



# **Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke**

**Summer 2015  
Newsletter 47**

**Fourteenth Annual General Meeting  
Wednesday April 22nd 2015, 7.30pm  
At the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn**

This newsletter was begun, as usual, rather later than intended, but I thought I might delay things by one day in order to get to the British Museum exhibition for a members' evening. Unfortunately, instead, I found myself in University College Hospital with a broken hip, but without a mobile, or a memory for phone numbers! The Piccadilly line was delayed for an hour, and this newsletter by two months. So what follows needs to be a rather skimpy record of the AGM.

About 50 people arrived for the meeting, including 11 non-members attracted by the reputation of our guest lecturer. Our Chairman, Edmund Tanner, summarized the activities, events and achievements of 2014 backed by a series of photographs showing work in progress. Work continued on the wide south verge of the Roman Road below Copley Hill.



In April last year, Bernard Hunt and two assistants mowed, treated the regrowth, and raked off this section of the Roman Road. They repeated the work in April this year, for the fifth year. By April 2015, the increased reduction in fertility meant that only three days were needed for the work and two days could be spent digging out the second generation of hemlock at the Mount Farm end of the Road.

Richard Todd, the owner of Copley Farms, now lives there, and once again he paid Bernard Hunt to clear his garden of hemlock. We shall repeat this work next year, with good hope for success. Iain Webb has continued to eradicate the Euphorbia. This pretty yellow flower spreads relentlessly on its dark string-like roots, out-competing its neighbours, in this case Purple Milk Vetch. Which brings me with an entirely unintended link, to the fact that just beyond the bottom right hand corner of this picture there are now two quite substantial patches of Purple Milk Vetch and several yards of Horseshoe Vetch. The removal of a 5 – 6ft band of scrub had restored the dry sunny conditions needed for residual plants to grow and flower.

**We are most grateful to Peter Bennett, Land Manager for Babraham Farms,** for arranging for the first few hundred yards of 'weeds' (beyond the big sycamore in the background of the photo) to be flailed last year and again this year. This is only a temporary solution to the problem that arises following scrub clearance. Brambles are always present at the edges of scrub, and will spread steadily if not treated at once. Flailing the brambles in winter allows the hardier flowers to hold their own in the spring. The result is no one's idea of chalk grassland but it becomes a wonderful insect-friendly wilderness offering a sheltered habitat for small mammals.

### **The Mount Farm end of the Roman Road.**

From the early 1990s, first Sharon Hearle (Smith) followed by Iain Webb, his Mid-Week Volunteers, and the Friends have tried to restore this section to the sort of rough grassland into which the hardier flowers can seed themselves. Mr Bennett arranged for it to be flailed in the autumn of 2005. In February 2012, a group of fifteen-year olds from the Perse School spent several cold afternoons clearing a good length of the scrub regrowth. (photo) In 2013, Iain Webb's Mid-Week Volunteers cleared a section further on. By then the whole section was full of clematis or Old Man's Beard, which blankets the ground and has spread along the hedge. To continue the same cycle of clearance and re-clearance seems foolish, and also we are anxious not to see clematis spreading further along the Roman Road. Therefore, In April 2014, Bernard and his assistants spent 5 days clearing and treating the scrub regrowth. On March 15<sup>th</sup> and March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015, the Cambridge Conservation Volunteers cleared all the regrowth. (My photo is identical to the one above!) and In May, Bernard retreated the clematis.



### **A Howling Failure?**

Since then there had been very little rain until the downpour of early July, and therefore no ordinary 'greening up' of the soil. Having seen the area on 24 June I can only agree with Roger Leman that it looks as though it was all randomly sprayed with Glyphosate. This was not so at all, but the clematis root stock is so abundant and so strong that there was an inevitable overflow of weed killer.

**What then should we do?** We can write off a great deal of voluntary work and the £2,000 spent so far, or the Friends can pay Bernard to re-treat the diminished regrowth in an attempt to reproduce the success we have had on Mutlow Hill. If that fails, then we can look for a radical alternative. Suggestions welcome.

To return to Edmund Tanner's summary of 2014 and the problems arising from work done by the County Council Countryside Access Officers on the Roman Road from Worsted Lodge to the Hildersham Road. 2014 saw further episodes of excessive clearance carried out without advance warning, using large sums of money from Natural England whose officer is obliged to follow the 'chalk grassland protocol' whether the site is recognizable as such or not. Repeated requests and discussions were apparently resolved by another management plan, proposed by Martin Baker, Conservation Director of the Wildlife Trust in the summer of 2014. See Newsletter 45 for November 2014, page 4.

Nevertheless, in the last week of May 2015, the south-east section of the Roman Road was mowed flat to a width of 40 feet, from Worsted Lodge to Deadman Hill. The Fleam Dyke footpath from the disused quarry to Fulbourn was mowed with an Alan scythe, as if there had never been an arrangement to the contrary. So it is with a certain relief that I introduce John Onslow, now head of all CCC grass cutting, either on road verges or on wildlife sites. He admits that he knows very little about wildlife conservation and appeared interested in taking advice from people who do.

Meanwhile, the long line of hedges which you can see in both the photographs of the Roman Road have now been 'coppiced' (cut down to 3 ft) from Mount Farm all the way up to **half way up** the stretch of grassland shown on page. This goes against **all** the advice on wildlife friendly management of hedges. For example, Peter Kirby's book '**Habitat Management for Invertebrates**', page 69, states that only a fraction of such a hedge should be cut at one time.

**Butterfly report by Roger Lemon.** I only have time to pick out a few highlights. The beautiful Dark Green Fritillaries were not seen within the transect walk in 2014 by any of the recorders, though one was seen outside the transect. The Marbled Whites, which I love, have not yet bothered to fly over Copley Hill from Vestey's Meadow or the Golf Course, but the ChalkHill Blues were wonderfully abundant on the south end of the Fleam Dyke both last year and again this with a good number near Mutlow Hill. A small colony continues on the Roman Road. See our website: [www.frrfd.org.uk](http://www.frrfd.org.uk),

The remaining business of our AGM on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015 must be summarized very briefly. We ended the year in the black, as always, with money to spend on the conservation work I have summarized. Butterfly Conservation gave us £500 for scrub clearance on the Fleam Dyke, south of the A11, and have donated more this year with which we have paid the Conservation Volunteers (about £50 a visit) and some of the work by Bernard Hunt. The subscription was increased to £15, and the committee was briskly re-elected nem con. To my great regret, I have not yet been able to write a summary of this superb and illuminating talk. I hope to make it available later on.

## **How to make a Butterfly Haven**

### **Restoring Chalk Grassland in the Grounds of a School in Brighton**

Everyone knows that wildlife has been severely affected by developments in the last half Century. Habitat loss through the building of houses, business premises, new and wider roads, intensive farming methods, the increasing use of herbicides and pesticides, all contribute to the decline. Individuals can their best with nest boxes, wildlife friendly plants, ponds with hedgehog ladders and at the bottom of fences, what can be done to restore habitat on a wider scale?

Our Guest Speaker, **Dr Dan Danahar** showed how it can be done. Dan Danahar is an outstanding teacher from the Dorothy Stringer High School, a comprehensive school in Brighton, where he is the Biodiversity Co-ordinator. 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 improvements in other similar chalk grassland places in Sussex. He is the Habitat Restoration Officer for the Sussex Branch of Butterfly Conservation. His account of the restoration of a classic chalk grassland site was quite remarkable and the butterfly records are little short of astonishing. There is hope yet!

## Reminder! Increased Subscription- £15

If you have not already increased your standing order by £5, may we remind you to do so. Please check that the bank cancels your existing order for £10 at the same time.

Subscriptions are payable on 5<sup>th</sup> April. If you have already changed your standing order or sent your annual cheque for the increased amount, thank you very much indeed

## Excursion to the Conifer Arboretum at Pampisford Hall

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2015, from 2.30 – 5.0pm**

We shall meet at 2.30 in the car park near the Hall for a tour of the Arboretum. There will be an informal tea in the garden, with tables and chairs under cover just in case.

**Tickets £20 each or £30 for a couple.**

This exceptional opportunity has been offered to us by Mrs Arabella Killander, in order to raise funds for the work done by the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke.

Mrs Killander has proposed a tour of the remarkable collection of conifers in the Arboretum. Following the Enclosures Act of 1799, William Parker Hammond received land surrounding Pampisford Hall. His son used for the new Hall and its surroundings, which were developed between 1820 and 1831. His son and grandson shared his love of trees, especially conifers. William Parker Hammond III continued to develop and extend the pleasure grounds and arboretum until his death in 1893. Subsequently the estate was sold to James Binney, whose descendant, Mrs Killander took over the management of the estate in 1986. By this time the arboretum and gardens had been badly neglected. There followed the great storms of 1987 and 1990. The gardens are the result of a great deal of hard work by Mrs Killander, informed by the expert advice of Alan Mitchell, the dendrologist, and an expert forester, Alistair Hake.

In the mid nineteenth century, the famous landscape designer, Robert Marnock, was commissioned to advise on the design of the grounds. Marnock was known for the Gardenesque style of garden design, which emphasizes and displays the beauty of a variety of trees, particularly conifers. His designs included the Sheffield Botanical Garden; the Royal Botanical Garden in Regent's Park; Dunorlan Park, Tunbridge Wells, and others, most of which have suffered from the changing taste in garden.

**Pampisford Hall** was built between 1820 and 1831, and extended in the 1860s by the well known architects, Goldie and Child. However, by 1986, the hall was urgently need of the repairs which are now under way. **The hall and gardens are not open to the public.**

**Tickets available from Elfrida Heath,  
69 Humberstone Road, Cambridge, CB4 1JD**

**Please send s.a.e.**      tel: 01223 562360      [elfrida.heath@ntlworld.com](mailto:elfrida.heath@ntlworld.com)

With best wishes to all our members new and old,

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