

SOCIETY VISIT TO LACKFORD LAKES

Eighteen members enjoyed a visit to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Lackford Lakes on 20 January. Lackford Lakes, which were created from gravel pits, lie beside the River Lark.

A superb site for wildfowl in both winter and summer, Lackford attracts tufted duck, pochard, gadwall, shoveler and goosander. There is a large winter gull roost and one or two pairs of redshank nest here – unusual so far from the coast. Passing birds of prey include the majestic osprey, while hobby and goshawk can also be occasionally spotted. This is one of the best places in Suffolk for kingfisher, and

cormorant are often seen fishing at the sailing lake or roosting in the tall trees by the river. When we visited, the storms of the previous two days had subsided into mild, sunny and still conditions, and a variety of waterfowl were present, including little grebe, gadwall, shoveler and teal, and we also had some excellent views of goldeneye. A large flock of lapwing was present, and a single snipe. Smaller birds included reed bunting, longtailed tit and bullfinch. However, the overwintering bittern remained steadfastly out of sight!



EXHIBITION 'Green Buildings in Norfolk'

April 21– 27, The Forum, Norwich.

A bookshop powered by the wind, houses covered in earth, churches with solar panels ... and all made in Norfolk! Photovoltaics on the roof, geothermal heat pumps in the ground, wind turbines in the garden ... and all on our doorsteps! Come to an exhibition on Norfolk's greenest buildings and find out more. Meet CPRE staff campaigning to raise awareness about renewable energy and energy-conscious building techniques and ask yourself ... what could I do? Free.

EVENING LECTURES 'Green Buildings in Norfolk – Meet the People'

Monday 23 and Wednesday 25 April, Origins Theatre, The Forum. Norfolk contains many fine examples of buildings pioneering the use of renewable energy. But who are the people behind them? James Frost, CPRE Norfolk Branch Director, hosts two evenings of short talks by some of Norfolk's greenest architects and forward-thinking individuals, all of whom live in or have designed a 'Green Building in Norfolk'. There will be plenty of time for questions so, if you are interested in renewable energy, please come along. There will be different speakers each night. Admission is free, no tickets in advance and limited capacity. Please come early to avoid disappointment. Doors: 7.30pm. Wine to be served after questions. Close: 9.00pm.

BOOKLET Green Buildings In Norfolk

CPRE Norfolk's ground-breaking research uncovered 21 local examples of renewable energy in action. This 32-page full-colour booklet, with information and images from each of the projects, and a detailed appendix on energy-conscious building techniques, is still available from the branch office, free to members, £3 otherwise. Please contact Clare Franklin for your copy, on 01603 761660.

The Midsummer Service
at St Mary's Houghton-on-the-Hill
will be on Sunday 17 June at 3pm
with the Reverend Robin Griffith-Jones
Master of the Temple, London
followed by tea and homemade cakes
at Houghton Barns.

There will also be an exhibition of the latest
discoveries of the wall paintings (*circa* 1000–1170)
at the church and at Houghton Barns that weekend.

Details to follow in the next newsletter

**If you would like to contribute to
the Breckland Society Newsletter
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NEW RECOGNITION FOR THE BRECKS

W.G. Clarke, in his classic book In Breckland Wilds, published in 1925, said "Few of the lowland districts of England have more striking individual characteristics than the area known as Breckland" – now known as The Brecks. But what makes it so special? The geology of the area shapes the landscape and gives us our distinctive plants and animals; underlying chalk with a layer of sand and flint is the basis of our lowland heaths. Despite its exceptional character, The Brecks still lacks any overall designation or label that recognises its regional importance as a huge area of natural green space for residents and visitors to enjoy, appreciate and value.

Few people living and working in The Brecks are aware of the sheer scale of the area and are surprised to learn that it is recognised as one of the great natural areas of Britain. Spanning 370 square miles across Norfolk and Suffolk, the area has a distinctive landscape of heathland, is home to the largest lowland pine forest in the UK and is also a refuge to stunning wildlife, plants and animals, including the rare stone curlew. Lowland heath is a declining habitat throughout Europe, with examples in the Brecks that are akin to areas of Denmark, France and Germany. Heath has successfully been re-created in the Brecks and is now managed by sheep-grazing.

The Brecks (not to be confused with the Breckland Council local authority area) stretches from Swaffham in the north to close to Bury St Edmunds in the south, and from Red Lodge in the west to East Harling in the east. In January 2006, Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and Breckland Council made written submissions to the Examination in Public of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, seeking recognition for the Brecks' environmental qualities. The Panel Inspector's subsequent report endorsed the view that the Brecks was

"a very distinctive area which was considered to need much more recognition to conserve and enhance its special qualities and contribute to the region's social and economic well-being".

The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) now recognises the Brecks as "the green heart of the Eastern Region". The Brecks Partnership, and many other organisations that appreciate the area, are working to gain Regional Recognition for the Brecks and ensure that its communities and wildlife have a sustainable and prosperous future. Sensitive management of

WHAT'S ON Forthcoming Society events

20 February, 7.30pm. Nick Gibbons will give a talk on the wildlife of Thetford Forest. This will be at Thetford Grammar School, in Old School, by kind permission of the Governors and Headmaster. Please park in the public car park and there will be stewards to show people to the hall. This is a joint event with Friends of Thetford Forest Park. Booking essential, contact Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190. £3.

21 April. Clermont Hall. The owner of the Hall, Philip Jones, will give a talk on the restoration of the house (see article on p3). Tickets £5, to include canapes and a glass of wine. Please contact Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190.

16 June. Anne Mason will lead a tour of Barton Bendish, Shingham and Beachamwell churches. Details in next newsletter.



our wildlife habitats (as well as the creation of new areas for wildlife and the management and enhancement of existing reserves) can benefit people, plants and animals.

The East of England Regional Assembly is interested in the concept of making the Brecks a Regional Park. This is a designation that comes with no extra baggage in terms of planning laws and has much to recommend it. In the UK there are several fine examples of Regional Parks, and these can be found in the Colne Valley in Lancashire, the River Nene in Northamptonshire and Pentland Hills and Clyde

SODIUM LIGHTS DESTROY RURAL TRANQUILLITY

Light pollution not only prevents the stargazer from enjoying a view of the night sky, but also urbanizes the rural environment, writes David Hook, Norfolk Night Blight Campaign Co-ordinator for the Norfolk CPRE.

Nothing announces the arrival of the town into the countryside more than the erection of a high-pressure (pink) or low-pressure (orange) sodium light in a previously unlit rural location. These lights, as well as urbanising their immediate site, introduce a suburban feel into areas far removed from the lights themselves. This is because they are usually visible over many miles at night.

As CPRE (the Campaign to Protect Rural England) has recently launched a national campaign on the issue of tranquillity, it is appropriate to reflect that there are increasingly fewer places from which sodium lights are not visible at night, in one direction or another. The absence of artificial light is one of the key factors in what constitutes a tranquil place.

The Norfolk Night Blight campaign team consults regularly with Norfolk County Council in order to reduce the impact that street lights have on the rural environment. NCC is currently preparing a PFI deal for street lighting, which will have an enormous impact on how the county looks at night. It is very important that the renewal of old lighting is accompanied by a reduction in light pollution, and to this end the use of full cut-off lamps employing a white light source is vital.

We also campaign to reduce the impact of private security lighting. Unfortunately, far too many sodium lights are in place on farms and rural businesses and these permeate all corners of the county, destroying rural tranquility. We appeal to members to put pressure on the owners of such premises to change their lighting to movement sensor lighting. It is important to remember that the House of Commons Science and Technology Sub-Committee, in their report on light pollution, announced that there was no conclusive evidence that dusk-to-dawn security lighting in rural environments

Society, a report and recommendations were presented to an audience of 40 delegates at the Keystone Innovation Centre in Thetford in October 2006. This really is an important document and could mark the start of an exciting new way forward for the Brecks and for those that value the area, its landscape, atmosphere and wildlife.

A copy of the executive summary, with recommendations, is available to members of The Breckland Society from The Brecks Partnership. Telephone 01842 760116 or email brecks.project@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk.



led to a reduction in crime. In fact, in some cases the presence of such lighting can actually encourage a burglar to take an interest in premises.

Until recently, a key difference between the rural and urban landscape was the absence of artificial lighting in the countryside. Although this distinction has become blurred, unlit villages and unlit landscapes remain an important part of the British countryside, and they deserve better protection.

Only by identifying and protecting the increasingly scarce areas of countryside that are free from artificial lighting can we protect rural tranquillity. All the inhabitants of this tiny overcrowded island, urban dwellers and rural dwellers alike, need tranquil places where it is possible to "get away from it all", whether by day or by night.

Anyone interested in taking part in the Night Blight campaign, or in becoming involved in the related tranquillity campaign, should contact CPRE Norfolk office on 01603 761660.

CLERMONT HALL

John Davies first knew Clermont Hall when he moved to Little Cressingham in February 1971. There have been many changes during the intervening 36 years, not only to the Clermont Estate and the Hall, but also to the Parish.

"I arrived in February 1971 as resident land agent to the then owner, Sir Richard Prince-Smith Bt. He owned not only the Clermont Estate but also the Morton Hall Estate at Attlebridge, near Norwich, as well as the Southburn Estate, near Driffield in the East Riding of Yorkshire. He is still alive, although of failing health, and lives near Palm Springs in California, where he relocated via a short sojourn in the Channel Islands in the late 1970s. He was a Yorkshire man through and through, from an industrial background, with an innate engineering bent but also with an agricultural degree from Cambridge University. Sir Richard bought the Clermont Estate in 1966, having acquired it from the Estate of Reginald Foster, a Jewish tea planter, who had bought the estate from the Mills family of Hilborough in 1936. The estate extended to 2,736 acres in 1966, as it had been for some time. In 1976, when Sir Richard sold it, the rump was bought by the Hill Samuel Property Investment Fund, and other parcels were sold to tenant farmers. So that was the end of the estate as an entity. It was later sold to the Ministry of Defence as an extension to the Training Area, although there are limitations to the extent of training permitted. Clermont House was sold by the Pension Fund in 1977, having been built in the walled garden to Clermont Hall by Sir Richard in 1971, as an Agent's house. He loved building and hated having to spend money on repairs!

The original intention, in 1972, when it became clear that the Hall was being ravaged by dry rot, was to demolish it, and the Royal Engineers were on hand to blow it up! A precautionary call to John Burton, clerk to Swaffham District Council, before laying the charges resulted in a rapid response from Mrs Mills of Hilborough Hall. When



she heard about the plans, she was able to have the house listed almost immediately, bypassing all normal procedures. The Royal Engineers were stood down and the only course open to Sir Richard at the time was to sell the Hall. It was advertised and sold by public auction in the spring of 1973 to Mr Philip Jones, an accomplished artist, who at the time was living in London. His account of the work he did to save the Hall, and how he set about the huge task of doing so, is fascinating.

The Society is fortunate to be able to visit the Hall on 21 April and we are assured of a very interesting talk by Philip Jones."

SAVING ENERGY TO SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

It is now accepted by the majority of people that our world is facing a serious problem with global warming and climate change. We must all share responsibility for the nation's annual emissions of 500 million tonnes of CO₂ - enough to fill about five hot-air balloons for each of us!

We each need to make a contribution towards keeping the planet in good condition, for the sake of our children, grandchildren and all those who will come after them. Our homes are directly responsible for about a third of the nation's CO₂ emissions. This is through using energy (gas, electricity, oil, coal and such like) for heating, hot water, lighting, appliances and cooking. Of the energy used in the home about 60 per cent is for heating the spaces we live in.

In addition to this we are also responsible for the CO₂ emitted on our behalf from the food that we eat, the goods we buy and the services (including hospitals and schools) that we use.

Taking all of these things into account, the average Norfolk resident is responsible for releasing 9.3 tonnes of CO₂ every year, roughly enough for five well-filled hot air balloons, estimates CRed, which is the Community Carbon Reduction project based at the University of East Anglia. The CRed 60 per cent challenge is to find ways for us to lose three of those five balloons (that's 3.7 tonnes of CO₂) during the next twenty years.

Over 25 per cent of all our emissions of CO₂ result from our use of transport. This includes use of cars, buses, planes and trains, as well as the transport associated with the goods we buy and the food we eat. Year on year, the emissions associated with transportation are increasing. Much of this increase is from our use of cars and planes.

CRed has suggested five ways in which each household can make its contribution to the project:

- 1 Install at least three energy-saving light bulbs
- 2 Make sure electrical appliances are not left on standby
- 3 Use the car less
- 4 Change the electricity tariff to green energy
- 5 Wear a jumper instead of turning up the heating

More information can be found on www.cred-uk.org. Can you suggest more ways to save energy? Send them to the editor at info@brecsoc.org.uk, and we'll print the best in the next newsletter.