



Summer Newsletter, July 2018



Contents

Letter from Chairman	1
Secretary's Minute Book	2
Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize	3
Memories brought back	5
My memories of the Ridgeway	6



From the Chairman

Dear Friends

For the Spring Newsletter I concluded my Chairman's Letter by saying *'Winter will soon be over and spring will be with us'*. As I write now, winter (as shown over Sparsholt Firs above) has at last departed, spring has come and gone and it is now cloudless skies and hot sunshine – summer heat wave.



Equally, I wish I could report that issues affecting the Ridgeway have moved on, leaving our beloved trail unharmed. The objective of the Friends of the Ridgeway is to *'preserve the ancient Ridgeway paths along the chalk downs of Southern England'* in particular from the ravages of motor vehicles. But regrettably the issues highlighted in the Annual Review remain; we must remain vigilant to protect the Ridgeway.

There were, we believe, a significant number of responses to the consultation carried out by Oxfordshire County Council regarding the 32 Applications to Amend The Legal Record of Public Rights of Way in Oxfordshire. If agreed, these applications would impact heavily on the Ridgeway, in effect allowing motor vehicles use the trail. So far we have not heard the result of the consultation and the conclusions drawn.



Meanwhile the Motoring Stakeholder Working Group, established by Natural England, continues its deliberations. Most of the issues raised do not have an effect on the Ridgeway. However, the proceedings are a very clear demonstration, if any were needed, of the difference of view between those wishing to use green lanes for motor sport and those who wish to preserve the lanes.

Other issues impacting on the Ridgeway continue. Although the situation is improving, the Ridgeway Partnership still lacks financial stability, arousing concern about its long term maintenance commitments. And various development schemes that impact upon the Ridgeway continue to be promoted.

A member has reported the ripping out of a hedge on the Ridgeway where it runs North East towards Howe Road. It is suggested that this has been done to make an easier access for articulated lorries to the adjacent industrial estate. The matter has been reported to the South Oxfordshire District Council. We will investigate further.

Nonetheless there is good news. The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize was again held this year with more entries, more visitors to the exhibition, and more sales of works; and with a greater variety of works. This annual competition is helping to establish and celebrate the creative and artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway. A full report is given below. Given the wonderful written entries received, we felt that at least one should be included in this Newsletter; Philippa Upton's evocative piece about growing up on the Ridgeway is introduced by Diane Godfrey, a Trustee of the Friends of the Ridgeway, who herself grew up riding her pony along the Ridgeway. Following this success, there will be another Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize competition in 2019 with the Prize giving after our AGM; the exhibition will be open to the public on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 April 2019 with a preview on the 26 April 2019. The Art Exhibition will be the centre piece of the Ridgeway Friends Day on Sunday 26 April 2019 – *definitely a date for your diary*.

Turning to the administration of the Friends of the Ridgeway, in response to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) coming into force, a letter plus Communication Form was sent out with the Annual Review. Thank you to all who have responded (either by returning the completed form or on line). Regrettably some members have not responded. Originally there was a lack of clarity about GDPR and pre-existing mailing lists. Hence, we now suspect that our newsletter mailing list was probably already GDPR compliant. This Newsletter is being sent to all on the mailing list but if you do not wish to receive communications please let me know and you will be removed from the mailing list forthwith.

At the AGM, we were delighted to welcome Dr Nicola Swan and Diane Godfrey as Committee Members and Trustees and Alan Chater as Secretary and Trustee. Unfortunately, Nicola Swan has subsequently had to resign for family reasons. Andy Greenhalgh has been unable to make his usual energetic contribution due to ill health but we hope he will soon be fully recovered. At the end of this year John Edgerton wishes to retire as Treasurer. Consequentially to help the Committee with our mission to preserve and promote the Ridgeway, we would welcome further committee members, particularly a Treasurer. Please do volunteer.

Enjoy the summer along the Ridgeway – as autumn and winter will soon be with us again.

With all best wishes
Anthony Burdall

The Secretary's Minute Book

As reported elsewhere, the arts exhibition helped draw a substantial attendance on Sunday 22 April for the Ridgeway Friends day and AGM.

The AGM was the formal meeting of the day with Anthony Burdall, our Chairman, reporting on another eventful year with continuing involvement including on-going work to preserve the nature of the Ridgeway and in particular helping to prevent vehicular access. Anthony thanked the Committee for their work, mentioning John Edgerton for his work both as membership secretary and Treasurer, and Jeff Goddard in particular for his work as Secretary. Geoff retired at the meeting after 11 years' service to the Friends of the Ridgeway and the Chairman thanked him warmly for his invaluable contribution over this period. One new Trustee was welcomed this year, Alan Chater, who would take over the role as Secretary.

The Treasurer's Report and Accounts were adopted with the accounts showing a healthy surplus with income for the year boosted by several large donations. The elections of Lord Bradshaw as president, and our Vice-presidents, Officers and Trustees were all duly carried. Anthony thereupon drew the AGM to a close and introduced the prize giving for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize.

At our June Committee meeting we agreed that the Arts prize was proving a great success and we would continue this as an annual event. We agreed to support a planned proposal to re-designate the Chilterns AONB as a National Park. Also at that meeting Nikki Swan tendered her resignation as Trustee due to family commitments and we would again welcome new volunteers to our committee.

Lastly I must again mention the General Data Protection Regulation. This came into force on 28 May 2018. To comply with the regulation we have asked for your express permission so we can continue to contact you by e-mail and other means. To avoid missing our newsletter and other exciting news and updates from us, please complete the form you have been sent or fill in the form on our website.

Alan Chater
Secretary

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2018

Funded by a magnanimous donation, the Committee was able to implement in 2017 a long-standing ambition to launch an Arts Competition and Prize, celebrating the creative and artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway. Following strong support in 2017, the Competition was held again in 2018 and will, it is hoped, become established as an annual event.

The 2018 Exhibition and prize giving for the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize was held over the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 21 - 22 April 2018 in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington. On Friday there was a Private Viewing for invited guests to meet the artists; guests included the President and Vice President and Committee Members of the Friends of the Ridgeway, representatives of the Ridgeway Partnership, members of the Press and Friends of the Ridgeway members as well as the artists. Sunday was the Ridgeway Friends Day and Friends of the Ridgeway AGM.



Inspecting textile picture



Sir Adrian Swire with prize winners



Sarah Wright, Ridgeway Officer



Entries reached a total of 82 overall with 13 written, 4 sculpture, 19 photographs and 46 paintings. There was a considerable variety of works entered, including some wonderful textile pictures. Whilst entries came predominantly from the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire ridgeway corridor, some were received from further afield with the overall winning entry from Dorset.

All works entered were exhibited making a wonderful and varied exhibition of art works inspired by the Ridgeway. A large thank you is due to all entrants for submitting works; there was a wonderful entry enabling a comprehensive exhibition to be mounted including a large variety of works not only between categories but within the individual categories. The Judges were very complimentary about the variety and quality of the work exhibited.

The results of the competition were announced and prizes awarded at the Prize Giving after the Friends of the Ridgeway AGM. The Judges were:

- (a) Dorothy Burrows, Chair of Judges. Dorothy, a former drama teacher with a passion for storytelling, theatre and writing, has been involved in local community events for many years and has been the director of the Betjeman Festival.
- (b) Clover Stroud, written work judge. She is a local author of the Ridgeway memoir 'The Wild Other'; she writes for the Daily Mail, Sunday Times, Daily Telegraph and Conde Nast Traveller amongst others. She lives in Oxfordshire with her husband and five children.
- (c) Esther Lafferty, painting judge, is the organiser of Oxfordshire Artweeks, a visual arts festival involving around 1,000 artists and 450 venues each year; details at www.artweeks.org She also has a Masters Degree in Human Sciences from the University of Oxford and worked as a medical publisher before turning her hand to writing and event organisation, reviewing children's literature.
- (d) Paul Wilkinson, photographic judge, is one of the UK's most sought-after photographers. With a life-long love of photography and a passion for creating beautiful, timeless images, he has established himself at the top of his profession as a people photographer. Paul has won an array of awards for his work and is now an International Judge. Details at www.paulwilkinsonphotography.co.uk
- (e) Jo Boseley and Lyn Harrison, the sculpture judges, are Oxfordshire based sculptors, known for their quirky, decorative and functional stoneware ceramics.

After much debate amongst the judges, the piece that best expressed the 'Spirit of Ridgeway' was a written work 'Time Travelling'. The winners were:

- Overall winner and written work: Alison Green for 'Time Travelling'
- Sculpture: Sharon Rich 'Moonlight Owl'
- Photography: David Castle 'Free spirit along the Ridgeway'
- Painting: Maia Sissons 'Fingers of God over Sparsholt Firs'

The number and standard of the written entries was outstanding with several pieces commanding attention. Clover Stroud commented that every single entry had real merits and picking a winner was a very difficult job. Ultimately, 'Time Travelling' by Alison Jane Green, was chosen as winner of the written work category. Clover said *"I felt that Alison combined both a vivid sense of the geography and history of Europe's oldest road with a sensitivity and lyricism that I found extremely moving. Indeed I was moved to tears by the final paragraph, and reading her entry gave me a strong sense of what it FEELS like to travel the Ridgeway, conveying the singular journey through time and space that walking this incredible environment can leave one with"*.

For the sculpture category, Jo Boseley and Lyn Harrison said that *"From a small field of entries, Sharon Rich's 'Moonlight Owl' shone out for its brilliant execution and attention to detail"*. They also loved the movement in the papier-mache Hare.

Within the painting category, there was a variety of works including several textile works. Esther Lafferty describes how she was particularly taken with the felted view from the top of White Horse Hill by Ushma Sargeant: *"This picture"*, she said, *"had an instant visceral appeal. Both art and any individual's emotional response to it is very subjective: for me this view is the defining Ridgeway panorama, and the special spot I visit to blow away tensions in everyday life"*. The paintings showed a great variety of styles capturing the spirit of the Ridgeway. Esther chose, as the overall winner of the painting category, 'Fingers of God over Sparsholt Firs' by Maia Sissons. *"It's a spirited and uplifting picture which captures the intangible magic of the Ridgeway, and the strength of feeling it elicits in the people who walk its routes"* she explains.

Commenting on the winning photograph, 'Free spirit along the Ridgeway' by David Castle, Paul Wilkinson said: *"The winning image transported me to a late spring walk amongst the foothills of the ridgeway, particularly where I live in the Aylesbury Vale, with the Chilterns looming up out of the seemingly endless yellow of the Rape fields. I loved the composition, with the eye naturally drawn to the Red Kite (or possibly a Buzzard) launching in the foreground to the ridge away in the distance"*.

After much debate, all the judges took the view that, given the outstanding nature of the written entries, the overall winner should be one. Dorothy Burrows, Chair of the judging panel, said *"In choosing the overall winner, we selected the work that we felt matched the competition's criteria of Spirit of the Ridgeway most fully. Alison Jane Green's evocative and highly personal piece of writing appealed to all of us: the formal style of language coupled with the meandering and quirky nature of the prose somehow reflected what it feels like to travel along the Ridgeway and illustrated how everyone's experience of this wonderful path is unique"*. The considerable talent and creativity of all the competitors was apparent and resulted in a delightful and thought-provoking exhibition.

Introduced by Lord Bradshaw, Sir Adrian Swire presented the prizes to the winners. After the prize giving there was a cream tea for all at the exhibition. We were all delighted with the success of the Art Prize over the week-end. For this the Friends of the Ridgeway owe a real debt of gratitude for all the hard work and organisation, to the volunteers involved.

Anthony Burdall

Memories brought back by an entry to the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize

The entries for the Swire Art Competition brought home to me how very much the Ridgeway means to so many people. And, particularly, the written piece by Philippa Upton brought back my memories of a childhood on the Ridgeway.

You must read this beautiful piece of prose, written by Philippa Upton about her childhood close to our favourite road during the war. It is very informative.

My own experiences came about a decade later, and I rode along and loved all the same places. The war was still in the minds of my parents and they produced much of our food with goats and rabbits and chickens and vegetables. The prisoners of war were remembered as friends. Many of them set up successful businesses in the

area when I was growing up. When my husband was a little boy, his family were friends with the people who had the job of dismantling the American base in Grove.

My friends and I spent hours of freedom, taking turns with one pony, and the rest on bikes, listening to the skylarks and lapwings. We also collected wild flowers and took them home for identification. We picnicked in many of the places mentioned. There was so much I didn't know. I enjoyed learning all the facts that Philippa wrote about our much loved secret places. We thought they were secret, but the best thing about the Ridgeway is that it is, and has been from time immemorial, open to all who will treat it gently. (50 years later we know better than to pick the flowers -- modern children can take a photo on a 'phone.)

The Swire Ridgeway Arts Competition, and especially this piece of writing reminded me how many of us share and love the 'spirit of the Ridgeway', and we have done throughout the ages.

Diane Godfrey



My memories of the Ridgeway during the War

The Ridgeway has always been important to me. I was born in 1937 and the Ridgeway ran through our land. We lived at Angeldown, three miles south of Wantage in a rambling old farmhouse, sheltering in the folds of the Berkshire Downs. It was a square Georgian house with a grey slate roof and a very old one-storey wing adjoining it on which my parents had built a second floor. It was surrounded by a large garden and our land of four-hundred acres of open pasture.

Before the Second World War started when I was two, my father had been a racehorse trainer but during the war there was no National Hunt racing, although he did keep some of his horses. He had fought and suffered deafness from shells in the First World War but by now he was too old to be called up so was doing a worth-while job for the war effort. His brother was a farmer in Ireland and he would send over shiploads of Aberdeen Angus bullocks for my father to fatten up on the rich grasslands to sell for food, which was in very short supply. We also had a flock of sheep with their own shepherd. When my father bought them, the shepherd came too, complete with his own caravan and dogs. Meat, fish, sweets, sugar, butter, tea and eggs were all rationed but luckily we kept chickens so were able to trade eggs for extra treats with our friendly grocer in Wantage. There was no imported food but one does not miss what one hasn't had. My father and the men would shoot pheasants, partridges, pigeons, hares,

rabbits and even rooks to boost our rations. My mother would make nutritious pies from the breasts of the rooks with vegetables from the garden.

I had an older brother and a younger sister and every day we would ride along the Ridgeway on our ponies. My sister started riding on leading-rein when she was three. It was easier than taking her out in the pram. Before the war, the Berkshire Downs had been grazed mainly by sheep, penned in with moveable wooden hurdles and the Ridgeway provided an invaluable wide and grassy highway for getting them to and from the market. However, at the start of the war, farmers were required to fence their land for stock and plough and cultivate it for food production. We had to erect miles of barbed-wire fencing on our farm to retain the cattle, so the Ridgeway was about the only place for us to ride. It was deeply rutted by the American Sherman tanks which used to carry out manoeuvres along it and I remember the GIs throwing us packets of chewing-gum as they passed. They were billeted in the ten stable yards in Letcombe Regis and Antwick's Manor, (owned by the Godfather of my future husband) was requisitioned as an American Military Hospital. The United States Air Force built a small airfield at Grove with huts for the men to live in. German and Italian prisoners-of-war had camps on the Ridgeway and used to work on our farm, with the help of our beautiful cart-horse, Polly. Two Germans became our friends and made us children lovely wooden toys, which I still have, proudly hanging in my conservatory.

The Ridgeway has always been a magical place for me. I was taught that it was Britain's oldest road and was, arguably, about five thousand years old. It had originally been an informal series of prehistoric tracks across the chalk downs leading from the Dorset coast to the Wash on the Norfolk coast. After the Enclosure Act in 1750 the present path developed through the building of earth banks and planting of hedges.

The first farmers, the New Stone Age men, built the long barrows and then Bronze Age people, about 2,000BC, dragged the enormous sarsen stones from the surrounding hills to form round burial barrows. Hill forts were built during the Iron Age from about 500BC to defend the high ground against attack from the north. In the Dark Ages, it was a main route for the Saxons and Vikings who fought many battles during their advances into Wessex. In medieval times it was used by drovers taking their livestock from Wales and the West Country to London and the Home Counties.

Although the full length of the Ridgeway National Trail now stretches for eighty-seven miles, as children we only got to know the section between Wayland Smithy, just west of White Horse Hill and the monument to Lord Wantage above the town. This was erected in his memory by his widow at the beginning of the twentieth century. He had been a distinguished soldier in the Crimean War and was awarded one of the first Victoria Crosses. He was a great benefactor and was one of the founder members of the British Red Cross. The copses of trees below were planted by him to represent the battle lines at Alma, the first battle in the Crimean War. There are now good views over the point-to-point course where, many years later, I was to ride in Ladies' Races.

My mother used to pack up sandwiches and we would ride to one of our favourite spots. It was a great feeling to know that this chalk track across the downs had been used for thousands of years by travellers to avoid the wetter, spring line villages in the Vale. We loved going to the mystical Neolithic long-barrow at Wayland Smith's Caves and especially to hear the legend of Wayland or "Wolund" who had been the Germanic God of metal working. A traveller whose horse had lost a shoe would tie it up, leave a silver coin on a certain boulder and go away. In the morning, the horse would be shod and the coin gone. These huge sarsen stones were surrounded by trees and there was always an eerie feeling there. Since then, in the sixties, it has been excavated and restored - the stones have been moved which has completely changed its atmosphere for me, although it is still an interesting place to visit.

The Iron Age hill fort of Uffington Castle was also a special place. We used to ride round the embankment and over to the White Horse, by far the oldest of the chalk figures in England. We would dismount and stand on the eye to make our wishes. We loved to scramble up on to Dragon Hill below White Horse Hill, especially in the snow when we would take our sledges and hurtle down its steep slopes at full speed. The legend there was that this was where St George slew the dragon. The bare chalk patch at the top is where the blood spilled out and no grass will ever grow. At the foot of the hill down from the Ridgeway towards Kingston Lisle was the large sarsen Blowing Stone

where King Alfred was reputed to have blown into one of the holes to make a loud, resonant blast in order to summon his troops to battle.



Another special place was the much nearer Iron Age hill fort of Segsbury Camp. We always pronounced this as Sagsbury — I don't know why! There were wonderful views of the Vale from there and it always seemed a peaceful, sunny spot for our picnics, very near the farm.

My parents also owned land on the north side of the Ridgeway where there were some ancient barns and buildings in a woody hollow. In our day it was a gorgeous place to go for picnics, overlooking the Vale around Letcombe Regis. In the eighties these were restored and turned into the Court Hill Centre as a youth hostel for those visiting the Ridgeway.

Another large barn of ours was mentioned at the beginning of Thomas Hardy's book, "Jude the Obscure". It was the Red House Barn at the top of what was known as "Work House Hill" on the edge of the Ridgeway as the buildings which later became a racing yard was a Work House in those days. Hardy called this "The Brown House" at "Marygreen" above "Alfredstone" (Wantage). Jude Fawley was able to climb up a ladder "to see the sky to the northward the halo of light which hung over Christminster" (Oxford — the city of his dreams). Also on our land was "Jude's cottage" which was Jude's great-aunt's house, who he was living with when he was eleven. I remember the remains of its foundations were in one of our fields adjoining the B4494 road towards Fawley, which is where I was christened. However, there is unfortunately no trace of them now. Our racing gallops ran along beside that road too but they have since been ploughed up.

My father was keen for me to learn all the names of the local birds and wild flowers. He was a born and bred countryman and encouraged me to appreciate our beautiful surroundings as much as he did. We loved hearing the musical sound of the skylarks as they rose into the sky and the lapwings or "peewits" as we knew them due to their distinctive display calls. There were numerous birds in those days along the Ridgeway, especially warblers and finches which enjoyed the food supply of the hedges lining the track. Another bird that we often saw was the yellow-hammer and also thrushes and corn buntings. In the winter we would watch flocks of redwing and fieldfare which had flown all the way from Scandinavia. When I was young I used to cut out any bird pictures I could find and stick them into my scrap book. I was further encouraged by winning the prize at school for the best hobby.

My father gave me a lovely wild flower book which I still have and I would pick specimens to press between pages of a book. I never found anything very unusual - mainly buttercups, cowslips, daisies, hair-bells, dandelions and the occasional purple, pyramid-shaped orchid, but it gave me another interest in the countryside. We didn't have many toys or possessions in those days but we were quite happy without them.

I particularly loved the clumps of beech woodland along the Ridgeway, although sadly many have suffered over the years owing to drought, severe weather or disease. They had been planted by the Victorians as landscape features. There are numerous cart-tracks which criss-cross it



but now they are all marked by signposts erected by the Countryside Commission. In the days when I lived at Angeldown, the Ridgeway was mainly used by farmers as an access route to their fields for stock or tractors but now it has become a recreational path for walkers, cyclists and riders of horses. Vehicles are prohibited along some sections, apart from the land-owners getting to their fields.



My parents worked very hard during the war. As we were so isolated it was hard to get people to work for us. My mother had to mow the lawns and tend to the vegetable garden. She looked after the chickens, ducks, geese, guinea-fowl and turkeys as well as us three children. She was a good, plain cook and nothing was ever wasted. She would boil up the vegetable peelings and any left-over scraps to mix with layers-mash for gruel for the poultry. She made all our clothes and mended anything that wore out. I had to wear my

brother's hand-down clothes, which were then passed down to my sister once I had grown out of them. She even cut our hair when needed, but luckily we all had curly hair. We did not have a washing-machine so my sister's terry-towelling nappies were washed by hand every day. Whenever we went down to Wantage for shopping, we were left in the car. They never thought of locking the car doors — or for that matter, the house ones either. Polio was widespread at that time so we were hardly ever allowed to go into shops or to the cinema.

During the war, every household who had a spare room had to take evacuees from the cities. As we had a large house, we had enough space for a whole family so the well-known publisher, Michael Joseph with his wife and two daughters came to live in one corner of the house. It was good to have them as we didn't have many visitors at that time as no-one had any petrol for social visits. It was important that no light was ever shown at night so we all had black-out curtains which had to be drawn at dusk. There was a very strict A.R.P. Warden who used to pay us occasional visits to check that this was done. All the metal railings from around people's houses were removed by the government to make into ammunition. I remember one night hearing the most enormous explosion when a plane crashed on our farm. My brother went out in the morning and came back with bits of shrapnel and twisted metal which he proudly showed me, although I was never told what had happened.

I still love walking along the Ridgeway, more than seventy years on. It has now become a world famous long distance trail, and is much-loved by the masses. In the past, the Ridgeway was just the forty mile stretch between Overton Hill near Avebury in Wiltshire in the west and Streatley in the Thames Valley in the east along the Berkshire and Wiltshire Downs escarpment. It was intersected at the half-way point by the White Horse Hill. That stretch has lovely open views of rolling chalk downland which was important in case of enemies besieging them in years gone by. In recent times it was taken over by the Countryside Commission and now includes part of the old Icknield Way north of the Thames and from Goring joins the Thames Path, before heading for the Chiltern Hills and ending at Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. The actual Ridgeway was at least two-thousand years old and is far older than the Roman Icknield Way. It wasn't until 1973 that it became a National Trail.

Nowadays the Ridgeway is controlled by the Ridgeway Partnership which is made up of all the councils of the counties through which it runs. The National Trails Team, which is based with Oxfordshire Countryside Access, helps to monitor and maintain it with help from several other marvellous organisations such as Friends of the Ridgeway.

Although it has changed enormously since the thirties and forties, it still retains its spiritual feeling that I had when it was so much part of my life, living tucked away on the Berkshire Downs. I remember it as a privileged, happy childhood.

Philippa Upton
This piece was a highly commended entry
to the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2018