



Journal of Breckland Studies: Volume 2

Until the publication of the inaugural volume of the Journal of Breckland Studies in summer 2017, there was no dedicated forum for the publication of papers and articles about the area and its internationally important heritage.

The Breckland Society is delighted to announce the publication of the second volume of the *Journal of Breckland Studies* on 10 September 2018.

A total of six papers (all illustrated) are included, covering various aspects of Brecks heritage: a report on the results of the Breckland Bat Project; the history and conservation of shepherd huts; woodland planting on the great country estates pre-1920; the classification and conservation of grasshoppers; the archaeological excavation of a 'lost' WW2 prisoner-of-war camp at Eriswell; and the demise of lichen communities.

"Few of the lowland districts of England have more striking individual characteristics than the area known as Breckland... Here we feel in touch with man in his early days, with all that is primitive and prehistoric... Calls of Pheasants resound through the woodland silences; as a low undercurrent comes the far-off dreamy cadence of the wind in the ever-singing pines."

W. G. Clarke, *In Breckland Wilds* (1925)

Copies are available from Ceres Bookshop, 20 London Street, Swaffham, Norfolk, PE37 7OG (01760 722504/ email ceresbooks@aol.co.uk) at £9.99 per copy (plus postage of £2.30 if sent by mail).



Publication has been made possible thanks to financial support from HLF Breaking New Ground; the Suffolk Naturalists' Society; The Scarfe Charitable Trust; and Oxford Archaeology East.

What's On

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

Friday 28 September, 7.30pm.

Thatching in the Brecks

A talk by Stephen Letch

Engine House, Brandon Country Park, IP27 0SU

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.

Friday 26 October, 6.30pm.

A private view of the special exhibition held to mark the 125th anniversary of the death of the last Maharajah of the Punjab and erstwhile resident of Elveden Hall.

Visit and talk at the Ancient House Museum, Thetford

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.

Places strictly limited.

Friday 16 November, 7.30pm

The most secret place on Earth

Talk by Roger Pugh

Engine House, Brandon Country Park, IP27 0SU

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.

For more information about these Society events, see website or email secretary.brecsoc@gmail.com

****PLACES MUST BE BOOKED AND PAID FOR IN ADVANCE****

EITHER send a cheque to the Secretary: David Stancombe, Beck Springs, Beckett End, Thetford, Norfolk, IP26 5AF

OR by bank transfer to Lloyds Market Place, Dereham, NR19 2AT. Account No. 01482457 Sort Code 30-92-88

If you use the latter method please inform the secretary that this is what you have done.

BRECKLAND FROM THE AIR WITH MODERN 'TECH'

Breckland Society member and committee member Alan Clarke has been experimenting with drone footage as a convenient and valuable way of investigating the landscape of Breckland, and possibly spotting unknown features.

Last year, I got a *DJI Mavic Pro* drone as a birthday present. It had everything I wanted for a reasonable price, including the (very important) low battery emergency return-to-home feature! I had fun flying it; I made a video about the RAF Barnham nuclear bomb store (which Brecksoc visited earlier this year) and took some nice pictures of the Suffolk coast, near Shingle Street. So, what next?

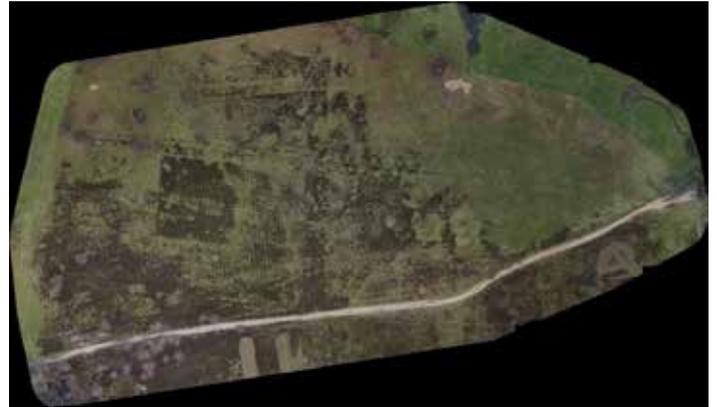
For 15 years before retirement I worked for a Geographical Information Systems software company, so I wondered if I could use the Mavic to perhaps create high resolution aerial images of potential archaeological sites?

During the Breckland Society Military History project, I combined Google Earth and LIDAR aerial imagery to locate and document hidden Second World War structures in the forest at the High Ash Desert Rats camp. During that project I became very interested in the former RAF Tuddenham, its WW2 airfield and its late 1950s Thor nuclear missile base. Some areas are now part of Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve (NNR) and an important Stone Curlew breeding site.

Chatting with the warden, he said that Natural England (NE) would love to have some good aerial images of parts of the site, to document and track invasive grass species since the recent catastrophic drop in the Rabbit population, and to map their ploughing and habitat restoration. I made several large images for NE, and will be mapping two more NNRs for them later this year.



An area of c. 20 hectares near Scoulton. You can clearly see crop marks indicating multiple structures from medieval, and possibly much earlier, times.



Cavenham Heath. The old WW2 glider trap line can be seen crossing from east to west. The parallel stripes are where heather was mechanically cut. Ploughed areas can be seen south of the road. The car on the extreme right gives an idea of scale.

The mapping process is easy and highly automated. On the *DroneDeploy.com* website, you define the area to map, and how high you want to fly the drone (higher altitude means fewer images are required but gives you a lower resolution output). It works out the best criss-cross route to fly and how many images to take. That 'flight plan' gets downloaded to your mobile phone, which is used to control the drone.

On a dry day without much wind, you take the drone to somewhere close to the site (it's not fussy) check you're not in restricted airspace, switch everything on and simply press a big red button on the phone! The whole flight – rising to 300-400 feet, flying to the start point, flying the criss-cross mapping pattern, taking 200-300 images, returning to the start location and landing safely to within 20cm – is completely automated!

Once home, you upload the images to a website (I use *MapsMadeEasy.com*). Their software merges these hundreds of images and, within a few hours, returns a single high resolution image.

This technology has enormous potential, but is still just in its infancy. It already allows what was previously only possible at great cost, done by professionals, to be done equally well by enthusiastic amateurs.

I intend to use it on as many Breckland Society projects as possible in the coming months and years, to document what we have now, to discover more about our rich past and to contribute it to our county historic records.

WYKEN VINEYARD: VISIT AND TASTING

A disappointing group of six Breckland Society members joined in with the visit to Wyken Vineyards in the southern edge of the Brecks. Wyken is a 1,200 acre farm near Stanton and Ixworth owned by former MP Sir Kenneth Carlisle. Sir Kenneth works hard on his farm for wildlife, and he is a Vice-president (and former Chairman) of Suffolk Wildlife Trust. A seven-acre area of the farm was planted in 1988 on a south facing slope, with some 12,000 vines. The vines, trained in the Scott Henry style, thrive on the sandy loam over chalk. On average some 12,000 bottles are produced a year, and include many award-winning wines, including 'Bacchus' the English Wine of the Year.

Group members were met by Charles and walked through a SSSI field which led to an area of woodland with impressive oak trees and then to an area of open sandy soil where the vineyard is situated. Charles tended the pruning of the vines and oversees the harvesting – some of which was due to take place in the ensuing weeks. There are two main varieties grown and these are sent to Framlingham for crushing, fermenting and all the other processes, before being returned in bottles for consumption in the Wyken Leaping Hare restaurant and shop sales.

After the talk and inspection of the vines we walked back to the reception in the restaurant for the important sampling of the wine produced. Surprisingly these received a mixed reception! Some of the wines are pretty dry, but others are very drinkable. Sir Kenneth Carlisle joined us at this point and gave us some of the background since he purchased Wyken Hall. Despite the small turn-out it was an excellent visit.

BUTTERFLIES BENEFIT FROM SUMMER HEAT

When the spring is well and truly over, and bird song is noticeable by its absence in the heat of the day many wildlife watchers turn to the emerging insects, especially dragonflies and butterflies. With some exceptions, butterfly populations have been causing worry, with numbers and often range decreasing noticeably in recent years. Summer in Breckland, with the low-growing, herb-rich grassland almost perceptibly fizzing in the heat, is a great place for butterflies and this year's drought and heat has been a real boon for some species.

Perhaps the most spectacular is the showy Silver-washed Fritillary, a butterfly of woodland clearings and edges, loving Bramble patches and, for lucky householders, an occasional visitor to garden *Buddleia*. A large and predominantly orange butterfly, it suffered declines during the 20th century, but numbers are recovering and this year was noticeable for it moving into Breckland, previously a 'hole' in its distribution in eastern England. A small proportion of females have wings that are bronze-green, known as the form *valezina*, always worth keeping an eye open for!

Before the drought, numbers of White Admiral and Ringlet were notable but during the worst of the heat, butterfly numbers dropped as available flowers were burnt off by the sun. 'Cabbage' whites were the most noticeable during this time but, as soon as the weather broke, records of Brown Argus, Small Copper and several of the blues were well above average. Although outside of our area it appears that Purple Emperor may have naturally re-colonised the North Norfolk Coast, and this nationally rare and beautiful woodland species is definitely one to be on the watch for next year.

New Local Museum



Museum 4 Watton

Despite being geographically at the heart of Breckland, Watton is often overlooked, but it is historically very rich - the town itself has been in existence for over 1,000 years! Last year the Museum 4 Watton group opened a new museum, located in

Wayland Hall, displaying, explaining and celebrating many of the fascinating finds from the town and surrounding countryside and villages. For the next *Breckland Society Newsletter* we will be visiting, finding out more and reporting back but in the meantime, if you can't wait, check out their website: www.museumforwatton.org.uk

Small Copper (right) and Silver-washed Fritillary (below) were just two of the butterfly species that have thrived in Breckland with this summer's heat.



Photos: Su Deive

WILDFLOWERS AT WEETING (OR HEATING?) HEATH

In blazing sun and with a temperature of over 30 degrees, 18 intrepid members set out with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Weeting Heath summer warden James Symonds onto a parched landscape reminiscent of the Kazakh steppe! James Parry describes what they found.



Several weeks of hot and dry conditions had taken their toll on the heath, as James explained how certain species of plant have evolved to cope with the relatively extreme conditions of the Brecks. He was soon down on his hands and knees, pointing out some of the floral specialities – often rather diminutive in stature! – such as Sickle Medick, which crosses freely with Lucerne and gives rise to a range of brightly coloured hybrids, and the wonderfully named Squinancywort, a classic species of Rabbit-grazed heaths.

The main quest of the walk was to see Spiked Speedwell at one of its handful of British sites; 2017 was

a bumper year, with several hundred individual spikes counted on the reserve, but this season had proved rather less impressive. The number of plants was far less, and their size smaller than usual. Even so, James was able to show us a few spikes and explain how overall the species is doing well on the reserve, thanks to careful management. However, the recent decline in the Brecks rabbit population as a result of VHD (viral haemorrhagic fever) poses a threat to many floral specialities, which rely on open, disturbed ground and can lose out to more competitive species in ungrazed environments.

Other notable plants spotted during the walk included Maiden Pink, Spanish Catchfly, Weld, Mignonette, White Horehound and Hare's-foot Clover. There were also some interesting butterflies and day-flying moths on the wing, including several iridescent Forester moths as well as Small Copper, Small Heath, Common Blue and Meadow Brown.

A most enjoyable visit, with thanks to James Symonds for his inspiring enthusiasm and expertise; plans are already in hand for a return visit next spring to see some of the early-flowering plants, particularly the speedwells.

The beautiful, diminutive Maiden Pink *Dianthus deltoides* (left) and a frequently encountered day-flying Forester moth *Adscita statice* (right).

Photos: Clive Sheppard

AGM AND RARE ORCHIDS IN THE SOUTH OF BRECKLAND

This year the Breckland Society AGM was held in the village of Hopton, almost on the southern edge of Breckland. This enabled us to make a return visit to Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Market Weston Fen to explore its stunning array of orchids, including some very exceedingly rare ones.

Twenty two Breckland Society members made the journey out to the village hall in Hopton on a sunny day on Sunday 17 June. A brief and straightforward AGM was held, where James Parry reflected on a full and productive 14th year, focusing in particular on the Society's key role in a new series of wildlife guides for the Breckland area. So far *Flowers of the Brecks: Part One* by Mike Crewe and *Birds of the Brecks* by our own Su Gough (Delve) have been published, and *Flowers of the Brecks: Part Two* and *Animals of the Brecks* by Mike Toms and Stuart Newson are almost ready to be printed. The diversity of Society events was once again commented on and to continue this theme, after the meeting closed we made our way to nearby Market Weston Fen, for a return visit after the success of the Grass of Parnassus visit the previous summer.

Our focus this time was orchids, and other wetland plants, for which this reserve is virtually unsurpassed. As the reserve is compact, it didn't take long to find lots of orchids, although overall numbers were somewhat low due to the heat and low water table. Thankfully, despite this we did find the target species (see photographs) as well as many other beautiful flowers, including the much-admired Bog Pimpernel, Marsh Arrowgrass, Common Butterwort and Saw Sedge. A good number of other orchids were found, including Common Spotted Orchid, Early Marsh Orchid, Southern Marsh Orchid and drifts of Marsh Helleborine at one of its only Suffolk sites.



The pink Pugsley's Marsh Orchid is a scarce and enigmatic species, endemic to the UK. Its rarity, however, is eclipsed by the creamy-white *Dactylorhiza (incarnata) ochroleuca* which is found ONLY at Market Weston Fen and one other site in East Anglia.

Photos: Su Delve