

The entrance to the Heath at the bottom of the bridleway is very pretty. Once through the gate you can turn left or right and follow numerous paths round the perimeter through the bracken and trees, or carry straight on and cross over the middle to the Dereham Road.

The centre section is very undulating, the result of small scale gravel extraction in earlier times. There is abundant heather, small oak trees, bracken and larger trees ideal for climbing and swinging on. It is in fact a very fine picnic spot, but you are more likely to find dog walkers and horse riders, or just find you have the place to yourselves. BMX and motorcycle riders have caused consternation by damaging some of the paths and creating jumps, but they are discouraged.

**Bawdeswell Heath** Up to two hundred years ago the village lay in the middle of a large Common stretching from Billingford in the West and nearly half-way to Reepham in the East. The old Roman Road, known as Common Lane, ran right down the middle of it.

In the year 1808 a private Act of Parliament caused the enclosure of the Common Land around Bawdeswell, resulting in the gathering up of arable land into very few hands. This had been happening everywhere for some years as farming methods were changing from strip-farming to field farming - due to the modern methods being introduced by people like Thomas Coke of Holkham and Townsend of Raynham, and the urgent need to grow more food for the rising population.

In 1808 provision was made to set aside two acres for gravel and 35 acres of woodland 'for the poor' - this is the Bawdeswell Heath we know.

Inevitably the poor suffered from the loss of their grazing rights and land, which they were compensated for - enough for a month-long binge at the Bell Inn, cynics say!

Today *Bawdeswell Heath Trust*, a local group of volunteers, look after the Heath. They carry out conservation work to maintain it and restore parts of it that have become overgrown. This involves, amongst other measures, clearing bracken and small trees and replanting heather.

An aerial photograph taken in 1947 indicates an open Heath with very few trees indeed. It is amazing that in the space of a generation it has become so overgrown.

The route back to Bawdeswell unfortunately is on the main road - so walk in single file. There is a way across Bylaugh Wood to the much quieter Elsing Lane but this is private land. Due to the fact that it is leased out to a third party, it is not possible for the moment to create a Permissive Path that way.

The long brick wall along the main road, broken in places, was built around the Bylaugh Estate to use up the money that had been left for the sole purpose of building the Hall.

You pass the remnants of three or four earlier tracks off to your right. Shortly after the Bawdeswell Lodge and the Shooting Box, there is a gated shady pathway. Was this the route of the lost Roman Road said to run along the border of the Heath and Bylaugh Estate, to Sparham Hole and beyond? Next there is The Drift with quite a collection of secluded dwellings of some age. On your left you pass a sewerage pumping station, taking all the foul-water drainage of Bawdeswell and Foxley to the sewerage works by Bylaugh church. The next track, Leed's Drift, went right through to Elsing Lane but has been ploughed up in recent times. The last lane on your right, just before the by-pass is Jott's Lane. There is a footpath here leading on to Elsing Lane, but it is too late to be of any use to us. Cross the main road and proceed through the gap to the Old Dereham Road or the leafy Paradise Lane and you are nearly home.

## Bawdeswell Heritage Group

# A CIRCULAR WALK TO BAWDESWELL HEATH

*Approx distance: 2 ½ miles*

*Approx time: 1 hour*



**Highlights** Fine rural views, attractive bridleway across part of the old common, Bawdeswell Heath with its heather, bracken and fine trees for climbing and swinging on (today we have to state: *at your own risk*). A short but invigorating walk.

Head for Foxley past the school and along the pavement past the Old Rectory on your left, and old police house on your right. Cross over the by-pass with care and turn left into Foxley West. A couple of hundred yards on at the crossroads turn left down Mill Road. The house on the corner was once the Dog Inn and the main road to Fakenham passed this way. The modern Natterjack Pub is just up Chapel Lane on your right.

Going down Mill Lane you can see a grand Georgian house over to your right. This is Foxley Lodge, built originally as the Rectory.

**Foxley's plane crash.** At 11.30am on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1944 two B-24 Liberators collided over Foxley Wood. A total of 11 crewmen died. Four managed to bale out from the first aircraft. It is not recorded where it came down, but aircraft parts and ammunition have been found at the edge of the wood. There were three survivors from the second aircraft and it crashed and burnt up just 50yards North of the sharp bend in Mill Lane.