

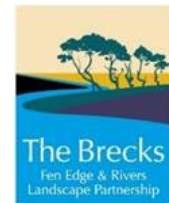


RECENT EVENTS

- THE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERIES AT LAKENHEATH
- A VISIT TO THE PINGOES OF THOMPSON COMMON
- TOUR OF STANTA BATTLE AREA
- THE AGM AND NIGHTJAR WALK

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

- THE SAND DUNES OF BRECKLAND
- HERON HAWKING AT DIDLINGTON
- A NEW BOOK



EVENTS

Tuesday November 1st. 'No Flash in the Pan'. A talk on the Brandon Gunflint Industry.

Tuesday November 15th. A Guided Walk at the Lynford Estate with James Parry

Tuesday December 7th Christmas Social at Oakleigh House, Swaffham . Times tbc.

For more information on times and ticket prices see the Society website
<http://www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events/>

THE BRECKLAND SOCIETY AND THE BRECKS FEN EDGE AND RIVERS PARTNERSHIP

Now that the River Raiders project is drawing to a close, the Society is moving onto their second project, Industrious Rivers.

This will be launched on Monday October 17th at The Engine House, Brandon Country Park from 11am to 3pm . There is more information on page 2 of this newsletter.

The latest volume of the Journal of Breckland Studies is now available. It focuses on Bury St. Edmunds. Originally planned to coincide with 1000th anniversary in 2020 of the founding of the Abbey, it was delayed due to the Covid pandemic. It benefitted from the financial support of The Bury Society, The Suffolk Preservation Trust and The Breckland Society.

Its Papers include:

- Pilgrim badges of St Edmund.
- The *Depredatio abbatiae* and the uprising of 1327-9.
- The Breckland Estates of Bury Abbey, 1100-1500.
- The rivers Lark and Linnet: Hydrology and Landscapes.
- Written in stone: An evidential connection with the Past..

LIVING AND BELIEVING IN THE BRECKS

A NEW BRECKLAND SOCIETY PROJECT

INDUSTRIOUS RIVERS

LAUNCH DATE OCTOBER 17TH 2022

Industrious Rivers is one of a series of projects under the umbrella of The Brecks Fen Edge and River Landscape Partnership (BFER), funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The Breckland Society is the lead organisation for the project, which will have its official launch on Monday 17th October and will culminate with an exhibition at The Ancient House Museum Thetford in Spring 2024.

The project will explore the history of trade and development along the waterways of the Brecks – principally the Rivers Gadder, Lark, Little Ouse, Thet and Wissey. Rivers are used more for leisure and recreation today, but for most of human history they were essential for the working community. Mills, docks, wharves and towpaths all speak of a time when transportation by river was the most efficient way of heavy haulage – bringing in commodities such as food, coal and building supplies to inland communities where they could be further processed or distributed and contributing to the wealth of inland ports such as Stoke Ferry and Brandon. Conversely, some of the export commodities of the Brecks – notably flint and rabbit skins – needed to be transported to larger conurbations. Far more navigable than today, and much busier, our Breckland rivers were a vital lifeline that connected this landlocked part of England to the rest of the country and even beyond.

Industrious Rivers offers a range of exciting opportunities to learn more about the history of the area, as well as to acquire new skills and insights into an underexplored aspect of the local heritage. A series of training sessions will equip volunteers with the knowledge required to understand the characteristics and significance of the Brecks rivers and to carry out their own research. We will look at the general history of the rivers, how they were written up in the historical record and the vital role they played in the daily lives of local people; special attention will be paid to historical river infrastructure and to the types of manmade structures such as locks, staunches and mills, that are likely to be encountered along rivers, as well as how to recognise their remains and record them.

Experts from UEA and other bodies will deliver workshops on the history of river landscapes, as well as practical conservation techniques at river heritage sites and more. If maps are more your thing, volunteers are needed to research and examine current and historic maps to identify likely features that were used historically for trade and industry. Where possible, you will be invited to walk sections of the rivers (with appropriate landowner permissions) to identify and record relevant features, which will then be digitally mapped so that a database can be compiled of surviving industrial heritage along the Brecks rivers. All the workshops will be filmed and put online for future reference.

The project findings will be brought together in four ways – a series of interpretation panels at four conserved sites; an exhibition at Ancient House Museum in 2023-4, co-curated with a Young Curators group; an illustrated report about the project and its discoveries; and finally an online archive.

The official launch of the Project will be on Monday 17th October in The Pump Room, The Engine House at Brandon Country Park. The day will start at 11am with an introduction and talk on the history of rivers landscapes in The Brecks from Professor Tom Williamson of UEA, a world renowned expert on landscape history and archaeology. This will be followed with an illustrated overview of the project and how volunteers can get involved, presented by Elliott Wragg an archaeologist who spent years working on the Thames Discovery Programme. After lunch Elliott will lead a walk along the nearby river The Little Ouse starting to look out for archaeological clues. The day should finish at about 3pm.

If you would like to attend the Launch on 17th October, please book your place here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/industrious-rivers-launch-tickets-419074863197>

Even if you cannot attend the Launch, you can still be involved as the day will be filmed and put online. No special skills or knowledge are required to be involved in the project - just an interest in history and heritage and a willingness to help make a difference in knowledge and understanding of why rivers were once so important in the Brecks! Look for more information on the following web page.

<https://brecks.org/bfer/projects/under-the-surface-discovering-heritage/2-3-industrious-rivers/>

Helen Leith
Project Manager Industrious Rivers

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETARIES AT LAKENHEATH. A TALK ON 'ZOOM' ON FEBRUARY 3RD 2022

On Thursday 3 February, Jo Carruth of Cotswold Archaeology gave us a fascinating lecture by Zoom entitled 'Evidence of Life and Death – 20 years of research into the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at RAF Lakenheath'. There were three distinct and contemporary Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, used between 475 – 675 CE, that contained a total of 440 burials, including eight cremations. The first cemetery was discovered and partially excavated in the late 1950s, with further excavations from 1997 – 2008 revealing very many more burials. Research into the findings from all the excavations, complimented by radio-carbon dating, metallurgical and textile analyses of grave goods and studies of the human and animal skeletal remains, including isotope and DNA analyses, has now concluded and publication the final report is expected later this year.

The most dramatic and well-known burial is the 'horse and warrior' which can be seen in the Mildenhall Museum. The body of a very high-status adult man had been placed inside a coffin which also contained a sword. A spear, shield boss (from the centre of a shield) and a bucket had been placed on top of the coffin and then covered with another cloth. These were found inside a large rectangular grave with a sacrificed horse wearing highly decorated bridle ornaments placed alongside. Radio-carbon analysis has dated the bones of the deceased and his horse to the last quarter of the fifth century suggesting that it was a 'founder' burial for its cemetery, around which other graves were placed. The 'horse and warrior' had been buried under one of three barrows - circular mounds, each surrounded by a ring ditch. The other two barrows contained higher status adult females, each with the remains of a small child interred at the side. One of these graves was also a horse burial, though it was not well preserved.

Jo explained that the research had revealed important information about burial practices: the relationship between the grave goods found and the age, gender and status of the deceased and the significance of the location of the burials. Higher status individuals were often buried near the barrows and genetically related individuals were interred in particular areas within the cemeteries. Significant information has also emerged about the lives and lifestyles of those who were buried.



The Horse and Warrior burial

Almost half of those buried had died before the age of eighteen and there was also a spike in women's deaths between the ages of 18 -25, probably relating to childbirth. Only a few individuals lived into 'extreme old age' of 55 or older! Evidence of polio and leprosy was found – the latter a new discovery for Anglo-Saxon times as the disease was previously believed to have arrived with the Normans. Some skeletons had healed fractures and a small number had skulls that showed evidence of trepanation. Most of those buried had spent their lives in areas that were fairly local to the cemeteries, although the isotopic composition of the teeth of one female skeleton indicated that she had lived in Denmark for the first 14 years of her life. These Anglo-Saxons were generally not that much shorter than us – the average height of women was five feet five inches, whereas men were mostly between five feet seven inches and five feet nine – but there were fewer tall people than today.

Overall, the grave goods found were fairly typical for the period, with spears, arrows and other weapons being buried with men and jewellery with women. Some male graves contained whole hand-made pots, but none of these were found in female burials. Animal bones from food offerings were mostly of sheep. Three graves of high-status males contained lyres, each from a different era. In one case the deceased had been arranged so that he appeared to be playing the instrument in death. Lyre players were important people, not just providing entertainment, but keepers of their community's history and stories. The only example of imported cloth was found in a lyre burial, but isotope analysis of the skeleton of the deceased showed that he had lived locally – so whilst the textile had come from overseas, he had not been a minstrel travelling abroad. Analyses of other grave goods revealed that trade was long distance and global, and not just for objects belonging to high status individuals. Elephant ivory from India was used for combs, glass for beads came from the eastern Mediterranean (or from recycled glass from the Roman era) and mercury from Spain was used in the gilding of objects made from copper alloys, for example.

This report provides just a glimpse into the huge range of evidence that Jo was able to describe and interpret for us. The publication of the report is keenly anticipated!
Pat Reynolds

VISIT TO THE PINGOES AT NWT THOMPSON COMMON WITH TIM HOLT-WILSON MARCH 13th, 2022

This Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve is an ancient area of ponds, scrub and trees that has survived almost entirely unchanged for 14,000 years since the retreat of the last ice sheet in Norfolk. Recent purchases of Mere Farm and Frost Common have enlarged the nature reserve and are providing an opportunity for more of this unique landscape to be restored for the benefit of its special, diverse wildlife.

Members and friends met at the car park where the Great Eastern Pingo Trail starts. Due to the delayed arrival of our speaker Tim Holt-Wilson, we enjoyed an introductory walk around the public area of Pingoies with Phil Childs, the volunteer warden and local resident of many years. Here the path took us amongst through an area of rough woodland into an open area of pingoies, large and small, shallow and deep, where we could see their raised banks. A variety of small birches and willows, gorse bushes and brambles were scattered around them, blending into reeds and sedges at their edges. The ponds provide a habitat for many plant, insect and animal species, common and rare, some found only in this site.

Phil told us that orchids were returning following the change in grazing regime from sheep to cattle. Great Crested newts breed in the ponds. Several members heard the first chiff chaffs of the year, and the characteristic chatter of a Little Grebe.

When Tim arrived we listened, captivated by his amazing knowledge of the geomorphology of the area.



A neglected pingo



Tim explains the different forms of pingoies

We learned that there is not one, but at least three types of pingo, depending on where the source of water is from. Either (i) upwelling from the chalk beneath, (ii) filtering downwards from local chalk outcrops or (iii) drawn in from the surrounding sediment by the process of freezing.

Most pingoies are roughly rounded but some can be longitudinal, some are deep but others are shallow. The mixture of surface sediment, from gravel and sand to silt and clay, some calcareous and some acid makes the site of each pond unique, and supports a diverse flora and fauna.

Pollen analysis from cores of sediment in this, and other local areas such as Cranberry Rough show an unbroken record of the vegetation since the last ice advance.

This is proved by the presence of a special beetle that lives only in periglacial conditions, but has remained in this, the only area in Britain, since that time. This is truly a habitat that has had very little human interference.

Tim elaborated on the present excavations of 'ghost' pingoies near Thompson Water by the NWT. This has provided an opportunity to take more cores for pollen

analysis before they are fully restored. Powdered organic layers in the former ponds and burned flints on their banks have revealed that early man had lived amongst the pingoies before they were incorporated into the larger fields of modern agriculture.

Julia Grover

TOUR OF THE STANTA BATTLE AREA

May 24th 2022

Most of our members will be aware of the story of how the inhabitants of several Breckland villages were ejected from their homes and land with just two weeks' notice during 1942, when the then War Department requisitioned over 25 square miles in the heart of the Brecks to serve as a military training camp. Despite verbal assurances given to the former residents, the government retained the land after the war and those who had once lived there were never able to return to their former homes, other than for brief annual visits.

Coach tours of STANTA are hugely popular, and there is often a waiting list – the area is still used intensively by the UK military, including for live firing exercises, and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation who run the site can only fit in a certain number of tours each year.

Rather than the standard tour, we rather cheekily asked if we could have a customised tour of the area, visiting a number of sites chosen by Professor Tom Williamson, a great friend of the society and leading expert on the landscape of the Brecks and its history. Perhaps a little to our surprise, the DIO folks were very open to our request for a custom tour and bent over backwards to make sure we could visit every location that Tom had chosen.

About 40 members boarded the coach in Swaffham in the early afternoon, and we were ferried to West Tofts camp, where we were met by WO Pete Goodchild who was to be our guide for the day.

First stop was the magnificent West Tofts church. Originally built in the early 14th century, it was extensively (and expensively!) remodelled in Victorian times to the designs of Augustus Pugin. Norfolk Heritage Explorer calls it “one of Britain’s finest Gothic Revival churches”.



Angels on the roof of West Tofts Church Alan Clarke



Looking over the Floated Meadows Alan Clarke

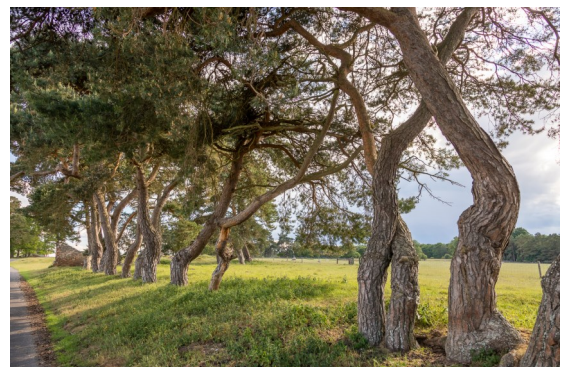
Next stop was the ‘floated meadows’ (water meadows to you and me) created ca. 1792 by Stephen Payne-Gallwey, who came from a plantation- and slave-owning West Indies family, and who purchased West Tofts Manor in about 1780. In early spring, river water was allowed to trickle across the gentle slopes of the meadows to raise the temperature of the ground, encourage early grass growth, allow early grazing and increase the eventual hay crop – vital for seeing livestock safely through the following winter. Returning from the meadows and church, we passed the site of the former manor house, long since demolished.

We then visited the site of Buckenham Tofts Hall, where Robert Edward Petrie remodelled the existing hall into one of Norfolk’s great country houses in the early 1800s. It was demolished in 1946; like so many others it had been used by the military during World War II and irreparably damaged. Almost all that remains now is the lake made by damming the River Wissey, part of the huge stable block and the large and very overgrown walled garden, which some members bravely explored during a heavy rain shower. As we listened to Tom Williamson talk about the history of the house, a rare Brecks visitor, a honey buzzard, was spotted overhead. (I’ve been asked to make clear that it’s not really a buzzard and does not eat honey!) Our final stop was at a particularly fine ‘pine line’ – one of Breckland’s iconic landscape features. The historical *raison d’etre* for these long straight lines of Scots Pine has long been debated. In its shadow, Tom advanced his current theory that it may well have been down to a particularly enterprising and persuasive nurseryman from the Brandon area, who had a lot of surplus pine seedlings to dispose of around 1800! It seems from the historical record that almost all of the lines were originally planted as conventional hedges during a brief 15-year period.

I really can’t finish this report without praising our host, Pete Goodchild, who manhandled Tom’s wheelchair over some really rough ground, much to the delight of Tom who though he would never again have to opportunity to get up close to some of the places that he researched so intensively twenty and more years ago. Pete also very kindly allowed a two-hour tour to stretch into a three-hour one, just to get us to all of our target places within STANTA.

Almost every face was smiling broadly as they dismounted from the coach back in Swaffham, much later than planned!

Alan Clarke



A typical line of Breckland Pines

Alan Clarke

SOCIETY AGM AND NIGHTJAR WALK

JUNE 29th, 2022

This year's AGM was held in Foulden Village Hall and was attended by 25 members. In general it is 'business as usual' for the Society. Thanks were expressed to Teresa Squires who has left the committee, and her husband Paul, a past treasurer who have moved away to Herefordshire.

Most of the attendees then joined the Nightjar walk led by chairman James Parry on Forestry Commission land just a ten-minute drive from the village. Conditions were ideal – warm and still – and so the prospects were good for hearing and, hopefully, even seeing these enigmatic birds. Nightjars are summer migrants to the UK, arriving in May from their wintering quarters in sub-Saharan Africa and leaving our shores from mid-August onwards on their return journey back south. They favour open landscapes with scattered trees and the tracts of heathland that historically covered the Brecks were always a traditional stronghold for the species. The advent of the Forestry Commission a century or so ago saw much of the area planted in conifers, but Nightjars soon adapted to life in this new situation and they continue to do well across Thetford Forest, especially in areas of clear fell and shifting their precise presence each year according to the rotational cycle of felling and replanting.

Being largely crepuscular and nocturnal, Nightjars are always not easy to connect with. During the day they are largely inactive, sleeping either on the ground, a fallen tree trunk or horizontal branch, relying on their cryptic plumage to escape detection. On the approach of dusk, they wake up and start flying about, displaying, feeding on moths and other flying insects and conducting sorties around their territories. The males also start delivering their "song", an extraordinary repetitive sound known as churring and which involves as many as 40 notes per second, delivered continuously for many minutes.

Usually this burst of activity starts in earnest just when it gets too dark for the human eye to see well, but on this particular evening the group was in for a real surprise. Soon after arrival at an area of clear fell identified by James in advance as the territory of at least two pairs, and in surprisingly good light, we heard two males churring from quite close by – but still unseen at that point. Then the birds started to appear all around us, dark shapes with pointed wings and a characteristic jerky flight. There were as many as six birds in total, some passing within a few metres of our heads a times, calling and even wing clapping as they hawked for insects and displayed to one another. It was a very impressive sight, enjoyed in optimal conditions and surely the highlight of any Brecks summer.

Other wildlife included Yellowhammers, Stonechats and a young Kestrel calling to be fed by its parents shortly after we arrived at the site, followed by at least three types of bats: a pipistrelle species, Brown Long-eared and Noctule. A great treat lay in store as we walked back to our vehicles 45 minutes or so later, by which time darkness had fallen. Close to the grassy track was a Glow-worm, the luminous green light of the male shining surprisingly brightly as he attempted to attract a passing female. A rarer sight than the Nightjars (and a first for many in the group) and a wonderful way to end the evening.

James Parry



A nightjar in flight *Alan Clarke*

THE SAND DUNES OF BRECKLAND

In Britain we tend to think of sand dunes as a coastal phenomenon, but sand dunes were an important feature of Breckland, although relatively few remain today. Whilst inland dunes are an important habitat in many parts of mainland Europe, in England they are extremely rare and special places.

Breckland has England's closest approximation to a continental climate, with hot summers and cold winters. It is also a very dry region - as the prevailing winds in Britain come from the southwest, much of the air's moisture load has been lost before it reaches the Brecks. The annual rainfall (22.7 inches at Honnington on average) is, unusually, quite evenly distributed throughout the year. Santon Downham often records some of the highest summer and lowest winter temperatures in England, probably because of its distance from the ameliorating effect of the coast and the relative proximity of East Anglia to the continental landmass. In winter bitterly cold winds are said to arrive 'all the way from Siberia', and it is true that cold air can come from central Germany at least.

The geology of the Brecks, of wind-blown sands of varying depths overlying chalk, combined with historic land use patterns, led to the creation of sand dunes. Native forests were easily cleared from the thin, light glacial soils by Neolithic settlers as they attempted to grow crops. Then rabbit warrening introduced by the Normans and later intensive sheep grazing led to soil erosion and sand windblow in some areas. The climate played a part too – the hot dry summers left the vegetation, which might otherwise have anchored the shifting sand, sparse and stunted (as is being so vividly demonstrated this summer). Where wind blows over bare sand, dunes are formed.

Before forestry and modern farming transformed the landscape, the Brecks' sandy soils formed a network of undulating and sometimes mobile dunes that stretched from Brandon to Lakenheath. Between 1665 and 1670 many houses in the original village of Santon Downham were inundated by sand blowing all the way from Lakenheath, and the Little Ouse River between Thetford and Brandon became silted up to the extent that cargo transport was badly affected by 'The Great Sand Flood'. Just decades ago, the road leading to Wangford was blocked by a sand blow from the nearby dunes.



Sand Sedge

Dune plant species found in Breckland include Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*), which, like other grasses, traps sand between its stalks and holds it fast by a dense network of roots, continuing to grow through newly deposited sand and stabilising dunes. Sand Sedge can still be found in large beds on Icklingham Plain and by many roadsides, even though the dunes on which it originally grew have been smoothed out or have disappeared. The grass Sand Cat's-tail (*Phleum arenarium*), and various stork's-bills (*Erodium* spp.) are typical dune species, and the Brecks holds one of only two inland records of Grey Hair-grass (*Corynephorus canescens*). Some Breck sand specialists also occur on coastal dunes, such as Sand Catchfly (*Silene conica*) and Dune Pansy (*Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii*).

Probably the best place to see the remains of former sand dunes is on Wangford Warren, a 38-acre Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve just northeast of the RAF Lakenheath airbase. It provides a panorama of mounds and dunes, now stabilised by Sand Sedge, as well as grazed grass and open disturbed soil. Large areas are covered by Reindeer moss lichen (*Cladonia rangiferina*) which crackles underfoot like dried seaweed as the heat haze shimmers over the landlocked dunes. H for Hawk author Helen MacDonald described this landscape as 'a ramshackle wilderness in which people and the land have conspired to strangeness'. It is well worth a visit.

Pat Reynolds



Wangford Warren



Dune Pansy



Sand Catchfly

HERON HAWKING AT DIDDLINGTON

Many members will be aware of the heronry at Didlington Hall, and of the building known as Falconer's Lodge at High Ash, about two miles from the Hall. And perhaps you've heard some stories of how the sport of 'heron hawking' – bringing down herons using various types of hawk or falcon - was practised during the early 1800s.

But I suspect few realise that between about 1790 and 1838, the Brecks, and in particular the area around Didlington, was almost the only part of England where falconry really thrived during this time, and that a few Breckland landowners, passionate about the sport, were key to its survival.

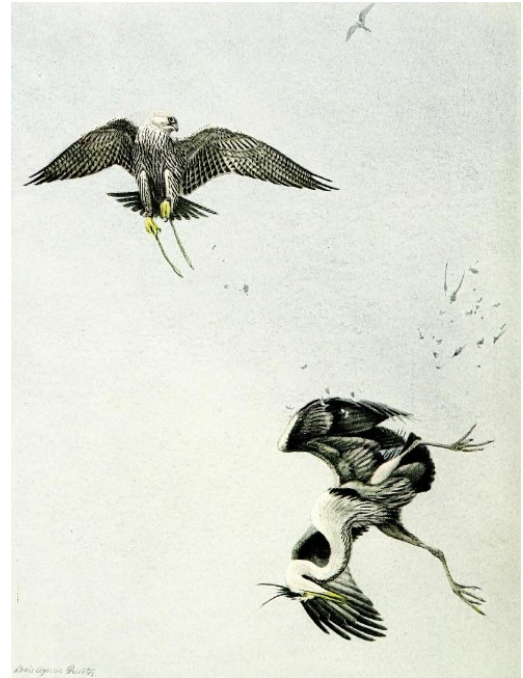
By 1826, in *Observations Upon Hawking*, as Sir John Sebright laments:

"Hawking, the favourite diversion of our ancestors, is now so fallen into disuse that the Art of Falconry is in danger of being entirely lost."

Three Breckland landowners from the C18 and C19 are closely associated with heron hawking at Didlington and the surrounding area. All had a passion for falconry, and each was, in his time, the driving force behind Breckland, and indeed English, falconry. They were Stephen Payne-Gallwey of West Tofts Estate, Col. Robert Wilson of Didlington Hall and Edward Clough Newcome of Feltwell Hall.

Col. Thomas Thornton (1747-1823) of Yorkshire founded a falconry club called The Confederate Hawks of Great Britain (also known as The Falconers' Club) in 1772. In 1781, he handed over the running of the club to George Walpole, 3rd Earl of Orford. After Walpole's death in 1791, the club was run by Robert Wilson (Lord Berners) for almost 50 years. Its activity became centred at Didlington, and it became known as the High Ash Club.

Heron Hawking took place during April and May, when the herons were actively feeding their young, and ranging widely in search of food. On suitable days, two falconers, mounted on horseback, with their birds, usually a pair or 'cast' which always hunted together, waited downwind of the heronry in the afternoon for the heavily laden birds, flying into the wind, to return. The two hawks, working together, were launched, and the aim was not to kill the heron (this was regarded as very poor form!) but to bring it to the ground. The falconers



An early illustration of Heron Hawking

would race to the heron and hawk and release the heron – but only after they had attached a very light copper cylinder to its leg. This was embossed with Lord Berners' name, the year, and the 'serial' number for that year.

The specific falconry technique used for heron hawking is called "The High Flight"; it is a little complicated to describe in a short article but can easily be Googled if you are interested.

As falconry had almost died out in England in the century after the extreme puritanism of the Cromwellian era, there were very few native English falconers. So, each year, typically in April, a group of Dutch falconers from the village of Valkenswaard, south of Eindhoven, would arrive in England, complete with young hawks of various types (mainly peregrine falcons) which had been captured on migration and trained through the autumn and winter to hunt first crows and later the much bigger herons.



An illustration from a book 'The Heronry at Didlington'

The Dutchmen then made their way to Didlington where they would live and work for the next several months. Most of these falconers were permanent employees of the club, splitting their time between Didlington and Holland.

Continued overleaf

HERON HAWKING AT DIDDLINGTON continued

Heron hawking afternoons were big public spectacles – up to 150 people, many of them guests of the large local landowners, drawn from across England, would gather to watch. Initially they would stay out of sight in a convenient pine line so as not to disturb either predators or prey.

Falconer's Lodge, at the top of the hill at High Ash, is about ½ mile north-west of the Desert Rats memorial. Lord Berners built this about 1814 specifically to house both the Dutch falconers and their hawks during each year's hunting season. Incidentally, it was a flag being flown from the top of the original very tall ash tree at this site (which in the days before forestry was visible for miles in every direction) which announced to the surrounding countryside that the weather conditions were suitable for heron hawking each day. Some of the most famous hawks, such as Clough Newcome's Sultan and De Royter, might bring down as many as 50 or more herons in a single short season. De Royter was lost when he got distracted by a crow near Feltwell, but Sultan stayed with Clough Newcome until he died of old age – at which point his owner personally stuffed him; he was an excellent taxidermist too!

When Lord Berners died in 1838, the club was dissolved – not only because of his death, but because the wide open heaths were becoming more and more enclosed for agriculture, and this made the horseback pursuit of the falcons and their prey (which was an essential part of the sport) increasingly difficult.

Falconry has a continuous history in England for about a thousand years, and has many keen adherents today (including one who lives in near Diddlington and “flies hawks in the area to keep the traditions of 200 years ago alive”). That unbroken survival of one of the country's most ancient sports was in large part due to the passions of those three Breckland men – Payne-Gallwey, Wilson (Berners) and Clough Newcome.

Alan Clarke

A NEW BOOK CONSTANCE VILLIERS-STUART IN PURSUIT OF PARADISE

Constance Villiers-Stuart and Beachamwell Hall

Constance was the subject of the last live event of the Society ran before lockdown in 2020 was at Beachamwell Hall, near Swaffham – on the 30th January 35 members and guests attended an evening talk by Mary Ann Prior entitled “from Beachamwell to Bharatpur”.

The talk was about Constance Villiers Stuart who lived at the Hall at the turn of last century and her work as both a garden designer and researcher of Indian Mughal gardens. The event was reported in the Society's April 2020 Newsletter (available on the Breckland Society website).

At the end of April this year at the Garden Museum in London a book was launched by Mary Ann Prior about Constance Villiers Stuart entitled “In Pursuit of Paradise” (by Unicorn Press). It has subsequently had a full page review in the Gardening section of the Saturday Daily Telegraph.

Robert Baker

