

Icknield

Way

TRAIL



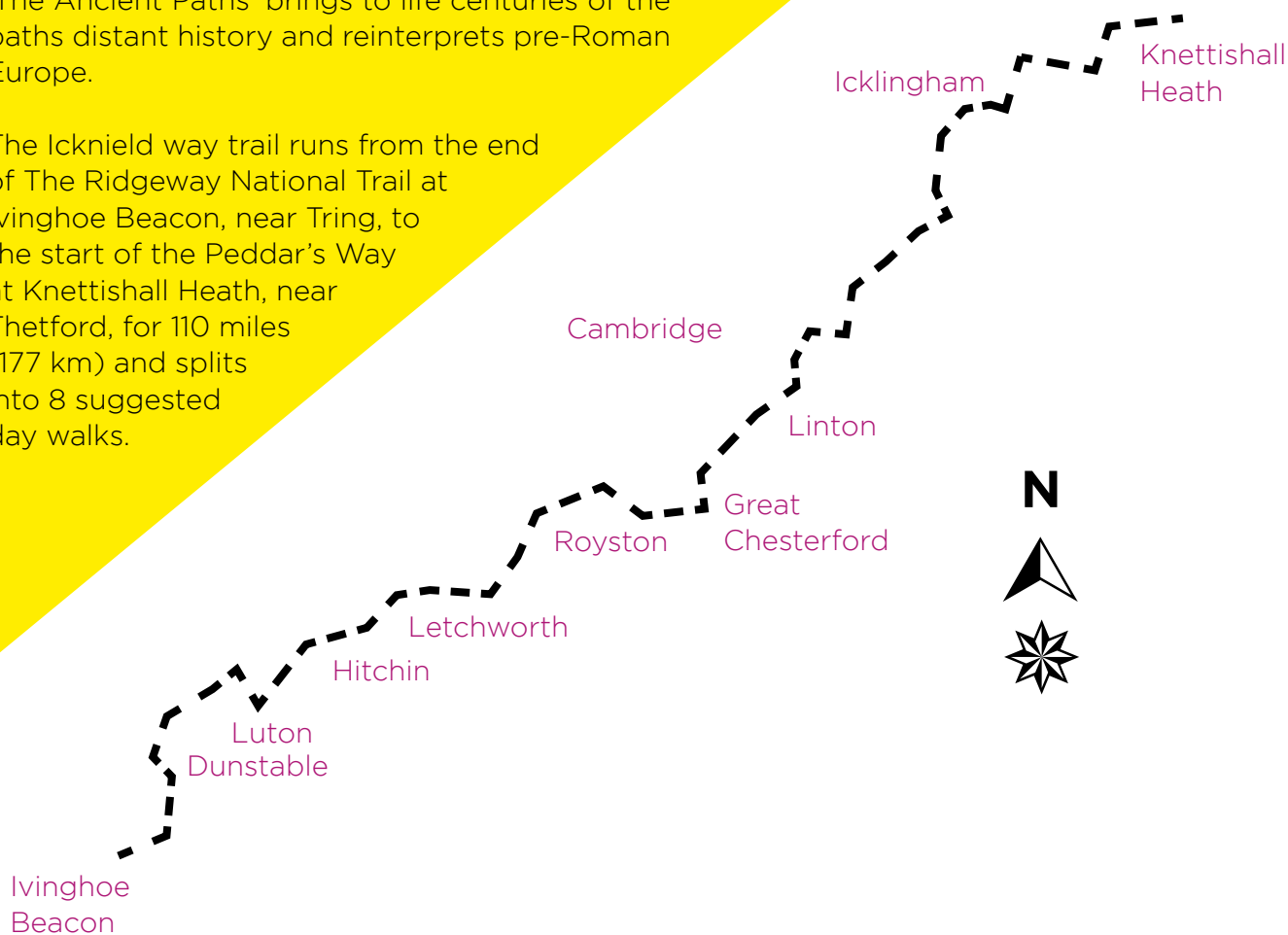
STORY OF THE TRAIL...

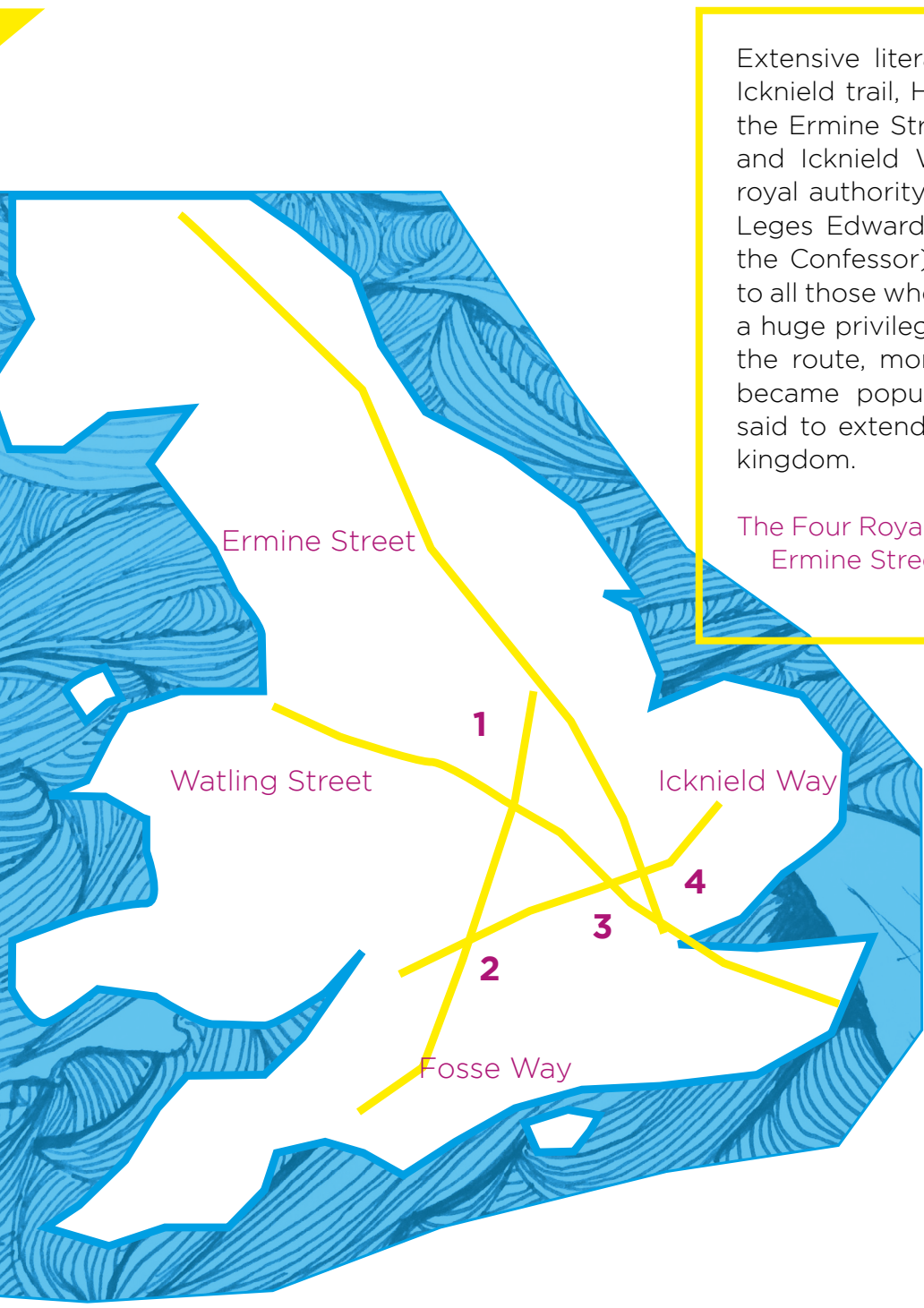
The Ickniel Way Trail has been identified as one of the oldest known trails in Britain and so has been explored and spoken about by many people, namely Robert MacFarlane, author of the book 'The old Ways', Edward Thomas, who wrote 'The Ickniel way', Alan Jenyon, author of 'Ickniel way: A walkers guide along the oldest road in Britain linking the Ridgeway path to the Peddars way...' and Graham Rob who wrote a book with a more mystical view - 'The ancient paths'. The book revealed something extraordinary: a lost map, of an empire constructed with precision and beauty across vast tracts of Europe.

'The Ancient Paths' brings to life centuries of the paths distant history and reinterprets pre-Roman Europe.

The Ickniel way trail runs from the end of The Ridgeway National Trail at Ivinghoe Beacon, near Tring, to the start of the Peddar's Way at Knettishall Heath, near Thetford, for 110 miles (177 km) and splits into 8 suggested day walks.

The route consists of prehistoric pathways, from the time of the Romans, hence it claims to be strewn with archaeological remains (though this has been open to dispute by many writers who have challenged this, stating that the route is not the oldest).





Extensive literature has been written on the Icknield trail, Henry of Huntingdon wrote that the Ermine Street, Fosse Way, Watling Street, and Icknield Way had been constructed by royal authority and so in accordance with the Leges Edwardi Confessoris (Laws of Edward the Confessor) royal protection was awarded to all those who travelled on this road. This was a huge privilege for those who travelled using the route, moreover, it meant that the route became popular, the Icknield way trail was said to extend across the width of the entire kingdom.

The Four Royal Highways of medieval England: Ermine Street, Watling Street, Fosse Way & Icknield Way

- 1: High Cross**
- 2: Cirencester**
- 3: Dunstable**
- 4: Royston**

Moreover, Geoffrey of Monmouth elaborated on this story by stating that Belinus, who was a legendary king of the Britons, who was the son of Dunvallo Molmutius and brother of Brennius, (It was believed that he was named after the ancient god Belenus) had improved the four roads so that it became clear and open to the public that the 'highway' was protected.

ICKNIELD STREET

In the 14th century, Ranulf Higdon described a different route for the Ickniel Way: from Winchester to Tynemouth by way of Birmingham, Lichfield, Derby, Chesterfield and York. This route included the Roman road running from Bourton-on-the-Water to Temple borough near Rotherham, which is now called Ickniel Street (or Ryknild Street) to distinguish it from the Ickniel Way.

AN ANCIENT PASSAGE

The Ickniel Way is usually thought of as a prehistoric trackway of great antiquity, in use from perhaps as early as the Mesolithic (before 4000 BC) but more certainly from the Neolithic (4000-2000 BC). It runs from East Anglia to the Thames Valley. Although according to some, it starts at Grimes Graves near Thetford, others extend it north to Holme-next-the-Sea or east to Lowestoft; it ends near Wallingford on the Thames, although it is sometimes extended west along the Berkshire Ridgeway to Marlborough.

According to Henry of Huntington, who was an American railroad magnate and collector of art and rare books, "An ancient king of Britain 'constructed four great highways in it, from one end of the island to the other', of which 'the first is from west to east and is called the 'Ickniel Way'."

AN ANCIENT KING OF BRITAIN CONSTRUCTED FOUR
GREAT HIGHWAYS IN IT, FROM ONE END OF THE
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FIRST IS FROM WEST TO EAST
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ICKNIELD WAY'

OSBERT GUY STANHOPE CRAWFORD



Osbert Guy Stanhope Crawford (28 October 1886 – 28 November 1957) a British archaeologist who specialised in the study of prehistoric Britain and the archaeology of Sudan, came up with the idea of four prehistoric routes across Britain: according to him, the Icknield Way was used to distribute flint from Grimes Graves across the south of Britain. He added the Jurassic Thoroughfare, from Lincolnshire down to the Thames Valley, the North Downs Way and South Downs Way, both south of the Thames. These were the main routes in the south, through a landscape that, by the Neolithic, was densely forested and largely impassable.

Further verifying the routes ancient heritage are sites at Blackhorse Road in Letchworth Garden City, where John Moss-Eccardt's excavations from 1957 to 1973 reveal the ditches of a road on the traditional line.

The ditches dated from the late first century BC while the road itself had worn itself into a hollow. Nearby, cropmarks show a road running on more-or-less the right line across the northern edge of Roman Baldock. Furthermore, Gil Burleigh's excavations in the 1980s revealed one of the ditches on Clothall Common, where they proved to be of the same date as at Blackhorse Road.

A MYSTICAL ROUTE

In 1921, amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins made a discovery. He noticed that ancient sites, at different points around the world all fell into a sort of alignment. Be the sites man-made or natural, they all fell into a pattern, usually a straight line. He coined these lines “leys,” and later “ley lines.

Ley lines are lines that crisscross around the globe, like latitudinal and longitudinal lines, that are dotted with monuments and natural landforms, and carry along with them rivers of supernatural energy. Along these lines, at the places they intersect, there are pockets of concentrated energy, that can be harnessed by certain individuals.

Ley lines refer to straight alignments drawn between various historic structures and prominent landmarks. The idea was developed in early 20th-century Europe, with ley line believers arguing that these alignments were recognised by ancient societies that deliberately erected structures along them and must have done so for a reason.

Nevertheless, the way that ley lines were taken up by enthusiastic amateurs who, from the 1960s, started to link them with mystical sources of an unspecified spiritual energy made archaeologists wary of even thinking about prehistoric travel. Although people clearly did move around and objects were traded, Crawford’s principal paths were accepted as the only major Pre-Roman routes. Hence connecting the ancient Icknield way trail to this mystical ideology.

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BEYOND ENGLAND, BEYOND THE RUINS

People have often found special significance in the unusual landmarks and geological features surrounding them. High mountain peaks and majestic valleys may be viewed as sacred, for example, while deep, dark caves have often been considered the domain of the underworld.

The same is true for roads; in 1800s on the British Isles many people believed in mysterious “fairy path”, trails connecting certain hilltops in the countryside. It was considered dangerous (or, at the very least, unwise) to walk on those paths during certain days because the wayward traveller might come upon a parade of fairies who would not take kindly to the human interruption.

Philip Carr-Gomm and Richard Heygate describe the origin of ley lines in their “Book of English Magic”: “Alfred Watkins, a landscape photographer in Herefordshire, noticed that ancient sites seemed to be aligned with others nearby. His idea was that our ancestors built and used prominent features in the landscape as navigation points. These features included prehistoric standing stones and stone circles,

barrows and mounds, hill forts and earthworks, ancient moats, old pre-reformation churches, old crossroads and fords, prominent hilltops, and fragments of old, straight tracks. Watkins went on to suggest that the lines connecting these ancient sites represented old trackways or routes that were followed in prehistoric times for the purposes of trade or religious rites.

The ley lines concept has been expanded beyond England’s ancient ruins. In some cases, geological sites around the world are included, such as the Mt. Everest, Ayers Rock in Australia, the Great Pyramid of Giza, Sedona in Arizona, hanging baskets of Babylon and Mutiny Bay as well as many other religious sites. These are amongst the places believed to have special powers created by ley lines.

Many within the New Age groups believe that these lines not only connect religious sites with each other; they connect areas of anomalies in the magnetic field. As to what these powers can do is yet uncertain. Some claim it improves health while others believe they are portals to other universes.

WHY IS THE TRAIL FAMOUS?

Because this path is made up of old prehistoric tracks and roads, the Icknield Way is sometimes called “the oldest road in Britain”. Whether this is true or not, what is certain is that along the 100 miles, 161 km of tracks there are many archaeological sites to explore.

TRADE ROUTE

Sarah Harrison's research (The archaeological journal, 2003) indicates that the trail did not inhabit a trade route. Moreover, the writer stated that Icknield Way was an invention of the 'High Middle Ages', connected with early twelfth-century writers.

Sarah Harrison found that some of the "missing" sections were "filled in" during the 18th century because antiquaries "knew" that the road existed, so where they were unable to find it, they built it. She suggests that the "Upper" and

"Lower" Icknield way in Buckinghamshire were created at this time, while unrelated "branches" such as Ashwell Street and Hambridge way were brought into the system. These were real but probably medieval trackways.

The idea of the Icknield Way as a long-distance trading made a good story and convinced early prehistorians and before that, the pioneering antiquaries of the early modern world. They built their hypotheses around what they thought was an established "fact".

HUMAN HISTORY

The Trail in Bedfordshire is rich in archaeology. The burial mounds at Five Knolls and the barrows at Galley Hill are some of the best examples on the whole of the Icknield way. These burial sites are from the Bronze Age, when tribes laid important people to rest in large tombs surrounded by their possessions. Older flints and axe-heads have been discovered close by and many of these are thought to have come from Norfolk. Many people used the ancient Icknield Way as a trading route which explains how they came to travel this far west. Wauluds Bank at the source of the River Lea in Luton is one of the oldest sites near the current route. It was an important meeting place for tribe elders and may also have been used for religious ceremonies.

Maiden Bower near Sewell was a Neolithic camp that later became an Iron Age fort. The battered remains of Iron Age

warriors have been discovered there, showing evidence of an ancient battle. Not far away, Ravensburgh Castle near Hexton is the largest hill fort in eastern England. This was also built during the Iron Age and was heavily fortified with timber ramparts. Some historians believe it is where Julius Caesar's army finally defeated a fearsome British warlord named Cassivellaunus in 54BC. When they were not fighting, the Romans left their own marks on the landscape, imposing order in the form of straightened roads. They may have been responsible for the straight section of the Icknield way from Galley Hill eastwards into Hertfordshire. Not quite so long ago, Sundon Hills was used for 'battles' of its own, as during the Second World War it was a firing range, used to train soldiers. One of the reasons the Trail does not go through there is due to the amount of live ammunition still buried in the ground!

NATURE & CONSERVATION

The chalk grasslands and woodlands found along the Trail are home to many special plants and animals. Places like Barton Hills, Dunstable Downs, Sharpenhoe Clappers and Sundon Hills are great places to stop and admire your surroundings and at the right times of year, you'll find Cowslips, Pasque Flowers and a variety of orchids. Bedfordshire is also home to Lapwings, Skylarks and Fieldfares, birds that are quite rare in other parts of the country.

Dormice and Badgers also live along the Trail, but you will need a sharp pair of eyes to spot them! Something much easier to see are the butterflies that love the chalkland plants. Through the spring and the summer, you will see Brimstones, Commas, Chalkhill Blues, and many others.

This part of the route is within the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which has some of the finest landscape in England, offering excellent opportunities for walking, riding, or cycling at any time of year. The AONB covers 383 sq. km of the chalk ridge that runs across southern England. It is an area well known for rolling hills, with magnificent views to the north from the ridge where the chalk drops away sharply, while the dip slope, with its valleys and chalk streams, runs gently down towards the Thames basin in the south. The landscape, cloaked in beechwoods and ancient hedgerows, also has a wealth of prehistoric features and sites rich in wildlife of all sorts. There are many picturesque villages with traditional brick and flint cottages, farms and medieval churches and ancient routes like the Ridgeway and Icknield way as well as newer ones like the Chiltern way.

TRAIL MAN DIARIES by Peter Aylmer



Peter Aylmer is an experienced walker and outdoor writer, author of the Cicerone guides to London and Essex as well as his own series of 'Trailman guides' to some of the best trails in Essex.

On his website www.trailman.co.uk, Peter shares 40 years of trail- and hill-walking experience. Peter spent three years exploring the Icknield Way Trail, usually with good friend Dave, occasionally with a son, and sometimes solo, but always by day trips from his then London home.

Here are his memories.

WALKING THE ICKNIELD WAY PATH

Sunday 29 January 2006:

**Knettishall Heath to the King's Forest,
11 miles**

"My first walk since I damaged a knee in October, hence the short and easy tenish miles. The map showed alternatives, along the Duke's Ride or by the Rushford Road. We chose the southerly route by the Duke's Ride rather than the variant along the Rushford Road, because (a) no cars (b) we'd just driven along the road (c) it's shorter. No brainer really.

"Euston is a pretty little village, worth an early stop, and the long empty stretch past West Farm down Euston Drove is quintessential quiet Suffolk. We stopped for a brew in the King's Forest with my brand new stove (do not do this in a dry summer folks!), hoping the King wouldn't mind, before the short hop to the George V monument which commemorates the forest's replanting. Beautiful blue sky, chilly NE wind, just about perfect."

Saturday 25 March 2006:

**Oldcross Grounds to Gazeley,
13 miles**

"Although the footpath route passes the King George V Memorial, it then combines with the St Edmund Way towards West Stow Country Park, a route we had walked the year before. Instead, we decided to take the variant by Duke's Ride and Seven Tree Road. It's probably a finer route in any case, as there are far fewer trees, some original breckland at Berner's Heath (beside a strange, ruined free standing wall), and very pleasant views across the Lark Valley from the rabbit warrens of Deadman's Grave.

"Beyond Icklingham, Cavenham Heath offers access land and bird watching. We lunched in Tuddenham, at the White Hart. Walk quality deteriorates after Herringswell over what one must call the A14 gap, not helped by a final one mile slightly uphill road-bound plod.

"Another beautiful sunny day for walking."

Saturday 6 May 2006:

Gazeley to Brinkley, 14 miles

“Once more, a very nice start, with mixed woodland before the squirearchical remnant of Dalham Hall and church. Another slightly uphill road-bound plod, into Ashley, did not bode well, but it is a pretty village with a pond and some rather too well-kept cottages. Around here you cannot move for horse stud farms – Dalham Hall is one – feeding into the bloodstock sales at Tattersall’s in Newmarket, one of the world’s principal racehorse markets. We chose to deviate from the path to the pretty-looking Three Blackbirds in Ditton Green. From around the path junction there are super views over the Fens, to and beyond Ely.”

“Back on the path after lunch, you soon cross the ancient earthwork of the Devil’s Ditch (or Dyke), which we spent a little while exploring. At the time of this visit, the authorities had banned one from walking along the top of the Devil’s Ditch, in case of tripping over roots! Locals and careful walkers had clearly ignored this prohibition. At the ditch, the trail picks up, for a mile or two, the Stour Valley Path through Stetchworth. It’s a bit dull around Burrough Green, other than the cricketers on the green itself, and we finished the day off with a wrong turning, adding an unnecessary mile to our finish point opposite the hall at Brinkley.

“Weathermen had forecast rain, but there were only a few light showers.”

Saturday 11 November 2006:

Brinkley to Great Chesterford, 14 miles

“The influence of horseracing Newmarket pretty much comes to an end at Brinkley. It is agricultural emptiness all the way to Balsham, a village we had passed through before, on the Harcamlow Way. No chance for a long stay this time, with nightfall starting to be an issue in November. The stretch on from here is interesting, with a short stretch of Roman road before the climb to the 1930s water tower on Risey Hill, vineyards visible to the west, and a pretty little descent into Linton. Linton is a small town that thinks it is a village. It had three good pubs to choose from [and as of 2020 still does!]; we chose the Crown. There are good buildings on the high street, and a zoo on the southern outskirts.

“From Linton, the going under foot changes as chalk predominates once more. Essentially this stretch traverses a high tableland, with good and distant views over the Cam valley, none more so than after Burtonwood Farm is passed. The OS map showed the trail descending to Great Chesterford by the road, but walkers are signposted along a fine path, with the destination village (and half-way point of the trail) in clear view ahead.

“The day started brightly, but cloud increased after lunch, and we were mostly walking in to a brisk south-westerly.”

WALKING THE ICKNIELD WAY PATH

Saturday 13 January 2007:

**Great Chesterford to Royston,
13 miles**

“Great Chesterford manages to keep some prettiness despite having its own commuter rail station and an M11 junction round the corner. We managed to choose a week in which the footbridge over the motorway was closed, necessitating a two-mile diversion through Ickleton and a long trudge up Coploe hill in the drizzle. From Strethall church we were off road again, past a shooting party at Free Wood, shot raining down, before a succession of distinct little villages: Elmdon, Chrishall and Heydon, where we ate at the King William IV. This area features in Walk 17 of my Cicerone guide *Walking in Essex*.

“Leaving Heydon, there is a lovely little valley running northwards, and scenically that’s it for long miles into Royston. We had been this way before, on the Harcamlow Way, and it has not got better since. Still, the drizzle stopped in the afternoon. In near dark, we entered Royston; here, the Roman Watling Street intersected with the original Icknield Way, so it’s a point of great significance on the path.”

Saturday 24 February 2007:

**Royston to Baldock,
13 miles**

“Must own up to a little cheating here. Readers might have noticed that we like a pub lunch, yet any inns beyond Therfield had long gone. With Dave not favouring a hedgeside sandwich, we diverted south to the Moon and Stars at Rushden. In practice, today was an Icknield start and finish, with the Hertfordshire Way in between, and a pub diversion in the middle. Of course, the original Icknield Way on this stretch is now the A505, not a stretch an Iron Age merchant might recognise.

“Our diversion didn’t make for a bad day though, even though rather overcast with rain coming into Rushden. Therfield Heath nearly manages to feel wild (the trail avoids the golf course), and Therfield village is a pretty place. However, we had to miss out Wallington, where George Orwell lived and married, for the pub diversion. Clothall’s church and manor house give a view more typical two hundred years ago than now; after Clothall, the open chalk lands return, but thankfully not in as dull a fashion as at the end of the previous day. Finally, Baldock is an old coaching town on the Great North Road and hasn’t had its atmosphere suppressed by the advent of commuterville.”

Saturday 8 September 2007:

Baldock to Streatley, 14 miles

“Letchworth was the original ‘garden city’ but maybe we do not see its best side, other perhaps than the magnificent Spirella building. Eventually open fields return, and Ickleford is reached through pretty water meadows. Lunch was at the Motte & Bailey pub in the interesting village of Pirton, and it set us up nicely for classic stretch of the path, up and over Telegraph Hill. It’s the first taste of the Chilterns, and not a moment too soon.

“Suddenly there are deep little coombes (like the Pegsdon Hills), small entrancing woods and hills with proper edges to them. We cut off through access land to the hillfort atop one such, Deacon Hill, a few hundred yards off route and an excellent viewpoint, all the more remarkable for having had nothing like it since Norfolk. Below Galley Hill, where the Chiltern Way is joined, it’s decision time for the Icknield Way walker: stick close to the original prehistoric route, now through urban Luton and Dunstable, or divert to the north. We diverted north.”

Saturday 6 October 2007:

Streatley to Whipsnade, 15 miles

“My elder son Matthew (then 19) joined us for this stage, which starts along the Chiltern escarpment of Sundon Hills, the promontory of Sharpenhoe Clappers jutting out north. A traverse over the M1 takes you to Toddington, better known for its motorway services, but still home to several pubs and a broad green – a far better place for the motorist in the know. It’s also a major stop on the Greensand Ridge Walk. Our pub though was the beautiful little Plough at Wingfield.

“North of Houghton Regis, it’s back on the Chiltern Way, with the magnificent hillfort of Maiden Bower the highlight of a stretch that includes too much plodding round the edge of Houghton Regis and Dunstable. Catch Maiden Bower while you can: off-road bikers and housing developers are two types of vandal having a pop at it. Finally, though, it’s onto the open Dunstable Downs before the cut south to Whipsnade.”

WALKING THE ICKNIELD WAY PATH

Sunday 7 October 2007:

**Whipsnade to Pitstone Hill,
7 miles**

“My younger son Adrian (then 15) joined us for this short stage, as a preliminary to our Hadrian’s Wall excursion planned for half-term. Skirting the famous zoo, we soon made Dagnall, which had a dedicated real ale pub the Golden Rule – so dedicated then that it had no food, and alas by 2020 it was no more. We lunched instead at the Red Lion.

“It’s a nice climb from here back to the escarpment and the final push on chalk to Ivinghoe Beacon. The Beacon is a splendid viewpoint, and it’s the start (or finish) of The Ridgeway national trail. Dave met his wife Rachel here; Adrian and I wanted a bit more though, so the two of us continued on the extension path to the Ashridge Estate car park below Pitstone Hill, from where Dave and Rachel kindly drove us back to Tring station.”

Though the Icknield Way Trail ends (or starts) at Ivinghoe Beacon, there is an extension path to Bledlow Cross, which Peter walked a couple of years later.

Friday 23 January 2009:

**Pitstone Hill to Wendover,
12 miles**

“On a wet morning, I took the Ridgeway national trail through the nature reserve of Aldbury Nowers, home to half of all England’s butterfly species. The view north here is spoilt alas by the incredibly insensitive siting of an ugly business park not far below the scarp, but this is good chalk downland, especially the rise over Pitstone Hill itself. After a road stretch, the extension climbs into a wooded stretch above Aldbury, without entering the bijou heart of this village.

“A plethora of routes and intermittent waymarking make it easy to go astray, and I took the Chiltern Way route to the Grand Union Canal lock at Cow Roast, partly in error and partly to save wondering which path was which.

“On the Chiltern Way some years before, I had taken a lunch stop at the Cow Roast pub, but the Greyhound in Wigginton was better placed this time. The path then leads over tableland, with the bonus of a red kite circling the woods above Tring Park, to the dell of The Crong, which has a sudden, dramatic view back to Icknield Beacon; surely one of the best views in the Chilterns. A magnificent sunken green lane leads down to The Hale, with a quiet road stretch leading me to Wendover and its station.”

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Friday 13 March 2009:

**Wendover to Bledlow Cross and
on to Chinnor,
12 miles**

“The archetypal walk of two halves. Superb morning, lacklustre afternoon. It’s not a great start, along a field edge with the Wendover bypass for company, but you soon head uphill to Dunsmore, steeply downhill to a typical Chiltern dene, then up again to Little Hampden. The Rising Sun pub here was [and I mean was – alas, it’s closed now] an absolute gem. The landlord came out and we had a chat, offering me an early drink. More up-and-down follows, skirting around some deeply indented wooded hangers, before a brief rise brings you to the wonderful high open space of Whiteleaf Hill. This was used as a burial place 5,000 years ago, and a local school child had written a superbly evocative poem celebrating the space for the display board.

“Coming back to valley level, my map placed the Red Lion on the wrong side of the wrong road, so I ended up entering Princes Risborough alongside the A road through Monks Risborough.

On the way out of town, the map showed the Extension and the Ridgeway both hugging roads, but one taking an inordinate detour; alas, the Extension hereabouts is immaculately signposted, and I obediently took the official long way round.

“There’s then a long mile on a minor but busy road before a cindered track heads with promise uphill. The promise at last of an interesting windy bit (ie a bit that winds, not a bit with wind), where the Ridgeway rejoins, was dashed with a subsidence warning, forcing yet another detour. Ah well. It was still not far to the presumed end of the Extension in the hamlet of Hempton Wainhill, below the chalk figure of Bledlow Cross in the woods above. From there, it was a simple walk across fields and over the preserved Icknield line railway into the thriving village of Chinnor and my bus towards home.”

HOW DO WE KNOW IT IS THE OLDEST TRAIL IN BRITAIN?

The idea of the Icknield Way is firmly ingrained in local consciousness, with a long history of almost 900 years. The origins of the idea are an interesting story, but they involve medieval writers inventing a past that they thought ought to have existed but for which they had no evidence at all.

In Crawford's day, knowledge of prehistoric settlement in Britain suggested that it was restricted to the ridges above the clay soils of the Midlands, where ridgeways gave access through the woodland. Icknield Way and the two Downs Ways followed chalk ridges, while the Jurassic Way followed a limestone belt. The soils that had developed around these soils were thin, supported thinner woodland and were more easily worked by pioneering Neolithic farmers.

The idea of prehistoric trackways was complicated by Alfred Watkins's "discovery" of what he called ley lines. He believed that all ancient sites were largely of Neolithic origin, linked by "old straight tracks", and could be discovered by seeking alignments of sites on Ordnance Survey maps. He "discovered" them in 1921, when he realised that the routes were marked by present day and ancient landscape features. The archaeological community could not accept such a dense network of Neolithic tracks, which went over the tops of high hills, crossed rivers at points too deep to ford and were as common in places where no Neolithic settlements were known. Ley lines do not exist, as shown by Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy's study, *Ley Lines in Question*, published in 1983.

Nevertheless, the way that ley lines were taken up by enthusiastic amateurs who, from the 1960s, started to link them with mystical sources of an unspecified spiritual energy made archaeologists wary of even thinking about prehistoric travel. Although people clearly did move around and objects were traded, Crawford's principal paths were accepted as the only major pre-Roman routes.

The Icknield Way was also thought to have played a role in the Saxon invasions of the fifth century. One of the puzzles of archaeology was evidence for very early Saxon settlement in the Upper Thames valley, well away from the coast where these sea-borne invaders were believed to have landed. These early fifth century remains cluster in the area where the Icknield Way crosses the river. Because there was equally early settlement in East Anglia, at the other end of the Icknield Way, the archaeologist E T Leeds hypothesised in 1925 that the West Saxons had invaded along the route, starting out in East Anglia, and moving south-west to settle around Dorchester-on-Thames.

Literature exploring the trail

*The Icknield Way By:
Edward Thomas in the year 1911

*The Icknield Way Path:
A Walkers' Guide, by Sue Prigg

*Along the ancient highway,
Hugh Thomson, article May 19, 2012

This idea was always controversial and few other specialists in the period accepted it. It is also wrong, partly because the Icknield Way passes through a large area with no early Saxon settlement, which includes all of North Hertfordshire.

Locally, the Icknield Way is mentioned in an early medieval charter, as *pa* street to the south of Norton. Old English *stræt*, from Latin *strata*, was generally used to designate a road of Roman origin; the word became *street* in modern English. Elsewhere in North Hertfordshire, the road was recorded in a document of 1638 as *Ede* way in Lilley and in 1686 as *Ede* Way in Hexton.

These names derive from the Old English term **Þēod-weg**, meaning “national road”, which suggests that its long-distance character was known when people spoke Old English (600-1150). It forms the boundary between Lilley and Hexton. It is important to note that the early documents do not call it Icknield Way, which first happens during the reign of Henry II (1154-1189).

ATTRACTIONS NEAR THE TRAIL

Toms Café

The Dunstable Downs and Whipnade Estate

ZSL Whipnade Zoo - Whipnade near Dunstable

Odds Farm Park - Wooburn Common

Home of Rest for Horses - near Princes Risborough

Beale Park - Lower Basildon, Berks

Bucks Goat Centre - Stoke Mandeville.

Go Ape High Wire Adventure - Wendover Woods.

Gruffalo Trail - Wendover Woods - forest adventure for 3-8-year-olds

Go for a row on the Thames - hire a boat in Henley.

Cruise the Thames from Wallingford or Marlow

Have a go at fishing - day tickets are available at Tring Reservoirs

Take a walk by the River Chess near Chesham and look for trout and dragonflies.

Ashridge Estate

London Flying Club

VOLUNTEER JOURNEY TESTIMONIALS

Khansa Ameer

HLF Interest Group: Booklet/Research group

My experiences of taking part in the Heritage lottery funded project focusing on the Icknield way trail.

I was involved in researching about the Icknield way trail as well as locating volunteers interested in taking part in the project. This was quite a tricky situation as the Covid restrictions meant that it was much more difficult to involve people in the project as normally would have been the case.

Initially we all had a face-to-face induction in which we were informed about the aims of the project and the type of commitment required from volunteers. We were informed about the type of training we would all receive and that the project would revolve around some of our other academic commitments. During the induction we were given opportunities to engage with other volunteers as well as a Q & A which helped us better understand the depth of the project and resolve any queries we had. All training sessions were delivered virtually owing to the pandemic. I received the course contents via email and then we had a session on WhatsApp to discuss how to approach the set tasks. The tasks were quite challenging, and I felt that further reading had to be carried out in order to be successful and so I looked to the resources that the instructor had advised us to. I got the opportunity to improve my interviewing skills by taking part in a virtual session

in which interview skills were discussed, this helped me engage with other people outside of the group. On a personal level, aside from the structured courses, I feel that the sessions also helped me improve my team working skills, as I had to work with several other volunteers.

Working virtually at times became challenging as we had to ensure that the group had the same pace and did not fall behind. The challenges were made worse because of covid lockdown restrictions and general unwillingness of people to participate in a community project. However, ample guidance was provided by the project management team and instructors so that the project aims could be met as best as possible. This was my first community project, and the experience was good, partly because of the interesting topic and partly because of the supportiveness of the team. My personal favourite part was proofreading material which would be printed. As I enjoy reading, I took great pleasure in enhancing the booklet style to make it more colourful and fun. I also selected the poems to be added as I found them to lift the booklet by making it a better read.

In my view, given the challenges faced, this project was a huge success as I have gained numerous skills which I can add onto my CV as well as learnt so many things about Luton where I have lived all my life!



Maleeha Kiani

HLF Interest Group: YouTube/Research group

My experiences of taking part in the Heritage lottery funded project focusing on the Icknield way trail.

My role in the Heritage project was to carry out extensive research and then learn and support the YouTube footage. I was also required to help with location of material as well as volunteers. However due to the covid restrictions I was not able to carry out any research involving people outside of the group so as a group we simply had to use the resources we had. I managed to contact a successful trail man who was eager to be involved in the project and so supported our cause by providing details of his trail diaries. This was very useful for the project, and I was commended by the project coordinator for locating this resource.

During the induction stage of the project, opportunities were made to both ask questions as well as get to know other volunteers on the project.

All volunteers were given online training which we had to complete after which a discussion with the group took place. The training was very helpful as it was linked back to the project, so I was able to give it more meaning. Although the covid restrictions meant that we couldn't meet face to face I was able to speak to all group members via WhatsApp and this really helped. I received the following training:

- *Project management
- *Research skills
- *Leadership skills

The training helped as it built my self-confidence, so I was able to complete the tasks assigned to me.

As I had the role of taking images, I received special training for taking images with the camera.

The only part of the project I found challenging was that as there were restrictions in place, I had to contact businesses and try to locate people using email and this was very difficult as I was not able to get anyone onboard.

All volunteers were supported as we were given use of laptops to help us, and we were given extra time.

My specific contributions included:

- *Research
- *Taking images
- *Contacting people (trailman)
- *Helping with the YouTube
- *Revising the design of the booklet.

The booklet produced looked fun and interesting so in my view that was one of the main achievements.

One of the greatest challenges was that and I feel that if we had waited another few months for the restrictions to open then all interview elements could have been fulfilled as we were prepared for this, but this did not happen.

Would I take part in another heritage project, the answer to that is, yes? I have actually developed an interest in photography and would like to pursue this.

VOLUNTEER JOURNEY TESTIMONIALS

Abid Mahmood

HLF Interest Group: Research/Booklet/YouTube group

I was informed of the project via a poster in my local surgery which requested volunteer involvement in research of the oldest trail in England. I found this slightly unusual as this was the first time, I found out that Luton had a heritage site. Hence as a result I decided to go to the induction which was at the One Stop Advice Centre to help me decide whether this was the type of a project I would like to take part in and what skills I would gain as a result.

After the induction I decided to commit to the project on the basis that I would be taught how to produce a YouTube video and involved in research.

We had a number of training sessions, though virtual they were appropriate for the times that the country was facing and due to my parents' vulnerability if sessions were not delivered virtually, I would have had to leave the project. The training sessions gave me a clear idea of the project and enabled us all to plan the final version of the YouTube video clip.

Taking part in this project allowed me to use my skills. It further helped me improve my communication skills, as I had to take into

account everyone's opinions before making the final edit of the YouTube video. The group agreed that it would be short and snappy with points from the booklet being covered.

The bits I found challenging were communicating over emails/WhatsApp mostly due to covid-19. However, my queries and hurdles were always overcome by the team, and we were able to support each other. The project manager allowed us to take ownership of the project, and this increased our level of commitment as we all felt accountable for assigned tasks. I know that being involved in this project has given me the confidence to take part in other activities especially as previously I lacked the confidence to do so.

The most enjoyable training I received was accompanying a professional from Diverse FM who taught me how YouTube video footage is developed and uploaded. I really enjoyed taking part in this project and working with my team members. The project would have been better had we not been disturbed by covid restrictions because of which many volunteers had to shield.



Fatima Nadeem

HLF Interest Group: Research/Booklet/Proof-reader

I was made aware of the project via a friend of mine who also was part of the project. I became interested when I realised that the project would give us training and also because I had no idea that Luton had a heritage trail!

On the project my role was mainly that of a researcher and proof-reader. I received the following training.

- *Project management
- *Research skills
- *Leadership skills

I learnt many skills on the training however in particular the research course has helped me with research in my academic life and as a result of the project management course I learnt how to manage a group, this is very useful as I was always someone who preferred working alone and the courses in the project were designed in such a way that enabled the group to work together remotely despite all the restrictions.

The main challenge in this project was the Covid 19 restrictions as these made it really difficult to complete certain tasks however the team managed to overcome them by improvising and changing certain parts so that the objective could still be met as best as possible.

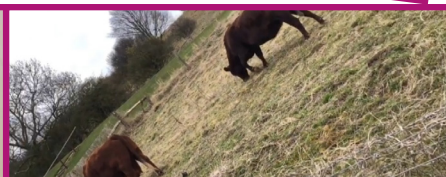
We had an amazing project team and really learnt to bounce off each other's ideas helping us overcome challenges.

The project was a joint effort however my personal contributions included:

- *Proof reading
- *Researching and adding more material
- *Supporting the booklet design
- *Contacting various businesses

My biggest achievement was being able to work as part of a group as this is something I rarely do.

I feel that I would enjoy taking part in another heritage project as I have learnt many skills.



LOCAL BUSINESSES AROUND THE ICKNIELD WAY TRAIL

As part of the Heritage project we interviewed local businesses to obtain some further insight about the trail.

Nick Clark

Clark Partnership, The Ickniel Business Park

The Ickniel Business Park is a family business and originally a pig farm. In order to diversify, the business has changed the use of many of its buildings into business units, that are perfect for the small to medium size business. At the present time the business has a variety of businesses located there, from cabinet and furniture makers, flooring and carpets, upholsterer, hire companies, printing, metalwork, manufacturing, storage etc. Many of the businesses have been with Clark Partnership for more than ten years. The business is currently investing in 9 more new units.

The farm is still in operation with some arable and Kelly Bronze turkeys produced for the Christmas market.

How long have you been running the business at Ickniel Way?

“The business has been operational for 28 years, I started managing this park when I was 18 and left school, so it has been a long time.”

Is the business a family one?

“Yes, this is a family business my grandfather LA Bunker purchased it in 1935 and we have had it ever since. Initially it was a poultry farm and we had 50,000 chickens producing eggs, we also had Pigs. Unfortunately, the Poultry side became unprofitable, so we stopped and expanded our pig production. At one point we had 14,000 pigs on our sight. In 1992 we decided to pack it in and turned it into a business industrial estate.”

Do you have any experiences specifically related to the Ickniel way trail or any stories from your ancestors that you could share with us?

“In 2002 we gave the Natural Trust some land for a bridlepath on the edge of our land to link it to Ickniel Way Trail. We donated a mile and this has been highlighted in red on the map to show you how much land was given.”

What attracts people to this area of England?

“The walkers are attracted to the trail, The downs, Whipsnade Zoo, Ashridge and Woburn.”

Are people aware of the trail's history and the fact that it is one of the oldest trails in England?

“No, there is very little awareness of this fact.”

Do you have any old imagery you would permit us to use (this could be of the business/trail)?

“Yes only a few attached.”

Can you tell us a little about the Ickniel way trail and any events that may have occurred here?

“No events have taken place that I can remember as this has been an industrial estate for a long time now.”



In your view and experience, has the trail ever attracted the kind of publicity that it should have from organisations such as Trail walkers, Heritage England etc or could more be done to promote the area and businesses?

“The trail has not had much publicity at all unfortunately so certainly more can be done.”

Maria Santarsiero

Mr Softee

Maria Santarsiero has been running a family business around the Icknield way region for a period of twenty years. When asked about the interest or awareness people have about the heritage site Maria responded that there is little awareness about the prestige of the trail as people simply view it as a countryside park.

Maria added that the Icknield way trail needs more recognition by way of advertisement as not many people are aware of the trail being the oldest in England.

Though the trail is looked after well people are unaware of how grand the trail actually is. Many people simply visit the trail area to hike or have picnics with no real understanding of why the trail has been preserved for so long.



INTERVIEW

Andrew Sampson

Chairman, London Gliding Club

London Gliding Club was officially inaugurated on February 20th 1930, and in March the first flights took place at Stoke Park Farm, in Guildford, Surrey. By May the club had secured the use of Ivinghoe Beacon. The gliding activity attracted so many visitors that special trains were laid on from Euston to Tring, and in July we were visited by the Prince of Wales -the crowds caused chaos on the roads and soon after the club was evicted from Ivinghoe Beacon after the National Trust accused it of “spoiling its peaceful enjoyment by the public”.

The club moved initially to a farm in Totternhoe, and then to ‘Pascombe Pit’ -still known to members as ‘The Bowl’. The gliders were launched by “bungee” from the top of the hill, and the pilots flying along the hill had instructions relayed to them by flag signals for “too fast” or “too slow”. The first hangers had been erected by 1932. In 1935 these were replaced by the present hangar and clubhouse, designed by renowned architect Kit Nicholson who later became National Champion. The building is now Grade 2 listed and retains all the character of its 1930’s heritage.

During the Second World War gliding was prohibited and the club became a prisoner of war camp. Several club members played important roles in the military Glider Training School. The club reopened in 1949. Over the years the club was able to purchase the fields adjoining the original land and by the 1960’s the airfield reached its present size. Right from the start the London Gliding club has been a pioneer in the art of soaring. We achieved the first cross country flight by a British pilot, the first ‘Silver C’, and in 1939 the first soaring flight across the channel to France (from Dunstable!). We set early records for duration (22hrs in 1937), and for height (over 14,000ft above Dunstable in 1939).

To this day Dunstable pilots have continued to set records and win trophies both across the UK and at international competitions.

Originally gliders were made of wood, with wings of painted fabric, supported by metal struts or bracing cables. In the 1950’s training was in open cockpit Slingsby T21 gliders, replaced in the 1960’s by the Schleicher K13.

By the end of the 1980’s we had standardised with

fibreglass ASK21 dual seat trainers and ASK23 single seaters, these remain the core of our fleet today.

Today there are over 100 gliders based at Dunstable.

How long has the business been operational?
“The business was established in 1930.”

Is the Gliding club a family business?
“No, it’s a members club”.

Do you have any experiences specifically related to the Icknield way trail or any stories from your ancestors that you could share with us?

“London Gliding Club was officially inaugurated on February 20th 1930, and in March the first flights took place at Stoke Park Farm, in Guildford, Surrey. By May the club had secured the use of Ivinghoe Beacon.

The gliding activity attracted so many visitors that special trains were laid on from Euston to Tring, and in July we were visited by the Prince of Wales -the crowds caused chaos on the roads and soon after the club was evicted from Ivinghoe Beacon after the National Trust accused it of “spoiling its peaceful enjoyment by the public”.

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During the Second World War gliding was prohibited and the club became a prisoner of war camp. Several club members played important roles in the military Glider Training School. The club reopened in 1949.



What attracts people to this area of England?
“People are attracted to the Dunstable Downs area as it has fantastic views and is an opportunity to watch the gliders.”

Are people aware of the trail's history and the fact that it is one of the oldest trails in England?
“I am actually unsure about this as there is little information out there about the trail”.

Do you have any old imagery you would permit us to use (this could be of the business/trail)?
“All imagery is available for viewing at the following site:
<https://www.londonglidingclub.co.uk/our-history>”

Can you tell us a little about the Icknield way trail and any events that may have occurred here?
“Many landmark things have happened around the trail, details are; we achieved the first cross country flight by a British pilot, the first ‘Silver C’, and in 1939 the first soaring flight across the channel to France (from Dunstable!). We set early records for duration (22hrs in 1937), and for height (over 14,000ft above Dunstable in 1939). To this day Dunstable pilots have continued to set records and win trophies both across the UK and at international competitions. Originally gliders were made of wood, with wings of painted fabric, supported by metal struts or bracing cables. In the 1950’s training

was in open cockpit Slingsby T21 gliders, replaced in the 1960’s by the Schleicher K13. By the end of the 1980’s we had standardised with fibreglass ASK21 dual seat trainers and ASK23 single seaters, these remain the core of our fleet today. Today there are over 100 gliders based at Dunstable. Of these, 14 are owned by the club for training and use by members, the rest are all privately owned aircraft. Some of these come from the earliest years of gliding and are still flying –there is a vigorous vintage gliding section within the club. At the other end of the scale we have some of the most modern and advanced gliders in the world.”

In your view and experience, has the trail ever attracted the kind of publicity that it should have from organisations such as Trail walkers, Heritage England etc or could more be done to promote the area and businesses?
“More certainly could be done as I am unaware of this!”



PHOTO GALLERY



ICKNIELD WAY TRAIL



PHOTO GALLERY



ICKNIELD WAY TRAIL



*Running along a bank, a parapet
That saves from the precipitous wood below
The level road, there is a path. It serves
Children for looking down the long smooth steep,
Between the legs of beech and yew, to where
A fallen tree checks the sight: while men and women
Content themselves with the road and what they see
Over the bank, and what the children tell.*



Meeting Edward Thomas on The Icknield Way

*I found the track by accident one morning
at the back of the wood. A backbone carved
of stones, a chalk tyre tread making the miles
seem easy. The dog went far ahead, a small
lodestar: everything splintering,
resisting the tightness of frost.*

*The warmth of another breath was there,
wool shirt, tweed jacket, rucksack,
leather of boots. I thought I might
catch up, but there was no one,
between the black of winter hedges
that closed us in and held the path.*

*Perhaps it was white light,
an orange sun that lent itself to ghosts,
murmurs of other walkers blessing
the freezing air. But something was given
in the track appearing suddenly and the next day,
finding the book: where he'd noted
each turn and slip of the road. Asking
whoever followed to look again at leaf fall,
bright berries, the shape of hidden places,
marks of stone as he walked east to west,
on a pilgrimage across the chiselled heath,
which promised all the sky.*

*He must have imprinted air with the weight
of thought, his movement of hands.
Everything seemed so close to how he found it.
In that moment that was falling out of cold,
into spring, which had never been history,
had always been there,
if we had chosen to see it.*



(Meeting Edward Thomas on The Icknield Way is taken from the book, The Shape of Us)

Illustration from: Icknield Way, Crossing Watling Street, Dunstable from The Project Gutenberg eBook 'The Icknield Way, by Edward Thomas, Illustrated by A. L. Collins.'

PROJECT MANAGER



My name is Azra Jan and I was entrusted by OSAC to manage the Icknield Way Trail Heritage Project.

Accordingly, volunteers were recruited for the Project and commenced with the training which was abruptly halted in March 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our plans and the way in which we had desired to execute this project were greatly affected by the pandemic in that we could no longer travel in groups and had to now resort to individual travel. We had prepared 5 group/volunteer days out to different sites on the Icknield Way Trail, but this was now no longer feasible as non-family members were not allowed to integrate. This frustrated us but nonetheless the volunteers did the best they could in the given situation.

However, once lockdown restrictions were relaxed, In July 2021 a few volunteers reluctantly grouped together and agreed

to visit the Icknield Way Trail again. Our journey commenced from Ivinghoe Beacon to Dunstable Downs and ended in Luton.

Many volunteers still, due to the length of the lockdown and despite the easing of the restrictions, were reluctant to group together and travel with non-family members I am therefore extremely grateful to the volunteers who did put aside their fears and agreed to set upon a journey with me to explore and research the historic trail known as the Icknield Way Trail.

Thank you also to everyone that contributed to this project especially the businesses that allowed us to visit their grounds once they reopened and allowed us to retake some pictures and to talk to them about their experiences.

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We would like to acknowledge the contributions made by volunteers on the project and thank them for taking part.

Without commitment from the volunteers, the task of researching and documenting this project would not have been possible. Initiating and supporting the YouTube channel set up by our volunteers meant that awareness about the trail could be raised in youth today, in a method which is more meaningful and relatable to them.

Unfortunately, the course of this project coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic which meant that many aspects of the project had to be altered to meet the set outcomes.

The Heritage Lottery fund has been amazing in supporting us throughout the pandemic by permitting us with the time and flexibility needed to successfully meet our aims. Finally, we would like to thank Teyba Seyed for successfully coordinating our fourth Heritage Lottery project.

One Stop Advice Centre



Thanks to National Lottery players

Quantrill House, No. 2 Dunstable Road
Luton, Bedfordshire, LU1 1DX
www.onestopadvicecentre.org.uk
01582 967473