

Stapleford Parish Pit

An interesting man-made feature of the landscape of South Cambridgeshire is the cluster of clunch pits dug into the sides of the low chalk ridges bordering the upper Cam valley and along the Fen edge towards the Suffolk border. These quarries were hewn by hand from the chalk outcrops. The extracted ‘clunch’ was used as a building material from medieval times up to the end of the Nineteenth century. ‘Clunch’ is in fact the traditional local term for a hardened chalk.

Stapleford Parish Pit is the last of a series of such pits on Little Trees Hill to have been worked, though we have no record of when clunch extraction stopped, perhaps in the 1930s by which time the clunch was used for road making.

It has been managed by the The Public Stone, Chalk, Gravel and Clay Pit Charity whose Trustees were The Parish Council. For a period a volunteer group from the Wildlife Trust, funded by the Parish Council, took care of the management of the site, but this ceased with the result that that scrub encroached extensively on the site.

Since 2015, a volunteer group has been working to manage the pit so that chalk flora species can colonise the pit floor. Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust has been advising the group with a management plan. Now around 75 wildflower species have been recorded but this still falls short of the number recorded in 1992 when records were started. Along with Magog Down, it has been awarded County Wildlife Status.

To ensure the ongoing, long term management of Stapleford Parish Pit and recognising its importance in the landscape, The Magog Trust approached Parish Council to allow its management to be undertaken by The Trust. This has now been negotiated with the Charities Commission and took effect from January 2022.

KLF 220212