

20 March 2008



Media Release,

## Langdyke Trust launches appeal to save heritage sites in Peterborough

The Langdyke Countryside Trust has today launched an appeal to raise £120,000 to buy two valuable heritage sites in the heart of the countryside west of Peterborough, both of which it will manage for the benefit of the local community and for wildlife.

**Torpel Manor Field in Bainton Parish** is one of the most important ancient monument sites around Peterborough, containing the visible remains of a 12<sup>th</sup> century manor house. Once owned by Queen Eleanor of Castile and later by Henry VIII, this is a Scheduled Monument, which means that it is of national importance. It is also a county wildlife site – an important home to a wide variety of wild flowers, insects and birds.

**Swaddywell Pit, in Helpston Parish**, has been under management by the Trust since 2003, but we now have the chance to secure its future by acquiring its main meadow, the home of thousands of orchids. Swaddywell is a county wildlife site and a regionally important geological site with a rich history and connections with local poet, John Clare, who wrote two poems about it.

The owners of both sites have now offered to sell them to the Trust and given it twelve months in which to raise the money.

Trust chairman, Richard Keymer, said, 'These are both wonderful sites, full of wildlife and reminders of our rural history and heritage. If we can raise the money, we can secure them forever for the benefit of the local communities. If we are successful perhaps we can all look forward to 'Timeteam' style excavations at Torpel? Or outdoor drama on the main mound, community picnics or even the

revival of the medieval Torpel Fair – held throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on 31 August – 3 September? Our school children can enjoy pond-dipping at Swaddywell and learn about their local heritage at Torpel. We can all enjoy the majestic beauty of the thousands of orchids at Swaddywell and the sense of history as we stand in the moat at Torpel.’

The Trust will manage the sites for the benefit of people and wildlife and as a lasting reminder of the local rural heritage. At Torpel, the existing stable blocks on the field could be partially converted into outdoor classrooms and exhibition rooms. The ruined stone walls could be repaired and through careful grazing by the Trust’s flock of Hebridean sheep more wild flowers will grow. At Swaddywell the Trust will continue to manage the site for wildlife and encourage visitors to walk around the site and enjoy its tranquillity.

To meet the costs of buying both sites and to complete initial management tasks the Trust needs to raise £120,000 by 1 March 2009. It hopes to cover the bulk of the land acquisition costs through applications to grant making trusts, but needs to raise as much money as possible from the local community to ensure its ability to manage the sites and take forward restoration and management work.

Anyone wishing to support the appeal should send cheques made payable to the Langdyke Countryside Trust Appeal to the Trust at 18 Heath Road, Helpston, Peterborough, PE6 7EG or visit <http://www.botolphsbarn.org.uk/langdyke/langdyke-torpelmanorfield.htm>.

### **Notes for editors**

The Langdyke Countryside Trust is a voluntary, membership based organisation that through community action aims to preserve and enhance the natural heritage in the area between Peterborough and Stamford, including, where possible, through the restoration of the lost limestone grassland landscapes described by John Clare. We have three principal theme areas of activity

1. **Places** – working with landowners, or if appropriate managing land ourselves, to enhance or create habitats in order to increase both the diversity and the numbers of our local wildlife species. In particular, and working with the John Clare Trust we will focus on the restoration of the lost landscapes as described by John Clare, including areas of limestone grassland.
2. **People** – working with schools and other community groups and wildlife charities, we will offer opportunities for people to learn about and appreciate and support the natural environment on their doorsteps.

3. **Projects from Poems** –we will establish specific programmes of conservation activity designed to support increases in population of certain species that feature in the poetry and writing of John Clare.

The Trust has managed Swaddywell Pit as a community nature reserve since 2003 and has over 150 members in the villages west of Peterborough. [Background on Swaddywell Pit, is set out in the attached leaflet]

### About Torpel Manor Field

Torpel Manor Field lies at the extreme west end of the village of Helpston, although it is in the parish of Bainton. The 8.5 acre field is a schedule monument, containing the visible remains of a fortified manorial residence – the ‘stately home’ of the medieval period. In addition to the motte, on which the main house would have stood, there is clear evidence of an outer protective bank and ditch, within which ancillary domestic and agricultural buildings would have been situated (the bailey).

The site is associated with Torpel manor, which was an extensive and important holding during the medieval period. Occupation at this site probably pre-dates the earliest documentary reference to Torpel manor in 1198, but almost certainly included the hamlet mentioned in 1276. From 1280 the manor was a royal park, owned first by Eleanor of Castille, wife of Edward I and later by the mother of the Black Prince.

The site is a Scheduled Monument, which means that it has been assessed to be of national importance and is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. To put that in context, Scheduled Monuments comprise less than 5% of recorded archaeological monuments. In its local context, this is a very rare example of a high status medieval site that still survives in earthwork form in grassland.

Torpel Manor Field is also a County Wildlife Site, meaning it contains a range of locally uncommon species and is important for biodiversity. The field supports a range of wild-flower species and has in the past been the home to nesting barn owls. It also contains an old pond, probably the remains of the manorial moat, and some ancient ash and oak trees. In recent years the field has been used as a pony paddock and there has been little opportunity to manage the site sympathetically for either its heritage or wildlife value.

The combination of the heritage and wildlife value of the site, plus its ease of access and proximity to a number of rural villages and schools offers a fascinating opportunity to create a valuable community asset. The Trust’s initial thoughts on how the site could be developed include

- Working with English Heritage and Peterborough City Council’s archaeologist to develop the heritage aspects of the site, including exploring the potential for excavations on the site
- In conjunction with the John Clare Trust, establishing a small interpretation centre on site, probably through the partial conversion of the existing stable block. This might include a small classroom, interpretation boards, and facilities for other forms of outdoor learning, including mapping the earthworks, grass sweeping, moth surveys and pond dipping
- Encouraging visits by local primary and secondary schools, designed to help pupils understand heritage and biodiversity issues. This might require the creation of a small car park at the entrance to the field and putting in basic facilities, including a small kitchen and compostable toilet. The site already has electricity and water.

- Developing a management plan for the sympathetic grazing of the site by the Trust's flock of Hebridean sheep, with the objective of restoring wildlife rich grassland across the field.
- Restoring the hedgerows around the site.
- Restoring the stone walls that mark the field boundaries on three sides
- Creating, within the existing fenced paddock area (roughly one acre), a range of small-scale food production activities, for community and educational purposes
- Using the field as a venue for community events and visits, such as picnics or drama productions

**Media Contact**

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