Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

March 2012

Newsletter Thirty Seven

The Penipotentiary Mystery

by Janet Morris

When you pass through Horseheath on your way to or from a walk along the Roman Road, you might be forgiven for thinking that the rather handsome village sign, which pictures a race horse, was just a nice play on the name of the village but this was a real horse and famous resident - Plenipotentiary, the winner of the 1834 Derby – and one with some drama, if not a bit of a mystery, attached to him.

Plenipotentiary was owned and bred by the wonderfully named Stanlake Batson (1773-1857) who lived at Horseheath Lodge. Stanlake inherited the Horseheath Hall estate from his father but as the Hall itself had been demolished and sold off for building materials in the 1790s, he built himself a new modern house, the Lodge, on the opposite side of the village between the Roman Road at Mark's Grave and what is now the A1307 (recently the home of the late Sir Arthur Marshall). Stanlake was a keen 'man of the turf' and a prominent member of the Jockey Club. He established a stud farm and set up a training ground on his Horseheath estate, part of which was apparently incorporated into the present-day point-to-point course when it was set out in the 1970s.

Plenipo (his conveniently shortened name) was born in Horseheath in 1831. He was a powerful, chestnut coloured horse, described at the time as a 'great fat bullock' but much admired for his speed and stamina. After a couple of wins at Newmarket, he was justifiably the favourite when entered for the Derby at Epsom in 1834, which he went on to win by an astonishing two lengths. There must have been celebrations back in Horseheath as Stanlake had promised his tenant farmers a rent-free year if the horse won and Plenipo's seventeen-year-old Horseheath stable lad, Henry (known as Harry) Mynott, became something of a village celebrity. Stanlake was able to enlarge the Lodge with the money the win brought him. He added a second storey (removed by a subsequent owner) and he commissioned Abraham Cooper to paint Plenipo with trainer and jockey – a painting that has subsequently inspired the village sign [1].

Now for the mystery. Plenipo had a walkover in his next race at Ascot - no one even wanted to enter a horse to compete against him. He went on to Doncaster for the St Leger in September where he was again the firm favourite. However, this time he came absolutely nowhere. He was not even placed in the race. So what had gone wrong? Was he simply unprepared or was it poor training? These are certainly possibilities. Before the advent of the railways, horses had to walk from racecourse to racecourse even though they may be a hundred or so miles apart. This could take two or three weeks. So, perhaps not enough time had been allowed for him to recover and he was just not racing fit. However, there seems to be no evidence that would indicate that Stanlake ever had any doubts about the ability, or indeed integrity, of trainer or jockey.

Was there something more underhand going on? Had Plenipo been 'got at' in some way before the race? Not an unnatural conclusion to come to in the circumstances, nor indeed for the time. There is no doubt that there was big money at stake in horse racing, then as now, and this would have given plenty of motive for someone to disable Plenipo. 'Nobbling' was apparently fairly commonplace in the racing industry. The horse was said to have been difficult to rouse in his stall before the race and be unusually docile while being saddled, although this is the sort of thing his trainer and jockey might well have said in order to shift the blame if their own competence was being questioned. One suspect would be the stable lad, Harry Mynott, but no suspicion seems to have been attached to him at the time. It is only much later that there has been some suggestion that Harry made a deathbed confession that he had handed over the keys of Plenipo's stall on the eve of the race to some unnamed person [2].

So, could Plenipo have been 'nobbled' with the help of his stable lad? Harry was very young and may simply have been rather naïve. He would, of course, be used to doing what he was told without question by anyone with seeming authority. He could well have succumbed to temptation if offered money, as he was no doubt poorly paid, but would he really have put his future livelihood in jeopardy? A position as a trusted stable lad would have provided security and year round employment at a time of rural depression and when agricultural work was subject to seasonal vagaries. Harry certainly does not seem to have profited if his subsequent history is anything to go by. At his marriage in 1845 he was described as a labourer (he signed the register with a mark). In every Horseheath census from 1851 to 1881 his occupation was given as Groom and in 1891 he and his wife, Susan, were recorded as receiving parish poor relief. Jonas Marshall Webb recalled Harry in a memoir published in 1928. Harry had been groom to his uncle, John Webb, of Church Farm in Horseheath and had one hand that was helpless from the wrist where he had been 'disabled by a savage racehorse' [3]. An elderly Harry can indeed be seen holding this arm rather awkwardly in a photograph included in *Horseheath: Some recollections of a Cambridgeshire Parish* by Catherine Parsons [4]. Both she and J M Webb knew Harry well and wrote about him long after his death in 1898. Neither, perhaps tellingly, made any mention of any supposed 'deathbed confession'.

Whatever the reason for Plenipo's failure in Doncaster, it seems to have had a permanent effect on his reputation. Accounts say the horse was never the same again, that his racing days were well and truly over and that he was not even a success at stud. This is not entirely true - Plenipo did go on to win some lesser events and some of his progeny were successful, if not spectacularly so – but he may well have ended his days 'servicing half-bred mares for a fiver' before his death in 1854 [5]. It all seems a rather inglorious finish to the career of a racehorse that had until then been called 'the best horse of the century'!

1. Information on the Batson family and Plenipotentiary can be found in Catherine Parsons ‘Horseheath Hall and its owners’ *Proceedings of Cambridge Antiquarian Society* Vol XLI 1948
2. Information about Harry Mynott’s ‘deathbed confession’ and other details about Plenipo can be found on Patricia Erigero’s Thoroughbred Heritage website
(www. tbheritage,com)
3. Jonas Marshall Webb *Streetly: A Tale of Cambridgeshire by a Native* 1928 (a copy is in the Cambridgeshire Collection)
4. Catherine Parsons *Horseheath: Some recollections of a Cambridgeshire Parish* 1952 (typescript in Cambridgeshire Archives P95/28/16)
5. See note ii

Talking of Horses ….

The Buglife Ragwort Fact file,

Summary and comments by JN

In July 2011, Monsanto, Barrier Biotech Ltd., Ragfork, The British Horse Society and Warwickshire Council were criticized by the Advertising Standards Authority for displaying inaccurate and misleading information on their websites and in leaflets about Common Ragwort, a British wildflower important for wildlife conservation.

In 2002, the British Horse Society asked members of the British Equestrian Veterinary Association (BEVA) how many suspected cases of Ragwort fatalities they had seen in 2002. 4% of BEVA members responded saying on average they had seen 3.37 cases. The 3.37 was then multiplied by the membership of BEVA (1,945) to give an annual total of 6,553 cases. As anyone with a science degree, or a degree of commonsense, will tell you, this is an absurd approach. In the first place, vets who did not encounter any Ragwort poisoning would be unlikely to respond to a survey about Ragwort poisoning as they would not consider it to be a problem. Therefore, a more honest reporting of the survey results would be that at least 283 horses were suspected of dying of Ragwort poisoning in 2002.

Horses will not eat leaves and flowers from a clump of Ragwort, as used to be demonstrated annually by the horses grazing round the bright clusters of Ragwort on the meadow opposite the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. I think it was last year that I realized the Ragwort had gone. The main danger to horses comes from dried Ragwort in hay, which was already covered by earlier legislation placing the responsibility for safe hay on the shoulders of the supplier. There was no need to involve all land owners and managers in the mass destruction of a native plant.

The toxins (pyrrolizidine alkaloids) in Ragwort can cause liver poisoning. It is a cumulative poison, eventually leading to the rather rapid onset of symptoms which precede rapid death. The plant has the alternative name Stagger Weed, referring to one of the more obvious symptoms. Cattle are sometimes affected, sheep apparently less so (although it is difficult to find solid evidence of any fatal effects on other livestock). On the basis of this entirely false statistic, there has been a national war on Ragwort in the course of which many similar yellow flowers such as Tansy, Colt’s Foot, Fleabane and even St John’s Wort have been poisoned in meadows and commons.

Does this matter?

At least 30 species of insects and other invertebrates are totally dependent on Common Ragwort, *Senecio jacobaea*, or the closely similar Hoary Ragwort, *Senecio erucifolius.*

leaf beetles; 12 flies, Including the attractive picture-winged flies,
1 macro moth - the Cinnabar moth, 7 micro moths
1 aphid species, 1 thrip species, 1 mite species

A further 22 species rely very heavily on Common Ragwort as a foodplant. Seven of these 52 highly reliant species are Nationally Scarce (three beetles, one fly and three micromoths); and three species are of Red Data Book status = on the way to the Exit.

Ragwort is also a major nectar source for many insects, especially:-

* Solitary bees (at least 30 species: 38 cited in one list
* Solitary wasps (at least 18 species; not the sort to harm people).
* Hoverflies (many species).
* Conopid flies (parasitic on solitary bees and bumblebees).
* Butterflies (Small Copper, particularly when other flowers are scarce)
* Moths at night (including at least **40 noctuid** moths. Noctuids are generally the ones which settle with their wings folded down beside or over their fat and furry bodies.)

Many of these insects are important for the pollination of food crops on which we depend, particularly fruit crops. Insects are an important food source for birds and small mammals. Smaller birds and mammals are the food source for the hawks and owls we all love to see. If you would like to know more, go to the Buglife website for an account of possible solutions to this problem.

With thanks to Arran Textiles for the illustration.

Arran Textiles was set up nine years ago by Project Manager Lynn Ross. Offering classes in traditional skills such as spinning, weaving and natural dyeing, the project was initially aimed at women over 50 living in isolated rural communities, and has been extremely successful. Ragwort flowers are used for yellow dye, and the leaves for a less permanent green dye. There are also a variety of medicinal uses.

Bat Survey Report,
October 2011
Prepared by the Wildlife Trust bcn

Fulbourn Fen and Fleam Dyke
summary by Julia Napier

The MB.50 Pipistrelle, Maurice Brochet 1947

This report was funded by Renewable Energy Systems Ltd (RES) in connection with the wind farm development at Wadlow Farm. If you would like to see the full seventeen page report with maps and tables, send me an email and I can forward the PDF.

The survey covered the Fulbourn Fen Nature Reserve and the northern end of the Fleam Dyke as far as the A11. Fixed point and hand held recorders were used. Unsurprisingly, the Nature Reserve was visited by many more bats than the Fleam Dyke. There were five species recorded in the reserve the Common Pipistrelle, the Soprano Pipistrelle, Serotine, Myotis and one Barbastelle, but on the Fleam Dyke there were only Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle.

Common Pipistrelles, followed by Soprano Pipistrelles. The species breakdown reflects national and local trends. Pipistrelles are the most common bats in the UK and are found in a wide range of habitats, so it makes sense that they were the most common species recorded during this survey. During this year’s survey recorders did not find anything unusually significant, such as a large population of a locally rare bat. However, the Barbastelle record is interesting, because they are nationally rare and listed as a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species. A Barbastelle roost was discovered at Wimpole Hall in 2001. The Cambridgeshire Bat Group, led by Chris Vine, are attempting to research how wide-ranging the species is. (It should be noted that bat recording and moth recording require a great deal of late night heroism, and very patient partners!) Records from this survey will be shared with the Cambridgeshire Bat Group and with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre. Further comparisons with the data they hold will be made in future years.

Major Clearance on the Roman Road SSSI

Readers who have walked along the Roman Road either from Wort's Causeway southwards or from Worsted Lodge towards Hildersham will have noticed extensive clearance all the way along. On the northern section, beginning off the dirt track from Wort's Causeway, invasive scrub has been cut back, including larger bushes and small trees, and some of the scrub treated with chemicals. Tree trunks and larger branches were chipped and scattered randomly under the trees, or thrown into the northern ditch. The advantage is that the shape of the old Roman Road can be seen clearly, once again, with its characteristic ditches on either side, which have been almost invisible for many years. The work was organised by Karen Whymark of the CCC Countryside Access team who found a spare crock of gold in the Rights of Way budget.

This clearance compliments the new Conservation and Enhancement Scheme for the Roman Road planned by Natural England with funding from DEFRA under a national Grasslands Improvement Scheme. This scheme will run for 5 years, providing £5,000 a year for improved grassland management of the Roman Road. This scheme will not affect the section of the Roman Road from Copley Hill to Worsted Lodge, which is mainly managed by Iain Webb and the Mid-week Volunteers, with help from work parties of the Friends and, this year, a team of boys from the Perse School, led by the Biology Master, David Pickstone.

Under this scheme, the verges of the Roman Road will be mowed twice a year, in spring and in autumn, and the arisings will be removed. It is extremely important that this work will be done in accordance with the 2007 Management Plan, that is to say that the verges should be **not** be mowed all at once twice a year. This was in fact done in November, despite my protests at the Linear Sites meeting in September. The Management Plan states that work should be done in different years, on a mosaic, creating blocks of tall and short sward, with a border of taller grasses and herbs beside the hedges. It is not clear how much scrub will be left if any. The Countryside Access team are keen that all bridleways open to all traffic should be cleared to a width of forty feet, as can be seen on the formerly wooded pathway beside Lodge Farm, which now requires regular mowing.

From the initial cut in November it is clear that the mowing machine was and will be a large and heavy vehicle with rather wide tyres, which is a bit worrying but seems unavoidable. However, it is clear that a plan which produces regular mowing and removal of arisings is, in outline, something which seemed too good to hope for only last year. If implemented correctly it should help to improve the grassland all along the Roman Road SSSI, and give the surviving calcareous flora a much better chance of surviving and spreading. And after five years?

There follows my unashamed publicity for a major publication by two local botanists, which I thought our many flower lovers would like to know about. The following text and publication details come from the publisher's promotional leaflet, with additions for this newsletter from Philip Oswald. JN

JOHN RAY'S CAMBRIDGE CATALOGUE (1660)

Translated and edited by P.H. Oswald and C.D. Preston

John Ray is the outstanding British natural historian of the 17th century. This 624-page book far surpasses Ewen & Prime's (1975) *Ray's Flora of Cambridgeshire* by providing the first complete translation from the Latin of his first publication, *A catalogue of plants growing around Cambridge* (1660). This is famous as the first British County Flora, but it is a much more complex work than its title suggests. It includes not only a botanical catalogue, but also indexes of English names and of places (with lists of the rarer species of 12 areas in the county) and hitherto untranslated chapters on the meanings of plant names and of botanical terms. Ray's abilities as an all-round naturalist are apparent from the numerous digressions in the text, which include pioneer observations on insect parasitoids and the hermaphrodite mating of slugs and snails and a suggestion that gardeners may control plant pests by fostering "a great army of frogs". The rare appendices to the Catalogue, published in 1663 and 1685, are also translated here for the first time.

The translated text is preceded by introductory chapters which draw upon unpublished manuscripts and recently published studies to present a new account of Ray's time in the University of Cambridge and the role that his collaborators might have played in the preparation of the Catalogue. They also analyse its structure and sources, provide brief biographical portraits of the botanists cited by Ray and discuss the problems of equating his names to modern taxa. The book ends with a vocabulary of the epithets in Ray's Latin plant names, a gazetteer and a bibliography.

As Professor Oliver Rackham comments in his foreword, other editions and commentaries on the Cambridge Catalogue exist "but none does justice to its complexity, its discursiveness, its allusiveness, the circumstances of its writing, its vast bibliography or Ray's other works associated with it as appendices or supplements".

The authors both live in Cambridge and are Honorary Members of the Botanical Society of the British Isles and graduates of the University of Cambridge, Philip Oswald with a degree in Classics and Theology and Chris Preston with a doctorate in Botany, thus combining John Ray's principal interests

The retail price is £75.00, or £45.00 to members of the BSBI, the Society for the History of Natural History and the Cambridge Bibliographical Society. The Ray Society is offering one copy to each of its members at the special price of £35.00 (p. & p. included). Ray Society membership costs £6.00 *per annum* plus a joining fee of £6.00, so the total becomes £47.
See www.raysociety.org.uk/

Horseshoe Vetch, anon.
Common Rock-rose, anon.
Harebell, Sarah Wroot

Philip Oswald kindly sent the following comments and translation:

Ray didn't record any plants specifically from either the Roman Road or the Fleam Dyke but did include "Gogmagog Hills" in his Index of Places with a list of 24 species with pre-Linnaean names, as follows:

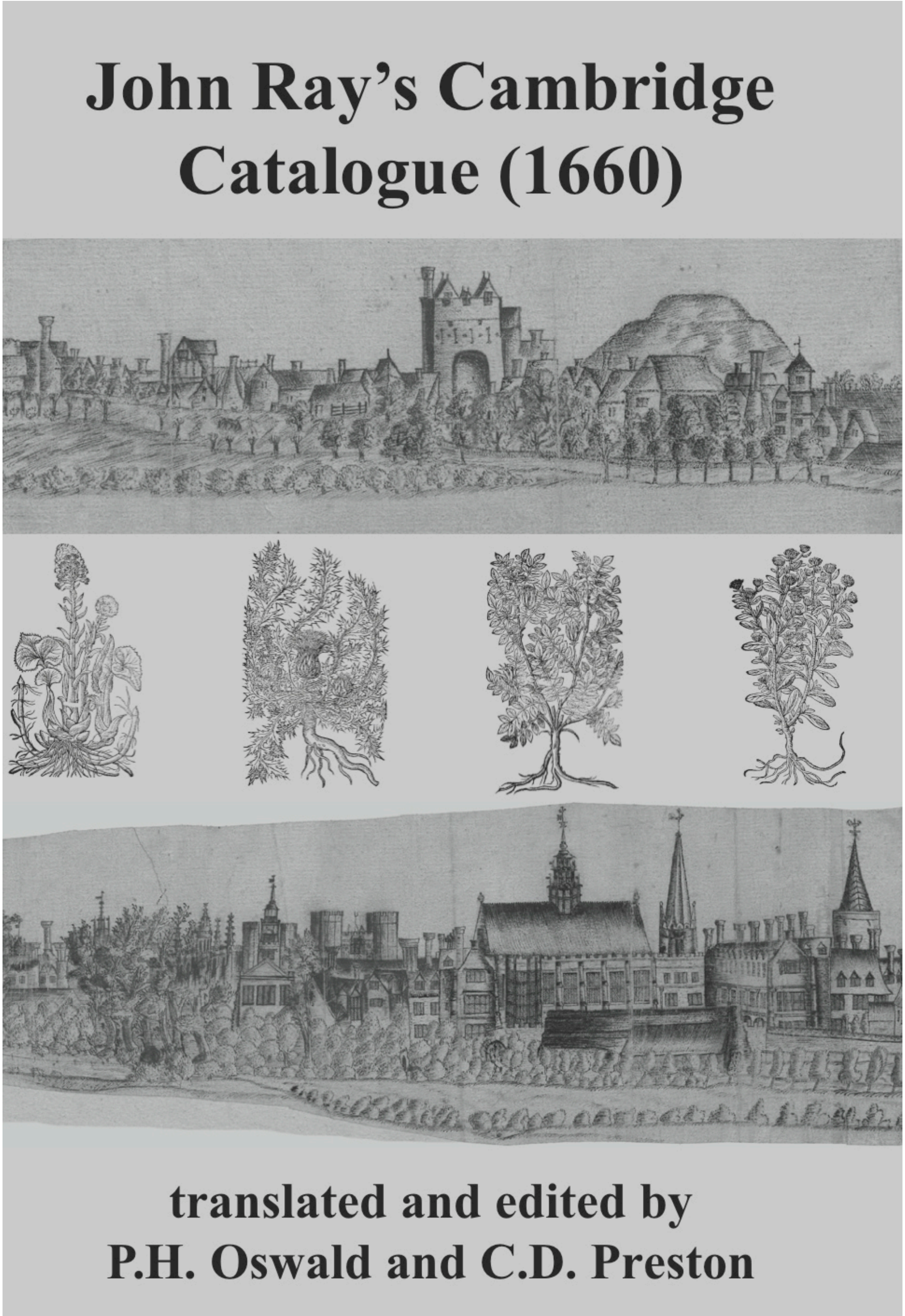
GOGMAGOG HILLS

Acinos Anglicum *Clusii*, Anthyllis leguminosa, Campanula minor rotundifolia, Erica vulgaris, Euphrasia, Filipendula, Gentianella fugax Autumnalis, Glaux Dioscoridis, Helianthemum, Jacobæa montana lanuginosa non laciniata, Linaria, Linaria adulterina, Linum catharticum, Linum sylvestre cæruleum, Onobrychis, Orchis militaris Pannonica, Orchis sphegodes, Polygala, Pimpinella vulgaris, Pulsatilla, Reseda Italica, Saxifraga Anglica Occidentalium *Lob.*, Serpyllum hirsutum, Trachelium minus.

Basil Thyme, Kidney Vetch, Harebell, Heather, Eyebright, Dropwort, Autumn Gentian, Purple Milk-vetch, Common Rock-rose, Field Fleawort (*Tephroseris integrifolia*), Common Toadflax, Bastard-toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), Fairy Flax, Perennial Flax, Sainfoin, Burnt Orchid (now *Neottinea ustulata*), Bee Orchid, Common Milkwort, Salad Burnet, Pasqueflower, Wild Mignonette, Squinancywort, Wild Thyme, Clustered Bellflower.

Other species listed from Gogmagog Hills in the main catalogue but not included in the above: Small Toadflax, Carline Thistle, unidentifiable puff-ball fungi, Horseshoe Vetch, Dark Mullein.

"Anglicum *Clusii*" is the specific epithet given to Basil Thyme in the genus *Acinos* by Clusius (i.e. Charles de L'Écluse, 1526–1609) followed by his name in the genitive. A comparable case later in the list is "Saxifraga Anglica Occidentalium *Lob.*", indicating that the name given by Lobelius (i.e. Mathias de l'Obel, 1538–1616) to Squinancywort was (literally) "English Saxifrage of Western [authors]".



John Ray's Cambridge Catalogue (1660)

translated and edited by
P.H. Oswald and C.D. Preston

The cover illustration shows two sections of a Cambridge panorama of about 1630 and pictures from Thomas Johnson's (1633) revision of Gerarde's *Herball* of four plants recorded from Cambridge by Ray, Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*), Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*), Wild Liquorice (*Astragalus glycyphyllos*) and the now very rare Small Fleabane (*Pulicaria vulgaris*). The upper section shows the area around Cambridge castle and the lower section is centred on Trinity College; reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library (MS Add. 2655).

Eleventh Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, March 28th, 7.30pm

Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn High Street

Business meeting

Interval for refreshments,

Illustrated talk by

Professor Ian Newton,

Chairman of the Council of the British Trust for Ornithology

Bird Migration

Professor Newton first became known for his outstanding research on finches, which had interested him from boyhood. His 27-year study of a sparrowhawk population nesting in southern Scotland was one of the longest-running and most detailed studies of a bird of prey population anywhere in the world, and it provided a new level of understanding. In recent years he has worked particularly on migration, and in 2010 published the New Naturalist volume entitled Bird Migration.

All Welcome Members free Non-members £3

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Subscriptions

Membership of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke is £10 a year, payable on the 5th April or thereabouts. We are most grateful to (almost) everyone for increasing their annual payments or Standing Orders to £10. It is best to instruct your bank to cancel any existing order.

E-mailing List

We have the email addresses for 120 members, which is about half the number of households on the mailing list. When this newsletter gets posted, I will also email Friends about the AGM. If you do not get an email about the AGM, and would like to be on our email list, let me know.

Julia Napier, February 2012

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