

## PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

Distributed with June/July 2016 programme

**Springtime Special (March '16):-** Our Springtime Special took us to Oxford where we entered straight into our theme when we called into The Folly. Here, alongside Folly Bridge, is where Christ Church lecturer Charles Dodgson, aka Lewis Carroll, set off by boat with Alice and her siblings to take trips along the river, conjuring up more ideas for adventures in Wonderland. After coffee we walked along St Aldate's Street featured in X Men: 1st Class, spotting Alice's Shop which she visited frequently as a child when it was a Victorian sweet shop. It became the Sheep Shop in Carroll's tales. We passed Christ Church College and made our way down an avenue of poplar trees planted by Alice's father, then The Dean of Christ Church. Our pleasant walk bordered Christ Church Meadows with first the River Thames and then the River Cherwell as companions.

Leaving the peace of the meadows we reached the High Street near Magdalen College with the tallest tower in Oxford. Soon we entered a quiet narrow street passing New College *Caught in the Frame* in Harry Potter's Goblet of Fire, Inspector Morse and James Bond's Tomorrow Never Dies. We paused to admire the Bridge of Sighs, regularly used as a backdrop for Morse, before passing under it to find the Sheldonian Theatre. We were booked in to explore this wonderful building with its magnificent *framed* painted ceiling. We climbed the stairs to discover an exhibition about the theatre and even more stairs to arrive at the cupola from where we had a perfect 360 degree view over the dreaming spires.

Next we walked to the Botanic Gardens, the oldest in the UK. A leaflet guided us round this oasis with its flower borders, rockery, water gardens and exotic greenhouses. The latter were popular as a warm picnic spot for some while others sat out on benches scattered around the garden or beside the River



Cherwell which flows alongside. One bench was of particular interest as it features in Philip Pullman's trilogy, *The Golden Compass*, as the place where Will and Lyra romantically vow to meet up on Midsummer's Day. We all decided the gardens were worthy of a future visit after this 'taster day' but now we needed to leave to take the short walk to the front of Christ Church College where we met our Oxford Guides. Each proved both informative and humorous as first we were taken on a tour inside Christ Church where we saw many areas used in films, especially Harry Potter. We saw the stained glass window in the fabulous dining hall featuring characters from Alice in Wonderland, the atmospheric cloisters, a favourite of film makers, and the Cathedral with a stunning Burne-Jones window *Caught in the Frame*.

Afterwards we were taken on a tour around the city passing more buildings often caught on film or TV, ending at the Ashmolean Museum with its priceless works of art *Caught in the Frame*. On the roof terrace we ended with cream tea amongst Oxford's dreaming spires.

**Dorchester (March '16):-** Dorchester is a favourite with film & TV producers so often *Caught in the Frame*. Recognised as Devington, Fletchers Cross, Little Worthy to name a few of its castings for *Midsomer Murders* we wandered down the High Street and out of the village on a path flaunting the first blossoms of blackthorn. We walked beside the well-preserved Dyke Hills with a good view over the hedgerow to Wittenham Clumps. To reach them we first crossed the Thames which we did via the Pooh Stick Bridge - for many years the venue for the annual Pooh Stick Championship. We of course couldn't cross it without a quick game! The Clumps loomed nearer as we crossed the Little Wittenham Nature Reserve, serenaded by skylarks, and soon we were climbing the first hill, Castle Hill. We reached the top to stand near the fallen Poem Tree. Beside it a bolder holds Joseph Tubb's Victorian poem which he had engraved onto the tree. We gazed over the far-reaching view over the Oxfordshire countryside while we took a break before heading to the top of the second hill, Round Hill. Here a plaque outlined our extensive view and we spent a few moments picking out familiar landmarks. Down the hill we joined a pleasant path beside the River Thames to eventually arrive back in Dorchester where we headed for the Abbey. Here we recognised the gardens, museum and lych gate often *Caught in the Frame* and ended our walk in The George cast as The Feathers, Maids in Splendour and others in *Midsomer Murders*, as well as The George in an episode of *Poirot*. Inside the cosy, ancient interior we enjoyed lunch before a look inside the wonderful Abbey.

**Sherbourne St John & The Vyne (April '16):-** Exploring hidden parts of Sherbourne St John we discovered what a pretty village it is with attractive old cottages and a large village pond complete with huge carp and tiny ducklings. We visited St Andrew's Church where Jane Austen's elder brother, James, was vicar for 28 years. In the churchyard graves hold members of the Chute family, former owners of the Vyne which we looked forward to visiting later. First we left the village by passing the Manor House *framed* by the host of daffodils along its drive before heading



out into the Hampshire countryside through lush fields. The rain which had fallen in the night had formed a large puddle in a gateway which needed to be manoeuvred past but the watercress in the old watercress beds nearby thrived on the wet conditions! Birdsong came from small birds hidden within the frothy blackthorn hedges beside us as well as from skylarks high up in the sky. On entering the National Trust woodland of Morgaston Woods we enjoyed the mass of cowslips, primroses and early bluebells along our path. We spotted the Vyne mansion over the lake before following a stream to find the bird hide overlooking the Vyne Wetlands. We took our break here giving time to use binoculars to see the waterbirds gathered out on the wetlands lake. More field paths with a clear stream with darting fish beside us took us back towards Sherbourne St John. As we neared we heard the rush of water and discovered an attractive waterfall beside the old mill. Rejoining our cars we took the short drive to The Vyne where after lunch we took a brief look around the garden before exploring the house with the 'star of the show' being the recently reinstated stain glass window *Caught in the Frame* in the Chapel, considered to be the most beautiful 16th century glass in Europe.

**Stanford Dingley (April '16):-** Sandwiched between celebrations for the Queen's 90th birthday, St George's Day and Shakespeare we had our own celebration of 'all things quintessentially English' when we set out from Stanford Dingley. Pretty cottages set off by their colourful spring gardens and the



River Pang flowing through the village certainly fitted the bill! Across fields of sheep with views across the glorious Pang Valley we reached Rushall Farm where we continued through luscious scented English bluebell woods. 'Feel-good' endorphins were sent racing and we remained on a 'high' as we crossed a pasture full of sheep with their young lambs. We reached Bradfield, coming alongside its former mill to take our break in the churchyard full of primroses. The delights continued as we joined the pretty River Pang all the way back to Stanford Dingley where we ended our quest for the best of England with lunch in The Old Boot, a favourite pub of the courting Will and Kate.

**Goring & Withymead (April '16):-** It was interesting to make our way up behind properties in Goring to walk beside their back gardens, a view not normally seen. A climb up through spring woodland rewarded us with a stunning view from the top over the Oxfordshire countryside. We talked to the many pigs routing in the field beside us as we made our way down, soon to pause for our break with yet another wonderful vista. We continued on our way to the edge of South Stoke to walk through meadows to eventually reach Withymead Nature Reserve. Here we were booked in for a visit and soon we were wandering between swathes of Loddon Lilies for which the Reserve is famous. Wonderful! We passed ponds on which various ducks glided and reached the banks of the River Thames, finding a fallen log as a good seat to eat our picnic with a view over the river. The Reserve is also an important ringing centre for wildfowl and we spotted various species floating by. Leaving the Reserve the sun began to shine strongly and the lure of the decking onto the river beside the Leathern and Bottle was too strong to resist for some! So - coffee was ordered to enjoy in the sunshine whilst watching the activity on the river. A lovely ending to a lovely walk.

**Upton, Blewbury & East Hagbourne (May '16):-** Exploring a trio of villages we began in Upton by walking past some gorgeous properties where wisteria and even some early roses clambered over their walls. Past the orchards of Upton Cider, their organic principles



encouraging the many cowslips seen beneath the trees, we joined a long mid-field path which took us to our second village to explore, Blewbury. We passed Hall Barn which Henry V111 used as a hunting lodge then joined one of many clear streams passing attractive thatched properties, some enclosed by thatch-topped cob walls. Lovely! We wandered around the 'Living Churchyard' managed by BBOWT and full of cowslips, primroses and snakes head fritillary, then on past the attractive Almshouses to join another clear stream beside more cob walls. We passed the former home of Kenneth Grahame as we made our way to a field path to head out of the village on our way to East Hagbourne, our third village to explore. On reaching it, again we were awed by the delightful properties. We passed the Fleur de Lys and the post office, both *Caught in the Frame* in an episode of Dr Who, and then the Village Cross upon which Dr Who (Tom Baker) was tethered! Being a hot day we took a second break at the Church before joining the disused railway, now an excellent walking/cycling track. From this elevated path we gained excellent views over

the surrounding countryside which inspired local students from Thame College to produce green oak seats carved into shapes to resemble elements of the area. The first, for example mimicked Wittenham Clumps, an excellent place to sit awhile with a view towards its inspiration.