

THE BEACHAMWELL EXCAVATIONS: Episode 2!

Following Sue Pennell's account of the flint arrowhead she discovered in her garden in Beachamwell, fellow village residents Mark and Eileen Powell now relate recent finds in their garden.

"We started digging in the garden in 1995. It was to be a water feature because I'm Pisces and relate to watery things and the Labrador was equally enthusiastic.

Test holes revealed that two to three feet down there was a solid chalk bedrock covered by a foot of gravelly subsoil topped off with another foot or so of sandy peat. The area we excavated was some thirty feet square and the depth was strictly limited by the chalk level. We very soon noticed that every few shovels from the top of the subsoil contained a small piece of pot-shard. Each was dusted off and placed in a shoebox. When the pond area was finally dug, the shoebox was half full.

We'd noticed that the shards were old, some we recognised as Grimston ware because of its bobbly olive green glaze and that little of it was more recent than the Grimston ware, suggesting that the settlement that produced the finds ceased to be as abundant with their rubbish after the medieval period. This fitted in with what we'd learned about the history of Beachamwell, a thriving Saxon Community which expanded through to the Middle Ages and had then fallen into a population decline by the time of the Dissolution.

I would recommend to anyone that, should the water feature bug bite you, don't just heap up a pile of stones round the plastic pond on the lawn – borrow or invest in a shovel!

The good folk at Gressenhall are very friendly and obliging and happily sorted and identified all our little bits and recorded the finds on the Great Archaeological Map of Norfolk."



*Thetford-type shards, 9th to 11th century.
Thetford-type pottery was so called because kilns for the manufacture of this Late Saxon wheelmade pottery were first uncovered in Thetford.*

*Green glazed Grimston bases,
13th to 15th century*



Protect our paths

CPRE Norfolk are launching a new campaign this year to help protect Norfolk's network of beautiful, rural footpaths which are under threat as a result of significant cuts in the County Council's public rights of way budget. This network provides free access to the countryside and it is essential that they remain open and accessible for everyone to enjoy, but there is a real danger that many rural footpaths will become overgrown or badly signposted, preventing their use and exacerbating their decline. You can help Protect our Paths as part of your normal day-to-day activity, perhaps when you are walking the dog or simply out for a family stroll, or you could become a Footpath Warden, responsible for monitoring footpaths in your parish. For more information, visit the CPRE Norfolk website at www.cprenorfolk.org.uk, or go to one of their launch events in May. They will be holding an information session at 2pm at Loddon's Jubilee Hall on Thursday 17 May, followed by a gentle (but optional and weather-dependent!) three-mile round walk to Hales Hall, and they will also be having a stand at Pensthorpe's Wild about the Wensum event on Saturday 19 May.

NPPF – it could have been worse

CPRE Norfolk has cautiously welcomed environmental concessions written into the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Caroline Davison said, "It's a relief to see that the final NPPF includes a statement on the intrinsic value of undesignated countryside; encourages the use of brownfield first; and provides an accepted definition of sustainability. However, there is still cause for concern in the detail of the document. For example, although the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability are supposed to be considered together under the framework, economic factors are given "significant weight" in the document, as opposed to "great" or "appropriate" weight for environmental concerns. It remains to be seen whether the final NPPF provides the backdrop for greater use of brownfield land, or conservation of ordinary countryside against the arguments of significant economic factors."

CPRE Norfolk will be keeping a close eye on how the document is implemented over the coming weeks and months.

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email at lizdittner@tiscali.co.uk or tel 01366 727813



PUTTING THE BRECKS ON THE MAP – FINALLY!

Last month brought the good news that, after months – some might say years – of discussion and negotiation, gateway signs to the Brecks are finally to be erected on the major roads in and out of the area. Millions of people pass through the Brecks every year without really knowing what they are missing and some level of on-the-ground recognition is long overdue. Eleven road signs are in the process of being installed, hopefully drawing the attention of visitors to the unique Brecks' identity and cementing a "sense of place" among local residents.



Putting the Brecks on the Map
Celebrating the installation of The Brecks road signs in Norfolk and Suffolk are, from left to right: Cllr Ian Monson (Chairman, Brecks Partnership), Heidi Thompson (Norfolk County Council), Elizabeth Truss MP, Les and Vanessa Scott (Strattons Hotel) and Neil Featherstone (Brecks Partnership Manager).

South West Norfolk MP Elizabeth Truss said "Forests and heathland, unique biodiversity and wildlife, all blend with superb farm shops, cafes and charming towns to make the Brecks a very welcoming destination in its own right. The new road signs are just the start of this tourism drive; securing the £2 million of Heritage Lottery Funding would provide a tremendous boost. Improvements on road, particularly the announcement last week that works on the final section of the A11 to be dualled will start early next year, and rail, will all facilitate access to the area."

The Brecks Partnership has worked with the tourism businesses of the Brecks to install gateway signs on the main roads that cross the area. Brecks Partnership Manager Neil Featherstone said, "This is a very significant time for those working to raise the profile of the Brecks and those that live, work and increasingly visit the area. The Brecks has an amazing story to tell to both residents and visitors and this is the first of many steps in creating a sense of place and developing the

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WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

Friday 4 May 6.30pm

Society AGM, to be held at Beachamwell Hall, by kind invitation of Mrs Jane Bonning. See enclosed flier. The AGM will begin at 6.30pm prompt, and will be followed at 7.00pm by drinks and canapes, to mark the retirement from the Breckland Society Committee of our Secretary, Sue Whittle, and Treasurer, John Davies. Both Sue and John were instrumental in setting up the Society in 2003 and have given almost a decade of commitment and hard work to ensuring its success. We hope that as many of you as possible will wish to join us in thanking them.

Friday 1 June 6.00pm

An evening field trip to Barnham Cross Common in Thetford, led by Neil Featherstone of the Brecks Partnership. We shall explore on foot for about an hour and a half, looking at this excellent example of Breckland grass heathland. Special plants here include tower mustard and field wormwood, and some 60 species of breeding birds have been recorded. There are also many butterflies and other insects. Free to members, non-members £2. Meet in small carpark on the left-hand side of the Bury Road out of Thetford, grid ref TL 865 813.

Friday 13 July 7.00pm

Talk by Michael Gouldstone on The Gurkhas. Venue to be confirmed. Please contact Delia Cook (as below) for details nearer the time.

If you need any further information about events, please contact Delia Cook on 01842 820663.

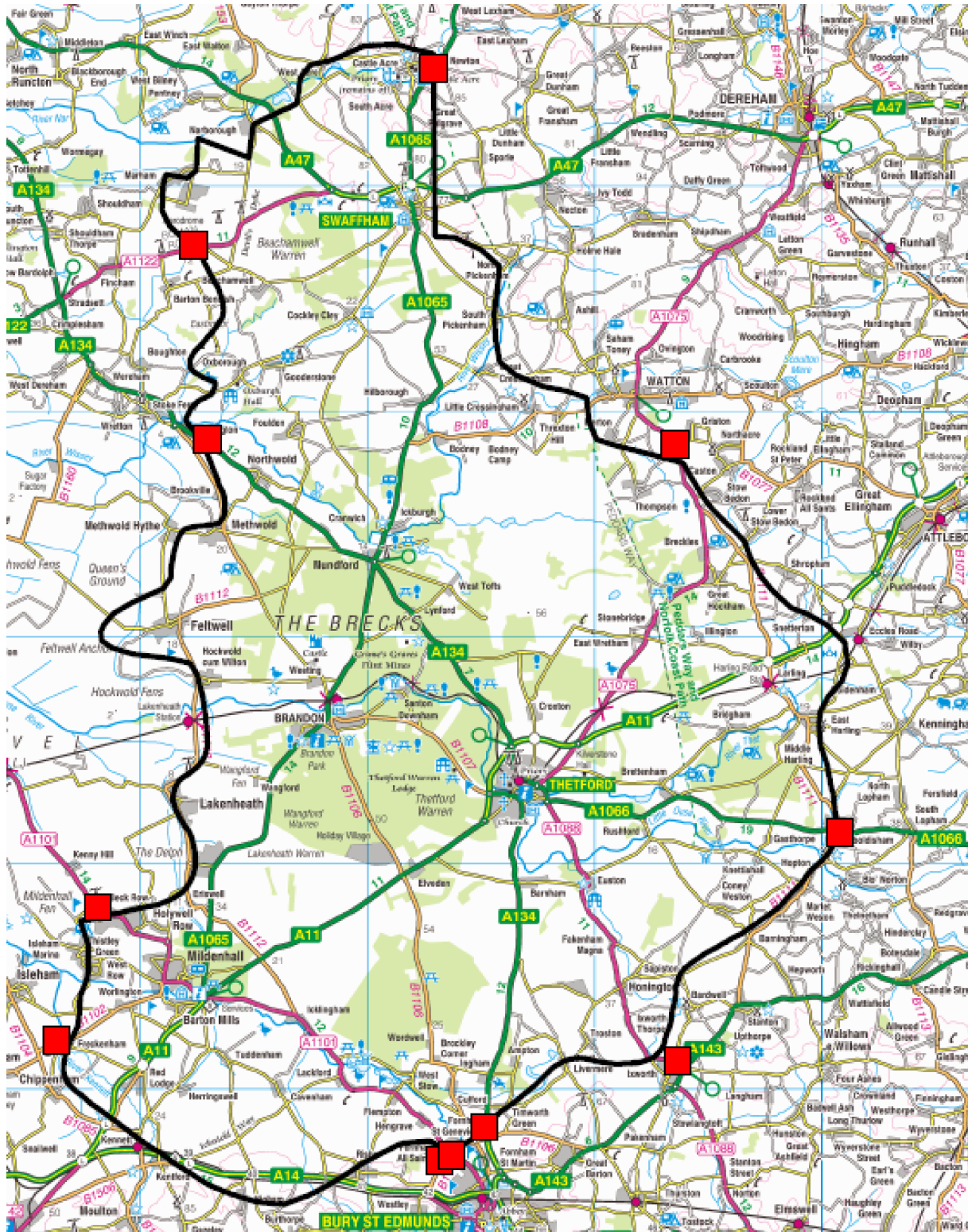
destination of the Brecks. Working with all interests, including tourism businesses, there is so much to be proud of and to celebrate here that we would like to literally put the Brecks on the map."

The Brecks does not have a well-known national designation such as the National Park for the Broads, or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the Norfolk and Suffolk Coasts, but the landscape is just as distinctive. Tourism supports 14 per cent of the working population in Norfolk and 13 per cent in Suffolk, so is a vital part of the rural economy, especially in areas of such low population as in the Brecks. "We need to let people know we are here and open for business. Many of the local residents

don't know about the Brecks and with so many potential visitors passing us by we hope these signs will encourage people to stop and make the Brecks their next destination", said Vanessa Scott, of Strattons Hotel and a long-time supporter of the Brecks Partnership.

The gateway signs will be placed at strategic points on the perimeter of the area and will be reinforced by repeater signs, which will be made available to settlements and attractions across the Brecks. The signs, along with other forthcoming tourism projects including a new Brecks website and newspaper, have been funded by the Brecks Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

Map of the Brecks showing the locations of the new gateway signs



LATEST WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ACROSS THE BRECKS

The unseasonably warm weather of late March brought spring to a sudden start, and with the thermometer regularly hitting 20 degrees it was boom time for insects such as bumblebees and for butterflies in particular. On several days it was possible to see five species on the wing simultaneously – peacock, red admiral, brimstone, comma and orange tip – a highly unusual sight so early in the year! All but the last-named will have overwintered, often tucked away in dense clumps of ivy or in garden sheds. The orange tips, however, will have spent the colder months pupating, emerging as immaculate adults once the weather warms up. Even so, to see orange tips on the wing by 25 March is quite remarkable. Finding nectar at this time of year is not so easy, though, and many such early emergents risk starvation, especially if cool and wet conditions return – as they now have.



Only male orange tips sport the eponymous wing features – the females closely resemble cabbage whites.

It's tempting, with a bout of early warm weather, to think that this will mean a huge and early influx of migratory birds, but that has not happened this year. Certainly chiffchaffs can be heard singing their distinctive and repetitive "chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff" song from woods and gardens, and a swallow was seen at Cranwich on 26 March. At Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve the first sand martins were spotted, as well as two pairs of that most delightful of migrant ducks, the garganey, but it will be another two weeks or more before the majority of our summer visitors arrive from Africa. Sandstorms over the Sahara may be holding them up en route.



Chiffchaffs are always among the first spring migrants to arrive, and some may even overwinter if conditions are mild.

One of our most beautiful migratory raptors, the osprey, has already been passing through the area, however. One was seen at Castle Acre on 24 March (sharing a fence with a buzzard!) and another – or the same? – over Thetford the next day. Ospreys are worth looking out for over any river or lake, as they will often stop off for a spot of fishing on their way to their breeding grounds further north. Red kites are on the move too, with three seen together at Cockley Cley on 1 March and one near Foulton on 30 March.



Lively and acrobatic, boxing hares offer some of the best springtime wildlife watching!

Meanwhile, some winter visitors are still around. A large flock of fieldfares was still present at Cranwich on 29 March, alongside singing woodlarks, back on their territories and preparing to breed. A great grey shrike, a regular winter visitor to the Brecks in small numbers, spent most of March on an area of clearfell near Santon church, where crossbills and bramblings were also present in good numbers. Up to 17 hawfinches were seen at Lynford Arboretum on 4 March.

Mammals are increasingly active now, with hedgehogs emerging from hibernation and bats easy to spot on milder evenings – look out for Daubenton's bats as they swoop low over rivers and ponds, picking off insects. Now is also peak time for hare activity, with the famous "boxing" taking place if you're lucky and patient. This is not, as often believed, two males squaring up to each other, but instead is usually a female who is not yet ready to mate attempting to fob off an admirer! The Brecks are a stronghold for hares and the area around Beachamwell and Barton Bendish is a particularly good place to look for them.



Ospreys have increased considerably in recent years and the nearest breeding pairs to the Brecks are now at Rutland Water in Leicestershire. Migrant birds arrive from their wintering quarters in Africa as early as mid-March.