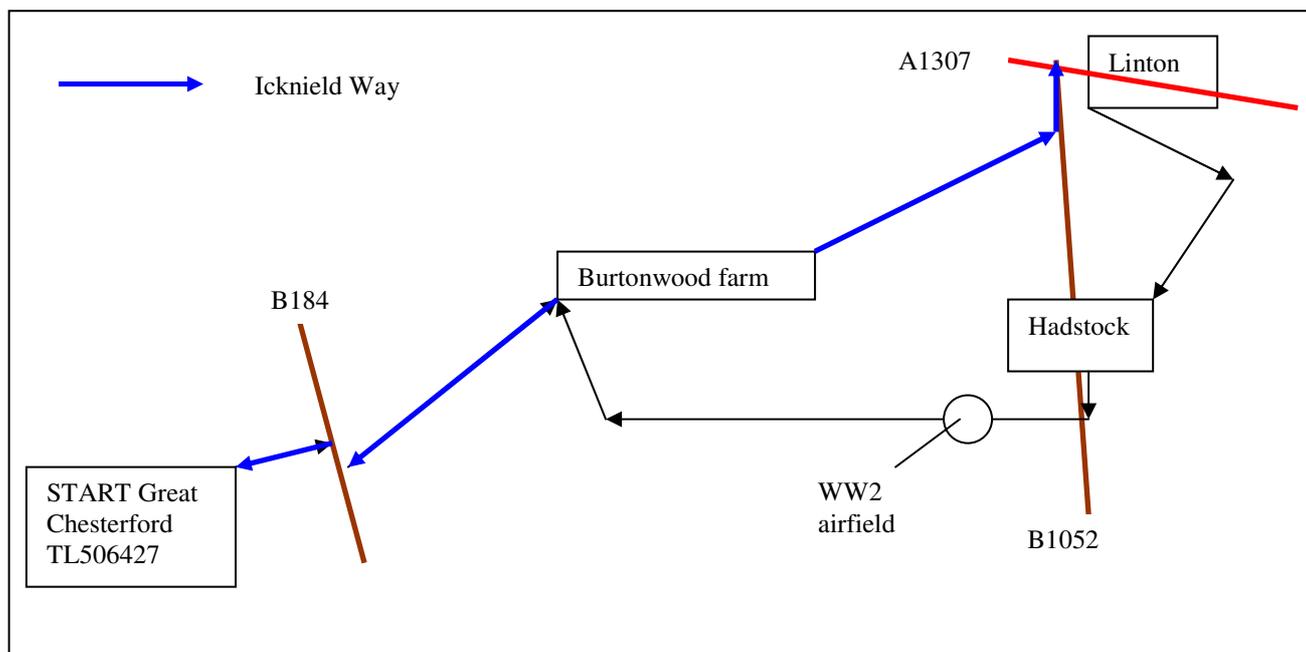


## The Icknield Way. Part 15 from Great Chesterford to Linton. 24 July 2010

Map OS Explorer 209. This section starts from Chesterford Church and follows the Way generally NE to the A1307 in Linton. It leaves the Way here and loops back S, E and W to Hadstock where it follows the B1052 to the WW2 airfield and back to the Way at Burtonwood Farm where we retrace steps to Chesterford. 16 km.



The route now continues on its way to join up with Peddars Way in Suffolk. Leaving (again) from the church in Great Chesterford, the Way continues past the inviting-looking Crown and Thistle to cross the B184 and climb NE to reach, and circumnavigate, Burtonwood Farm. But tarry a while in Great Chesterford for this was an important Roman town. It was unfortunately picked to pieces for alternative construction in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (William Stukely sketched what remained in 1719) and now no trace remains above ground.

We are still on chalk and so broomrape abounds on this stretch, from the clear association this should be *Orobanche elatior* – knapweed broomrape. The hedgerows are a-buzz with an array of feeding insects – bumble and other bees vie with beetles and butterflies for their share of the abundant nectar. And already there are signs of autumn in the air as sloes display their plump velvet and white bryony fruits send out their traffic light message from the depths of the blackthorn thicket.



**Knapweed broomrape**



**Hoverfly on bramble**



**White bryony**

The walk up to the farm also revealed fossils left on the surface after erosion of the chalk. These are from the Triassic and Jurassic periods (150-250 million years ago). The *Gryphea* or devil's toenails are oysters that lived in muddy sea beds and have come down to us in a remarkably well preserved state. Beyond the farm the Way continues NE through rolling country and (fairly) species – rich hedgerows. Robin's pincushions are the results of the handiwork of a gall wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*). Inside are many gall wasp larvae that will emerge as adults in the Spring. Old man's beard is also being prepared as the cascading traveller's joy flowers foretell.



**Robin's pincushion**



**Traveller's joy**



**devil's toenail**

The Way passes Linton Zoo and leads up to the A1307 where we leave it for this leg. Our return takes us down Chalky Lane past the Malting Cottages and on to Hadstock where we pause a while at St Botolph's Church which has parts dating back to Saxon times. The wooden door is said to be the oldest in use in the country<sup>1</sup>. Along Chalky Lane a strange plant appeared in the hedgerow, descriptions were submitted to DEFRA and Wild About Britain<sup>2</sup> to elicit the knowledge that it was Duke of Argyll's Tea Plant (*Lycium barbarum*). An introduced but naturalised species.

The return route now passes by the Harrison Sayer Nature Reserve with its undisturbed boulder clay grassland and WWII fuel tanks restored by the Lottery Fund and English Heritage. This was an important USAF site in the war – being home to both bomber and fighter squadrons. Today only the buzz of model aircraft disturbs the summer-soaked peace. From the airfield the path follows a gratefully shaded

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.essexinfo.net/hadstockchurch/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/forums/wildflowers-plants-and-tree-forums/72857-hedgerow-shrub-5-petalled-blue-flowers.html#post656046>



**Duke of Argyll's tea plant**



**St Botolph's Church**

drove which eventually leads back to Burtonwood Farm where we rejoin the Way and retrace our steps to Great Chesterford.

At this time of year there is a mixture of the excesses of Summer's profligate production and Autumn's riches quietly swelling and ripening ready for next Spring's transformation. Small copper butterflies refuelled with nectar from the scabious flowers sparkle over the grassland and hazels are producing the nuts that will keep the squirrels and dormice well fed until abundance is bestowed on the scene once more.



**Hazel nuts**