**Wilbraham River Protection Society**

First ideas to establish the Wilbraham River Protection Society were made by Dr. T.D.Hawkins, a long term resident in Little Wilbraham. Dr Hawkins had an intimate knowledge and understanding of how the drainage of the fens in the Little Wilbraham region had developed over the years and in 1990 published the First edition of “The Drainage of Wilbraham, Fulbourn and Teversham Fens”.

The document takes a small area of the Cambridgeshire countryside, examines it in detail and with the help of documents, maps and the memories of local people, unravels the fearsomely complex story of a remarkable piece of fenland. The study is also an example of how landscape history can contribute to planning for the future environment.

Second and third editions of the book were published in 2000 and 2011.

During the late 1990’s Dr.T.D. Hawkins floated the idea of the formation of a group of “like minded” people to study and monitor the operation of the system of rivers and drainage ditches that had been created since the Inclosure Acts of 1797-1810, to drain the area surrounding Great and Little Wilbraham and Fulbourn.

An enthusiastic group was created towards the end of the 1990’s who have met regularly since then. Members of the *Wilbraham River Protection Society (WRPS)* have continued the studies of the area and the development of the drainage system that now operates.

WRPS committee hold regular meetings and discussions focus on topics such as:

* physical observations from the river course, for example damage to embankments, weed growth etc.,
* observations concerning flow from the springs that feed the Little and Great Wilbraham Rivers.
* interesting flora and fauna. Bird and animal sightings.
* weather conditions since the last meeting are also recorded.
* observations of the level of the groundwater in the observation boreholes that are located at strategic points close to the springs feeding the river flows, are an important factor towards understanding the variations in flow in the rivers over the year.

It is important to note that flow in the rivers is generated from springs from the chalk aquifer that dominates the Cambridge region. The aquifer is charged by rainfall largely through the winter and spring periods, however in recent times, annual rainfall has been less than is required to top up the water table and to maintain river flows over the year. When these conditions occur flow in the rivers is augmented by pumping from boreholes, remote from the springs, directly into the headwaters of the rivers. This scheme known as the **Lodes Granta Groundwater Scheme** is managed by the Environment Agency.

Data is produced by the organisations responsible for the planning and operation of the river system. WRPS have access to the various bodies and there is regular supply of information related to the operation of the system from them.

Over the years WRPS have generated close contact with the managing organisations for the operation of the system and the supply of water to the community. Key organisations with whom we are in regular contact are:

* The **Environment Agency** who manage the Lodes Granta Groundwater Scheme and also the health of the rivers and their catchments.
* **Cambridge Water Company** who provide potable water supplies to the community. CW draw supplies from the same chalk aquifer that feeds both rivers.
* **Water Resources East** who are responsible for the future planning of potable water supplies to the community.

Low rainfall during the winter and spring periods has created low groundwater levels and flows in both rivers have been low and, in some years, have ceased altogether. Periods with low or no flow in the rivers has created a loss of habitat, increased weed and bank growth creating concern.

The WRPS have been active in raising these issues with the respective organisations and have developed good relationships with the technical staff in each organisation.

Brian Jackson (Committee Member) 24.05.22