

## A Fulbourn Nature Reserve

A large area of flower-rich meadows, marsh and woodland, belonging to Fulbourn Manor. The entrance is at the end of Stonebridge Lane. These beautiful meadows are managed for the Townley family by the Wildlife Trust.



clustered bellflower

## B Scrub areas

Large sections of the Fleam Dyke had become covered with **hawthorn**, **blackthorn**, **buckthorn** and some **spindle** (a chalk-loving, hardwood species used to make spinning wheels for the spinning of wool). Recent clearance has greatly benefited flowers, especially the **clustered bellflower**.



spindle

## C Disused railway

In 1848 the Newmarket and Chesterford line opened as the first part of a rail link from London to Norwich. However, after only three years the line closed due to financial difficulties. Eastern Counties Railway took over and drove an alternative route from Cambridge to Newmarket via Six Mile Bottom. Walkers now cross the cutting on an embankment which was constructed in the late 1930s in order to provide shooting butts for rifle practice in preparation for the coming war.

## E Chalk grassland

Chalk grassland is particularly rich with colourful flowers of chalk downland: in early spring, **violets** and **cowslips**, then in May, **rock-rose**, **horseshoe vetch** and **milkwort** followed by **wild thyme**, **sqinancywort**, **lady's bedstraw**, **dropwort**, **small scabious**, **field scabious**, **common knapweed** and **greater knapweed**. Between Fulbourn and the disused railway the path is now bordered by **harebell**, **clustered bellflower** and **greater knapweed**. **Rockrose** and **lady's bedstraw** are also spreading along the path. Autumn brings red **hawthorn** berries, purple **sloes** and the black berries of **privet**, **purging buckthorn** and the trailing, feathery white garlands of 'old man's beard', or **wild clematis**.



hoary plantain

cowslip

Essex skipper

ladybird

common knapweed

red-tailed bumblebee

lady's bedstraw

greater knapweed

agrimony

common broomrape

small scabious

rock-rose

meadow brown

field scabious

violet

small tortoiseshell

wren

red admiral

bird's foot trefoil with red and white clover

common blue

meadow brown

rock-rose

small scabious

common broomrape

greater knapweed

lady's bedstraw

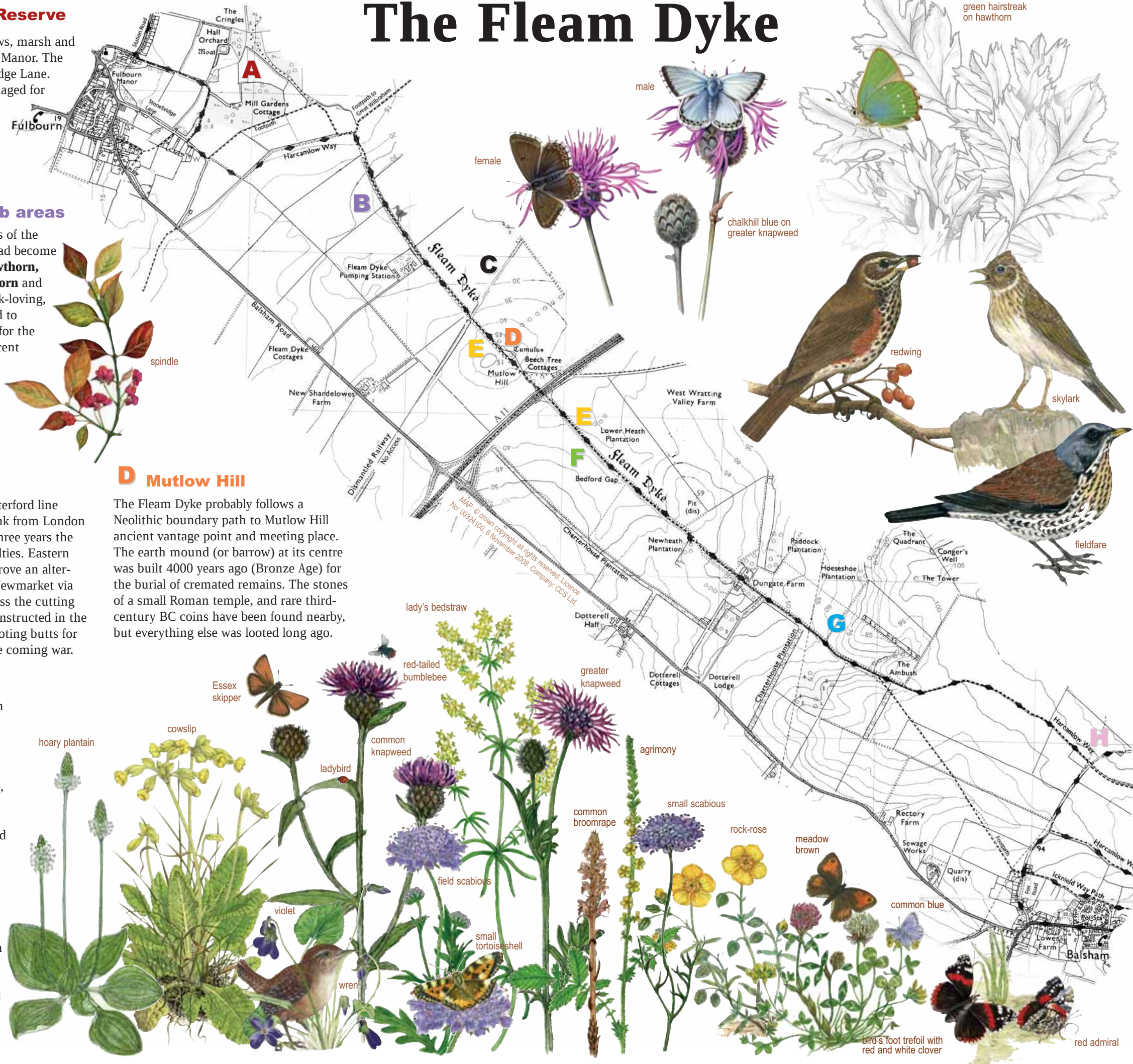
red-tailed bumblebee

Essex skipper

cowslip

hoary plantain

# The Fleam Dyke



male

female

chalkhill blue on greater knapweed

green hairstreak on hawthorn

redwing

skylark

fieldfare

juniper

common lizard

beech and silver birch woodland

the icknield way

the fleam dyke

the disused railway

the chalk grassland

the scrub areas

the fulbourn nature reserve

the mutlow hill

the west wrattling valley farm

the lower heath plantation

the bedford gap

the charterhouse plantation

the dungate farm

the raddock plantation

the hoeshoe plantation

the quadrant

conger's well

the tower

the ambush

rectory farm

sewage works

quarry (dis)

lower farm

balsham

the icknield way path

the harcamlow way

the fleam dyke

seen circling over Mutfow Hill, uttering their eerte cries.

through the hedges in winter, and summer visitors such as **whitethroat** and **blackcap** sing in the hedges. You may see a **sparrow hawk** “zooming” or a **kestrel** hovering along the dyke. **Buzzards** have returned to the area and can be seen circling over Mutfow Hill, uttering their eerte cries.



buzzard

## Mammals, reptiles and birds

### Rabbits

are common and

### hares

can be seen in the

surrounding

fields. **Muntjac**,

**foxes** and

**badgers** live

on or near the

dyke. **Stoats** and **weasels** can be seen crossing the path

and, if you move quietly, you may see a **common lizard**

basking on bare soil or on the cross-bar of a fence. There

are harmless **grass snakes** near the Pumping Station.

Many birds can be seen or heard: **skylark**, **yellow hammer**,

**blackbird**, **robin** and **wren**. **Fieldfares** and **tits** forage

through the hedges in winter, and summer visitors such as

**whitethroat** and **blackcap** sing in the hedges. You may see

a **sparrow hawk** “zooming” or a **kestrel** hovering along

the dyke. **Buzzards** have returned to the area and can be

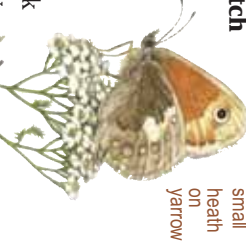
seen circling over Mutfow Hill, uttering their eerte cries.



bloody-nosed beetle



ringlet



small heath on yellow



orange tip

## Butterflies and other insects

Chalk grassland species, such as

the **grizzled skipper**, **grayling** and

**chalkhill blue**, disappeared as the

dyke became covered with scrub.

Scrub-clearance has led to an in-

crease in the growth of **horseshoe vetch**

and the return of **chalkhill blues**.

**Moths, bumble bees, solitary bees**

and **wasps**, and many other winged

insects thrive on the abundance of

flowers. In May, the occasional **green**

**hairstreak** can be seen along the bank

from Mutfow Hill to Fulbourn. Twenty-

four species of butterfly are regularly

seen on the Fleam Dyke, often in good

numbers. Numerous **anthills** are evidence

of large numbers of **meadow ants** (found

only in areas of old and undisturbed grassland).

**Crickets** and **grasshoppers**

can be heard and seen in the

grass on sunny days.

## Conservation

The flowers of chalk grassland are maintained either by grazing or by cutting and raking off. Some areas are left uncut each year in order to provide a good habitat for

invertebrates such as butterflies. Since 1990 there has been neeq clearance of invasive scrub and these areas are

now full of flowers from May until September. **Bumble bees, hoverflies, solitary wasps** and other winged insects

are abundant, and butterfly numbers have increased

steadily along the Dyke. Other, less easily visible insects

such as **spiders, weevils** and **beetles**, benefit from the wide

variety of plant species. All these provide food for small

mammals and birds.

General work has been done by

- the Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers run by The

Wildlife Trust

- work parties run by the Friends of the Roman Road and

Fleam Dyke

- contractors, paid for by a Lottery grant

More extensive work has been paid for by Natural England

(English Nature), and by the Cambridgeshire County

Council Archaeology Department.



Common knapweed (purple), clustered bellflower (blue), burnet saxifrage (white) and hawkweed oxtongue (yellow), on Fleam Dyke, near Mutfow Hill (Photo: Jack Harrison).

## Illustrations

**Richard Lewington:** Green hairstreak and chalkhill blue.

**Graham Easy:** Clustered bellflower, juniper, buzzard.

**Tina Bone:** Red admirals, wren, violets, tortoiseshell, spindle, hawthorn (and leaflet design & typesetting).

**Shelley Signs:** other flowers and birds. (November 2008)

## How to get there

*By Road:*

- The Fleam Dyke can be reached from the village of Fulbourn. Go past the church and Fulbourn Manor, turn left down Stonebridge Lane. Limited parking space at TL526557.

- From the end of Fox Road, Balsham, TL580514. Follow the Icknield Way symbol, turning left at Harcamlow Way. Limited parking space.

- The A11 cuts through the Fleam Dyke at TL550542. There is a lay-by on the southbound side.

*By Bus:*

- There is a regular bus service on week days from Cambridge Drummer Street Station to Fulbourn: buses 16, 17 and Citi 1.
- Bus 16a goes to Haverhill via Balsham.
- For details phone 0871 200 2233 or consult [www.stagecoachbus.com/cambridge](http://www.stagecoachbus.com/cambridge) and [www.cambridge.gov.uk](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk)

*Please note:*

- No cycling. The weight of cycle and cyclist damages the surface.
- Dog owners. Kindly clean up after your dog.

## Who looks after the Fleam Dyke?

- To report problems, call the Cambridgeshire County Council Countryside Services Team on 01223 715558.
- The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke help by fund-raising, running work parties and also monitoring flora and fauna. We have also produced a leaflet about the Roman Road (available from the Tourist Office, Cambridge). We have installed information boards and dog bins on the Roman Road. To join us, and to receive our newsletter, please contact the Wildlife Trust (subscription £5–£10).
- The Wildlife Trust runs regular mid-week work parties on the Fleam Dyke. For more information, please contact: The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH. Tel: 01954 713530 [greenbelt@wildlifebcnp.org](mailto:greenbelt@wildlifebcnp.org) • [www.wildlifebcnp.org](http://www.wildlifebcnp.org)
- The Friends wish to thank South Cambridgeshire District Council for funding this leaflet.



Fleam Dyke near the disused railway. Photo: Julia Hapler

## Archaeology

The massive earthwork

known as Fleam Dyke

consists of a 7m to 8m (25

feet) high bank and ditch

barrier, which runs for 5km

(3 miles) from Balsham to

Fulbourn. It is the third of a

series of barriers built in the

5th and 6th centuries by

Anglo-Saxon immigrants in

order to defend their core

settlements against

Romano-British attacks

from the south west.

The widening of the A11 (in 1991)

was an opportunity to excavate

using modern

methods to help

with analysis. The

results show that

the Fleam Dyke

was built in three distinct phases, from the early 5th to the

early 7th centuries. The remains of snail shells and a

Roman coin found beneath the bank show that the Dyke is

post-Roman.

Historically, the Fleam Dyke marks ancient settlement

boundaries, and is still a parish boundary. The highest point

at Mutfow Hill is crowned by a Bronze Age barrow, long

since looted, which was used for meetings (moots) from

Neolithic times onwards.

## Natural history

The flora and fauna of chalk grassland have developed over

several thousand years, since early man cleared the trees

and began to graze sheep. When sheep farming declined

during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the spread of

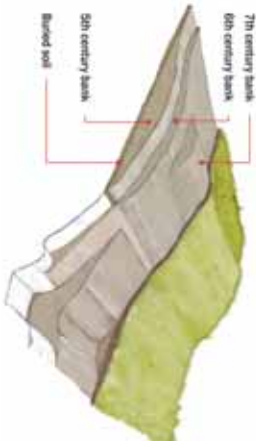
scrub was limited by grazing rabbits. However, myxoma-

toxis killed most of the rabbit population in the 1950s,

which allowed seedlings of many shrubs to grow. Large

areas of short turf, once rich in flowers and

butterflies, became covered in scrub.



The Saxon defence barriers



quaking grass

harebell



dwarf thistle

## Flowers!

**Violets** are the first flowers on the Fleam Dyke in April.

**Cowslips** have multiplied

since the overgrown banks

near Fulbourn were cleared.

From May onwards there is a succession

of the beautiful low-growing plants

typical of chalk grassland. The area

near Mutfow Hill becomes golden with

**horseshoe vetch** and **rock-roses**, and

here, and east of the A11, **wild thyme**

contrasts with large patches of **white**

**squinnancywort**. Look out for the starry white

flowers of **dropwort**, and the small white

umbels of **burnet saxifrage**. **Milkwort** has a

long flowering season and comes in a choice

of colours: pink, white and blue! As the

summer progresses, **lady's bedstraw** forms a

background to the mauve, purple and blue of

**common knapweed**, **small scabious**,

**clustered bellflower** and **harebells**. Near

Mutfow Hill the white flowers and dark

bronze leaves of **eyebright** mark the path

in August, and if you

look carefully you may

see autumn **gentians**.

dropwort

horseshoe vetch

salad burnet