



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

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photograph JN, September 2010

How the Fleam Dyke got its Footbridge by Janet Moreton

In the back bedroom of our modest Cambridge house, used as an office for our Ramblers' Association activities, are many dusty files. They relate to diversion orders, public inquiries, past campaigns, path clearance and waymarking activities, communications with other countryside organisations and parish, district and county councils, and records of path problems in South Cambridgeshire going back to the 1970s.

An enquiry about the history of the Fleam Dyke footbridge over the A11, led me to discover at the back of a tall cupboard, the cobwebby bundle 3 inches thick, labelled "A11 dualling, Four Went Ways and Fleam Dyke Bridge Papers".

A Public Inquiry was held at The Welding Institute, Abington, between 25th and 28th September 1990. The Department of Transport was not offering a footbridge for the Fleam Dyke crossing, only a considerable detour to what was then the Balsham Crossroads.

It was decided that Roger and I should co-ordinate the opposition. All through the spring and summer, we made contacts with the parish councils of Little Abington, Balsham, Little Wilbraham, West Wrating and Fulbourn; we sent round a petition for all supporters to sign; we made contacts with conservation and archaeological interests, and prepared our submission. We included lists of group walks made in recent years by local walking groups, and no fewer than 6 publications where descriptions of walks along the Dyke specified crossing the A11. We spoke of the paucity of public rights of way in the locality, and of the importance of through routes, the attractiveness of the raised spine in the quiet countryside, the nature interest in a mostly arable landscape.

Our case for a bridge over the A11 was presented by the Ramblers' Association National Office representative, John Trevelyan.

Since I worked at Welding Institute and was on the spot, it was decided I should give evidence for the Ramblers' Association, backed up by our Cambridge Group Chairman, John Capes, and our Countryside Officer, Alistair Cook. Parish Councillor Orgee of Little Abington, Mr D Kelloway, representing Fulbourn, and Mr Alex Sadler for Great Wilbraham Parish Council also gave evidence. Dr David Clark, the then Wildlife Trust Voluntary Warden for Fleam Dyke spoke of the wildlife aspects and the importance of the Dyke as a continuous entity. English Heritage was represented separately. Fred Matthews (joint author with Harry Bitten of 'The Harcamlow Way', the guide to the then new 140 mile walk part of which runs along Fleam Dyke) gave evidence of use.

The Inspector, Air Marshall, Sir John Fitzpatrick, brought out his report and decisions in March 1991. The matter which took up most time at the Inquiry was the vexed question of the alternative route for the old footpath. The Department of Transport proposed a staggered gap in the central reservation of the new four-lane highway and a new right of way taking walkers to the new overbridge at the Balsham Crossroads. The Ramblers' Association and others had argued that the diversion was unreasonably long (an 1840m detour, much of it beside the noisy A11) and that the direct crossing was dangerous, although the length of the detour would encourage people to use it, and walkers wanted a footbridge. One independent objector wanted a subway!

The DoT had carried out 3 surveys of path usage (I believe on Tuesdays) in winter, finding, of course, very few people crossing the road. The objectors had argued that the surveys were taken at the wrong time, and that the deterrent effect of the present road crossing gave a false impression for calculating present and future usage. The Inspector eventually concluded that the alternative route was not "reasonably convenient" and that a footbridge would be required. The bridge was to be built off the line of Fleam Dyke, in order to avoid visual intrusion into Beech Tree Cottages.

So Fleam Dyke won its bridge, but it was a very long time a-building. Almost every other part of the A11 improvement was completed, before the footbridge was erected. It was Sunday, 17 July 1994 before the Ramblers' Association held a series of concurrent celebratory walks along the Dyke, and over the bridge, to end in a free tea for over 100 people at Balsham pavilion. Guests of Honour included John Trevelyan and the renowned archaeologist, Thurston Shaw, who had chaired the committee creating the Icknield Way long distance path. It was a wonderful day, very hot, and a picnic lunch for the walkers was taken under the shade of the big tree at Mutlow Hill. Of the folk left out in the sun, one, unfortunately got slight sunstroke, and had to be escorted back, sponged down, and fed cool drinks.

photograph: Janet Moreton.
Roger Moreton is the man with a camera.



Other News: Second Bench on Mutlow Hill, November 2014

Dr David Clark joined the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke shortly after we were set up. He thought, quite rightly, that I would like to know more about the story of the junipers and the activities of earlier friends and protectors of the site. I remember the relish with which he described his part in the Inquiry. His account went something like this:

I rhapsodised about time-honoured freedoms and people's right to walk the ancient ways; how dear Fleam Dyke was to the many walkers who revelled in the beauty of the countryside, and so on. Then a Man from the Ministry rose and said his officers had been posted in cars beside the A11 for three days, and in that time one man had crossed on the first day, two and a half on the second and one more on the third day. I thought our cause was lost, but never underestimate an Air Marshall. Sir John Fitzpatrick declared that the ancient rights of travellers and walkers must be protected, and we got our bridge!

His widow, Margaret Farrell, had asked if it would be possible to have a memorial to him on Mutlow Hill, which she intended to pay for. In the event it was made and installed free of charge by a volunteer, as a tribute to a doctor who did so much for mental illness by his reforms Fulbourn Mental Hospital, and who also gave time and energy to conservation work clearing scrub on the bank and monitoring the Junipers of the Fleam Dyke.

Our Website – www.frrfd.org.uk

Begun by Roger Lemon, it was updated and is maintained by Christine Newell. Do have a look at it if you have not done so already. The Home Page is simple and clear and the sub-sections or Links have beautiful panoramas, often taken by Christine.

For several years the newsletter was a scissors and paste job which I took to Copy Studio to be photocopied and stapled at the corner. Peter Bishop was always very helpful while also tactfully suggesting moves into more modern times. His son, Mark has patiently explained my mistakes and unravelled my confusions, until, with extra coaching from Mike Albutt, we arrived at this sparkling 'saddle- stitched' product which could be electronically transferred to Christine if our software could be persuaded to collaborate. All the pre-electronic ones were scanned by Edmund Tanner. Christine has finally cracked the final problem, and so our website now includes **all the newsletters from 2001 to 2011**. Dr Clark's article about his involvement with the Fleam Dyke can be read in **Newsletter Number 28**, which is on our website.

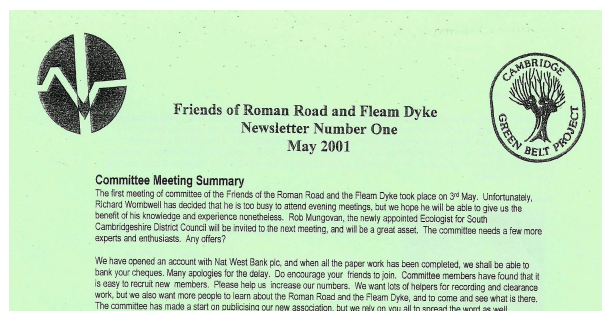
Why only until 2011?

A few years ago I asked about 15 of our members, more or less randomly selected, what they thought. The majority wanted to keep the newsletter for paid up members. Very few organisations give away their magazines, because they are the main regular benefit which members receive.

Why not send newsletters email?

I have email addresses for only half our members. Others tell me they find life can continue quite nicely without email. I believe that most people do not read email newsletters. I rarely do. Moreover, an email newsletter is unlikely to be read by other members of the family. It cannot be left lying around to be picked up later, or be seen by friends. However, if you would like your newsletter to come as an email, please let me know and I will add you to the list of members who prefer that system.

Is there an Index? Yes, in my files. Work in slow progress.



Management of the Roman Road near Hildersham

Readers may remember that the last two years have involved disagreement about the management of scrub on the Roman Road south of Gunner's Hall. We are most grateful to Brian Eversham, Director of the Wildlife Trust and Martin Baker, the Conservation Director, for finding the time to come on a site visit on 16th June and discuss a possible management plan with Professor Peter Grubb.



photo: Julia Napier

Brian arrived early and did a characteristically brilliant high-speed survey of the invertebrates on both the Deadman Hill and un-cleared sections (above), with an equal amount of time on each. This yielded **76** species including 3 Nationally Notable and 2 Local species on Deadman Hill itself and **88** species on the un-cleared scrubby section, with only one Local species. This result is unsurprising as one would expect to find a higher quality of invertebrate fauna associated with grassland habitats than with secondary scrub about 30 to 40 years old. However, the shelter provided by the remaining scrub is also important for some grassland invertebrate species.

For this reason Brian and Martin strongly criticised the hedge to hedge clearance done by the County Council and they recommended the retention of blocks of managed scrub to increase the amount of sheltered grassland and scrub edge habitat as prescribed by the Management Plan of 2008 -18.

The section from Deadman Hill to the Balsham-Hildersham Road was specifically noted in this plan as an area that supports breeding warbler species and is used by birds on migration. The mature shrubs also provide a valuable winter seed source for birds. Brian and Martin confirmed that, as the Friends have repeatedly pointed out at meetings of the Linear Sites Committee, wholesale clearance will not produce calcareous grassland and will remove a habitat that is complementary to the open areas of grassland elsewhere on the Roman Road. There are also strong aesthetic reasons for maintaining the current character of this semi-woodland section, where bushes alternate with scrub and flowery grassland and is filled with bird song.

The group also looked at the Chilford Hall section, beyond the Balsham-Hildersham Road. Brian and Martin agreed that the hedge to hedge clearance in 2012 had removed significant stands of scrub and bird breeding habitat purely to meet Rights of Way objectives with no regard for the natural environment. It was concluded that the area will not become high quality grassland as there are no local seed sources and the soils have become progressively less calcareous. The drastic clearance had revealed a dozen healthy, mature elm trees in the straggly, overgrowth remnant of the hedge. Brian Eversham confirmed that these were Wych elms and elms from the smooth-leaved elm group. Eastern England has a variety of elm species with types that are unique in Europe. We hope to arrange further analysis. Unfortunately the total clearance of surrounding scrub may make these elms vulnerable to gales.

Copley Hill, Roman Road Fourth Year of work by FRRFD

The picture on the right shows the Roman Road south of Copley Hill just after Bernard Hunt had cleared the first section of scrub in April 2011, treating the stumps as he worked. At the time the bushes were 4 to 5ft high. We planned to clear this second scrubby section in 2012. However, by mistake, the County Council contractor flailed all the remaining scrub, which would make it very hard to deal with next year. Bernard treated as much as he could anyway, using his own time very freely in order to rescue the situation. This whole section was then cleared and retreated in 2012, 2013 and 2014.



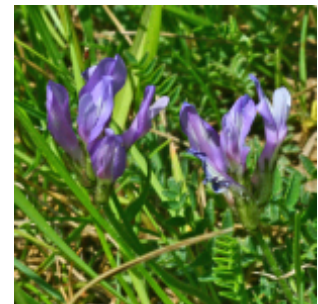
photo: Julia Napier



The spring, summer and autumn of 2011 were extremely dry but when rain finally came, a whole range of flowers re-emerged in quantity: Lady's Bedstraw, Small Scabious, Hoary Plantain, Burnet Saxifrage, Red Clover, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Ribwort Plantain, Salad Burnet, Common Knapweed and Greater Knapweed, Agrimony, Wild Basil, Wild Parsnip and Hedge Bedstraw. Best of all there was a great deal of Rock-rose, previously unrecorded for this section. This range of flowers is not apparent in a photograph,

where only the nearest and tallest stand out. (Small Scabious and Common Knapweed). The soil is too rich for true chalk grassland, although there is a substantial reduction in fertility, measurable by the 50% reduction in the quantity of material removed and burned last winter. I had hoped to get permission from English Nature to seed the bare soil with Upright Brome and Sheep's Fescue, but this was refused. However, fescues seem to be able to survive under light scrub and I was able to collect quite a lot of Upright Brome from the agger near the Golf Course and from the opposite verge of the Road, shown here to the right. I have continued to transfer seed in this way each June with some success. Upright Brome has surprisingly heavy seeds, which are not carried by the wind across even such a relatively narrow distance, as one might have imagined.

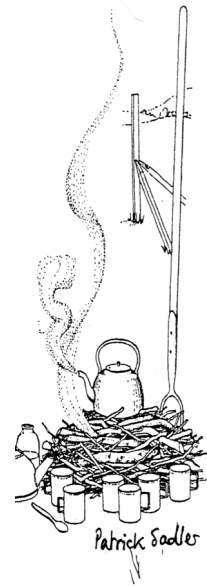
Best of all, in 2012, on the north verge, previously dormant plants of Horseshoe Vetch and Purple Milk Vetch came into flower as a result of the increased light and heat from the cleared area and are spreading steadily. There is also an increase in the small patches of Quaking Grass and Dropwort.



photos: Christine Newell

The End of our Work Parties

I have been finding work parties increasingly tiring and have been able to do less and less or have relied on Christine Newell to be there to represent the Friends, so it was a relief when Iain Webb said that he had decided not to work at weekends any more as he needs to keep Sunday for his family. Iain will continue to bring the Mid-week Volunteers to our sites 6 or 7 times a year, and I hope we will be able to replace some of the work in other ways, partly by paying for specific clearance of brambles. Needless to say, if you know anyone who would take on a few work parties a winter, please tell them to get in touch. Otherwise, for anyone with spare energy and a desire for fresh air with exercise, there are a dozen other wildlife sites where you would be welcomed with open arms! I should end by saying that our Sunday work parties got a great deal done over the years and there are sections of both sites which would not look as good as they do without it.



Thank you to everyone who has taken part.

Wandlebury Ring – plans for tree felling?

From time to time I hear comments about a plan to clear the Ring of trees in order to preserve the Iron Age monument. It is said that English Heritage requires this. Obviously, the ditch must be and is kept clear. Equally obviously, old trees liable to fall and drag a large root mass out from the bank should be felled and the stump treated before this happens, but is more drastic clearance needed? **What does the public want?**

When I was at the Cambridge PPF office recently I asked for authoritative information. Philip Robson, the new head of Planning and Development, said that there would be no more tree felling for the next year at least. It had been decided to make a proper survey of the existing habitat. This was begun in October with a “Dawn to Dusk” survey. An environmental survey is being supervised by two members of the Cam Conservation Forum, Roger Mitchell and Ros Aveling.

Roger Mitchell's career has been as Senior Scientist in the Department of the Environment's Central Water Planning Unit, Head of Marine Science in the Nature Conservancy Council and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and National Manager of Species and Biodiversity in English Nature. Ros Aveling is a primatologist, and an expert on gorillas. She is Deputy Chief Executive of Fauna and Flora International.

A firm of Landscape Architects has been hired to plan the tree management of the Ring. There is a budget of £75,000 for the repair of the Ring wall and restoration of the pond. At the moment the Ring is included on the 'Heritage at Risk' register and it is hoped that this work will resolve the problem.

I find it surprising that quite such big guns are being wheeled into position to resolve the environmental and archaeological problems of such a relatively small site, particularly when the home team of Rangers are very knowledgeable and dedicated; and Bill Clark, one of the best naturalists you could wish to meet, is on hand with an extensive memory of what is present on the site and field notes to back it up. In addition the Natural History Society of Cambridge is alive and well and full of experts.

Fund Raising

Three Car boot sales

We are most grateful to Anna Barnes who offered to run a couple of car boot sales for us and produced a cheerful flyer. Elfrida Heath collected energetically and others contributed books, clothing and possibly useful objects to the extent that Anna and her father ran three car boot sales, two at Fulbourn and one at Histon. Unluckily, car boot patrons in Cambridge are either poorer than Anna's usual customers in Surrey, or more tight-fisted, and she only raised £130 for all her effort. However, for us that is still a very useful sum. Anna says that she enjoys doing it with her father, who comes along to help. Her usual purpose is to raise money to promote the use of her discoveries at the Institute of Nuclear Medicine, UCL Hospitals.



Car boot sale experts, Mr Barnes and his daughter. Anna is holding some of the FRRFD leaflets which she very kindly printed off for us. photo: Julia Napier



The Waitrose Community Fund

Some time ago I applied to the Community Matters department of Waitrose. This is their very sensible solution to the problem of how to deal with endless appeals from charities of all descriptions. They set aside £1,000 a month to be divided among three local charities according to the Green Tiddly-Wink Voting Method. From applicants to the fund, they try to select three charities of, if possible, similar purpose. Last year Cambridge PPF was a beneficiary, which is how I got the idea. This year Waitrose chose the Magog Trust as an obvious partner for us, but the third charity chosen was Guide Dogs for the Blind, which quite rightly scooped the pool because it is a wonderful cause. Even so we still received a splendid £220 with a very great deal less effort than Anna expended on three car boot sales!

Summer Party, June 28th 2014

This summer we were lucky enough to find an empty slot in the summer bookings list of the Freemasons Hall. Originally built as a theological college in 1913, Cheshunt College finally became a mixed use building – part language school, part Masonic Hall and part offices. As part of their considerable charitable work for their own members and for many other good causes, they let their very nice rooms for fund-raising events. The secretary arranged for the hall and foyer to be laid out as we required, and they supplied sparkling wine and glasses at a reasonable cost. Elfrida and friends brought light food. We were most grateful to Tony Juniper for finding the time to give a talk about his new book.

'What has Nature Ever Done For Us?'

Tony Juniper's proposition is that we need to escape from what seems like an endless rearguard action - saving a marsh here, a lake there, and calculate what Nature is worth. 'From street cleaning by Indian vultures to British bees and bumblebees pollinating crops, nature provides 'natural services' all the time. There are recycling miracles in the soil; an army of predators ridding us of unwanted pests; forests renewing fresh water and removing carbon dioxide; a genetic codebook that underpins our food and pharmaceutical industries; coral reefs and mangroves that act as insurance against floods, and much more. It has been estimated that nature is worth as much as £100 trillion annually to the world economy – nearly double the global GDP. Yet we take for granted most of what nature does for us, imagining its services to be free and limitless, until they suddenly switch off.'

However, this was a Summer Party as well, so after the serious bit, there was Amanda Hall in a lacy black dress singing a mix of classic cabaret numbers to her guitar in a hall that was less like a cabaret venue it was possible to imagine, with very bright lighting and a background frieze of large, gold-framed portraits of the Royal Family. Even so, Amanda managed to get us singing 'Where have all the flowers gone' and 'Let us go, Lassie, go to gather the wild mountain thyme' – a song which is both very touching and incredibly unsuitable for the friends of a Roman Road, which has lost almost every trace of the plant, thanks to people 'taking and carrying away' in former years. There were about 70 guests who gave every appearance of having a good time, and we made £600. In addition, we received generous donations of £100 from Robert Sansom and £200 from Beti Evans 'to help with conservation work'.

Annual General Meeting. 7.30pm Wednesday April 22nd 2015

Our next AGM will be held in the Six Bells Public House, High Street, Fulbourn. We do our best to ensure that our AGM is as interesting as possible with plenty of pictures and a minimum of boring business. Although the committee would welcome some help, there will be no agonised appeals for replacements, so do come and enjoy it. All welcome. Members free.

We are hoping that our Guest Speaker will be **Dan Danahar**, an outstanding teacher from the Dorothy Stringer School, a comprehensive school in Brighton, where he teaches environmental science. He is the 2011 winner of the Stamford Raffles Award for contributions towards the advancement of biodiversity education. He has converted an ordinary-looking school campus in Brighton into an extraordinary network of chalk grassland, aquatic and woodland habitats and, working with Butterfly Conservation, has advised on similar chalk grassland improvements in other places in Sussex.

What will all this fund raising do for us?

These different events and donations, together with your subscriptions next year will make it possible for us to continue our Copley Hill project, continue our attempts to improve the Roman Road verge at Worsted Lodge and reprint our leaflet about the Roman Road leaflet.

Thank you very much to everyone for your continued support.

Julia

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