers on both sites. Small Tortoiseshells and Commas were also much less frequent than in 2009 and Painted Ladies were recorded in only very small numbers.

Among the browns, there was a reduction in the numbers of Ringlets recorded on the Roman Road but the numbers more than doubled on Fleam Dyke. From a fairly low number in 2009, Small Heath numbers also doubled on Fleam Dyke but remained very low on the Roman Road. The Speckled Wood maintained its low numbers on Fleam Dyke but showed a large reduction on the Roman Road. Both Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were recorded in much lower numbers. In particular, the Gatekeeper was down to 45% and 27% on Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road respectively, compared with 2009.

The Lycaenids fared somewhat better. The Chalkhill Blue has already been mentioned but the Common Blue also increased in numbers on both sites. The Brown Argus showed a good increase on Fleam Dyke and maintained its low population on the Roman Road. Holly Blue numbers were also similar to the previous year and on Fleam Dyke, the fairly low population of Green Hairstreaks has remained stable over a number of years. Three Small Coppers were recorded on the Roman Road compared with just one in 2009 but none were recorded on Fleam Dyke.

The Small White remained the most common butterfly on both sites while the Large White showed a dramatic reduction in comparison with 2009. The Green-veined White showed small reductions in numbers. Orange Tips almost doubled in number on Fleam Dyke and showed a slight increase on the Roman Road. Brimstone numbers were down to about 50% of 2009 levels on Fleam Dyke but still higher than they were in 2008. Numbers of this species were maintained on the Roman Road.

Small/Essex Skipper numbers were much lower than in 2009 on the Roman Road but were maintained on the Fleam Dyke. Large Skippers remained at similar levels to previous years on both sites.



Holly Blue on Bird's- Foot Trefoil, and Chalkhill Blue on Kidney Vetch.
drawing by Graham Easy

Work Parties and Butterflies

The arrival of the Chalkhill Blues seems to have been the result of various factors. By 2005 there had been a dozen years of volunteer work parties on the best areas of the Fleam Dyke: clearing scrub, mowing and raking off the arisings. Since 2001, the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke have also worked on these areas. The other factor is Climate Change. The Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, begun in the seventies, has recorded the steady movement northwards of species such as the Speckled Wood, the Marbled White and the Chalkhill Blue. Hot summers have produced a surplus of adult insects on one site, and good weather conditions the next summer has allowed species to spread to a nearby area which offers a good supply of the insects' plant food. When a few Chalkhill Blues arrived on Fleam Dyke in August 2005, they found a large quantity of welcoming Horseshoe Vetch. Similarly, the annual mowing of an increasingly large area of the Roman Road has produced a wonderful abundance of flowers such as Greater Knapweed, Common Knapweed and Small Scabious whose nectar is sought out by the Marbled White, (and the Red-tailed Bumblebees). Last summer Marbled Whites were seen in good numbers on the Gog Magog Golf Course. A few were seen visiting the Roman Road and may establish a colony there, we hope. Look for them in early July. In females, the upper side of the wing is more grey and the hind underwing is a brownish yellow.

So thank you to all the volunteers who come and help, and particularly this season to:

21st November 2010, mowing and raking on the north end of the Fleam Dyke: Mike Albutt, David Barden, Helen Chubb, Richard Fowling, Cathy Goss and her grand-daughter, Sophie Mitchell, Christine Newell, Cassie Sparks, Matthew Wallis, David Waterhouse, Roger and Stella Wolfe.

16th February 2011, cutting privet regrowth on the west slope of the Fleam Dyke, near the A11. David Barden, Helen Chubb, Richard Fowling, Cassie Sparks, Christine Newell, Rose Tristram.

And, of course, **many thanks to Iain Webb, Green Belt Officer**, who also brings the Mid-Week Volunteers to our sites six or seven times a year.

Previous Archaeological Excavations on the Roman Road by Quinton Carroll, Historic Environment Team Manager

We have records of two pieces of fieldwork along the Roman Road in recent years. Firstly in 2004 at TL 5055 5362. Monitoring was carried out during the improvement of a gas pipeline which runs the length of Worsted Street Roman road, south east of Wandlebury. Two trenches were excavated along the course of the road, revealing soil and chalk deposits associated with the construction of the road. The excavations showed that the road building material has been subject to extensive disturbance by tree roots, making the identification of any phasing difficult.

Secondly in 1991 where the A11 cuts through it by Worsted Lodge Farm. The Roman road and associated ditches were excavated and construction techniques recorded. Three sections were excavated, one to the east and two to the west of the road. The Roman road and flanking ditches were well-preserved west of the A11, showing the agger, the characteristic banked up track, comprising pre-Roman soil horizons, a foundation of rammed chalk, and gravel metalling. South east of the A11 no evidence of a Romanised road was found, and no conclusive evidence of ditches. Although no dating evidence was recovered, except for the imprint of a third century coin outside the south west ditch, soil samples were collected for detailed analysis of pollens, snail shells and soils. Limited fieldwalking and an auger survey traced the course of the road to the south east. Preliminary conclusions suggest that a fully Romanised road existed from Cambridge to Worsted Lodge and that this survives in very good condition. To the south east of Worsted Lodge a trackway may have been partly Romanised, though this is unproven. It may be speculated that the Roman road was intended to link Cambridge to the Roman Road from Great Chesterford to Caistor-by-Norwich, now the A11 trunk road.

Modern archaeology stands on the shoulders of earlier scholars and historians who recorded ancient sites. They called themselves Antiquarians, a name still maintained by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society. The first more scientific work on the Roman Road was on 18/02/1921 when a trench was cut across the road to determine whether the road is aligned on the partially levelled vallum of a pre-Roman dyke or not. The point selected for section was 5yds south east of the grid reference: BM 191,8 on OS 6in Cambs 47SE near the north east corner of the golf course. The trench was cut from the south edge of the crest down to the undisturbed chalk, thence southward and outward for 36ft. There was no ditch on the south side. The chalk rock was reached at a depth of 1 - 1 1/2 ft. Trial holes at three points on the same alignment showed similar results. The ramp was mainly constructed of earth; had it been material from a fosse it must have been composed of chalk rubble. The evidence is therefore conclusive that at this point the road is not on the line of a pre-Roman dyke. Several interesting features illustrating Roman methods of road making were noted during the digging of the section. The vertical section on the south side of the crest is typical. It showed from top to bottom:

- (a) 1 ft 2in of solid gravel, unmixed with surface soil
- (b) 6in of chalk rammed hard
- (c) 1ft 4in of earth with an occasional chalk nodule
- (d) 4in of chalk and earth intimately mixed and rammed, and
- (e) chalk rock

The road bearing surface was thus 3ft 4in above the undisturbed chalk. The definite limits of the floor layer (d) suggested we had data for determining the exact width of the Roman lay out. A second section was cut on 20 - 21/02/1921 at a point 130yds south east of BM 156 on OS 6in Cambs 47SE. The construction was identical with the former section; here the width of the floor layer was 36ft.

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The following article could not be further from the precise, scientific work of modern archaeologists, but Gervase of Tilbury was no fool: an expert in church law, a statesman and a writer, he taught at the University of Bologna and knew the great men of his time. I think the style makes it clear that he knows he is telling a tall tale to provide a winter night's pastime in the court. JN

THE KNIGHT OF WANDLEBURY

By Janet Morris

The rather nice story below is one of the oldest associated with Wandlebury. It was told by Gervase of Tilbury in his *Otia Imperialia* written about the year 1211 and translated by Arthur Gray in 'On the Wandlebury Legend' *Proceedings of Cambridge Antiquarian Society* Vol LVIII 1911. It seems particularly appropriate bearing in mind Wandlebury's later connection to the racehorse breeding industry.

In England, at the boundary of the diocese of Ely, there is a town named Cantabrica, in the neighbourhood of which there is a place called Wandlebiria, from the fact that the Wandali, when ravaging Britain and savagely murdering the Christians, placed their camp there. Now, where they pitched their tents on the hill-top, there is a level space surrounded with entrenchments and with a single entrance, like a gate. There is a very ancient tradition, attested by popular report, that if a warrior enters this level space at the dead of night, when the moon is shining, and cries 'Knight to knight, come forth', immediately he will be confronted by a warrior, armed for fight, who charging horse to horse, either dismounts his adversary or is dismounted. But I should state that the warrior must enter the enclosure alone, although his companions may look on from outside. As proof of the truth of this I quote a story told to me by the country people of the neighbourhood. There was in Great Britain, not many days ago, a knight redoubtable in arms and possessed of every noble quality, among the barons second in power to few, to none in worth. His name was Osbert, son of Hugh. One day he came as a guest to the town I have mentioned, and, it being winter time, after supper, as is the fashion with great folk, he was sitting in the evening by the fireside in the family of his wealthy host, and listening to tales of exploits of ancient days; and while he gave ear to them it chanced that one of the people of the country mentioned the wondrous legend aforesaid. The brave man resolved to make personal trial of the truth of what he was told. So he selected one of his noble squires, and, attended by him, went to the place. In complete armour he came to the appointed spot, mounted his steed, and, dismissing his attendant, entered the camp alone. He cried aloud to discover his opponent, and in response a knight, or what looked like a knight, came forth to meet him, similarly armed, as it seemed. Well, with shields advanced and levelled lances they charged and each horseman sustained his opponent's shock. But Osbert parried the spear-thrust of his antagonist, and with a powerful blow struck him to the ground. He was on his feet again in an instant, and, seeing that Osbert was leading off his horse by the bridle, as the spoils of conquest, he poised his lance and, hurling it like a javelin, with a violent effort he pierced Osbert's thigh. Our knight however in the exultation of his victory either did not feel or did not regard the wound, and his adversary having disappeared, he came out of the camp victorious, and gave the horse which he had won to his squire. It was tall, active and beautiful to behold. He was met on his return by a number of the family, who marvelled at the tale, were delighted at the overthrow of the knight, and loudly applauded the bravery of the illustrious baron. When Osbert took off his arms and discarded his iron greaves he saw one of them filled with clotted blood. The family were amazed at the wound, but the knight scorned fear. The neighbours, aroused from slumber, came thronging

together, and their growing marvel induced them to keep watch. As evidence of the victory the horse was kept, still tethered. It was displayed to public view with its fierce eyes, erect neck and black mane; its knightly saddle and all its trappings were likewise black. At cockcrow the horse, prancing, snorting and pawing the earth, suddenly burst the reins that held it and regained its native liberty. It fled, vanished, and none could trace it. And our noble knight had a perpetual reminder of the wound which he had sustained, in that each year, as the same night returned, the wound, though apparently cured and closed, opened again. So it came about that the famous warrior, some years later, went over sea and, after performing many deeds of valour against the heathen, by God's will ended his days.

Back to Reality!

Dog bins

Time for a much deserved Thank you to Jon Gibbs, the Head Ranger of Wandlebury, who very kindly undertook the regular emptying of three of our dog bins: those at Babraham Road, at Mount Farm, and at Worsted Lodge on the A11. The other two bins, one at the junction of the Linton-Balsham Road and one at Horseheath, are looked after by their respective parishes. The dog bin nearest to Fulbourn is the most regularly used. If you see that it needs to be emptied, could you ring Jon Gibbs on 07833 598155.

Cycling

Riding bicycles on an SSSI is, technically, illegal but is not thought to be a problem on the Roman Road at the moment. However, cycling is NOT permitted on the Fleam Dyke. The path is narrow, and the chalk surface can easily be eroded. In many places the rarest flowers are growing at the edge of the path. There are also places where the fact that the path drops away sharply is concealed by summer vegetation. The County Council will be erecting No Cycling signs.

Motor Cycles are NOT allowed, whatever the riders tell you.

e.g.

"I have permission from the landowner." All together now. "Oh no you don't!"
 "The map says so" Never mind about that, my lad. Just take a gander at the No Access sign.
 "I know it says No Access, but the finger post says Public Byway." Yes, it does, and in smaller letters underneath, the sign makes it clear that cars and motorcycles are not allowed.

Subscriptions for 2011 are now due.

£ £ £ £ £ £

We regret to say that it is now necessary to increase the subscription officially to £10. Many members have done this already which has substantially increased our small income. We should be most grateful if members with Standing Orders for £5 would alter them accordingly. The newsletters, two in colour and one in black and white, now cost almost £5 with postage. However, the remaining £5 has been extremely useful, allowing us to pay for some very useful work each year. Thank you for your continued support.

Forthcoming Events

Friends Work Parties on Sunday Mornings

Sunday 20th February: Roman Road, Golf Course section

Meet at Wandlebury car park at 9.45am

Sunday 6th March: Fleam Dyke, south of A11.

Meet at the end of Stonebridge Lane at 9.45am



Small Heath

Wednesday, March 9th 2011
The Tenth Annual General Meeting

7.30 – 10.00pm

at The Six Bells Public House,
 High Street, Fulbourn



Dr Peter Carey of the Plant Sciences Department of Cambridge University, will give an illustrated talk

The Conservation of Chalk Grassland flora: orchids and butterflies

All welcome. Members free. Non-members £3

Thursday 14th April, 2011

Tenth Anniversary Celebration

7.00 – 10.00pm

Drinks followed by an illustrated talk by Dr Kevin Leahy, the national expert on The Staffordshire Treasure

The Main Hall, Perse Upper School, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8QF
 Parking on site

All welcome. Members £5. Non-members £10

Please give the enclosed flyer to your friends and encourage them to come.

Tickets from Elfrida Heath, 69 Humberstone Road, CB4 1JD. **s.a.e**, please
 tel:01223 562360 email: elfrida.heath@ntlworld.com

Many thanks to **Oggie Tomic**, who designed the tickets for the 14th April, and to **Tina Bone**, who turned his initial design into our handsome flyer and poster. Our Fleam Dyke leaflet was also designed by Tina.

Readers will recognise the skilled hand of **Graham Easy** in the beautiful drawing of a Sky Lark at the top of this page, and in all the other illustrations used in this newsletter.

Finally and even more deserved than usual, many thanks to **Mark Bishop, Copy Studio**, who found Orbit Print to do 1,000 high quality flyers for only £65, placed the order, and hounded them when our order seemed to be slipping down their list of priorities.



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