

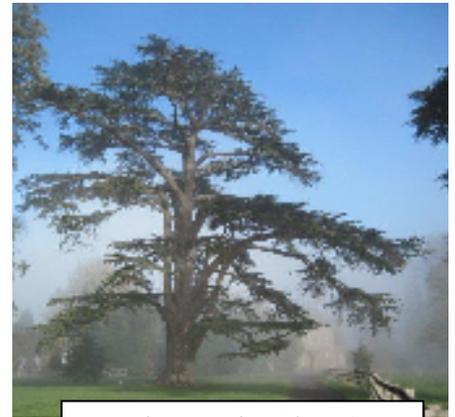
PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

HISTORY

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Wasing Estate (Nov '10):- Despite a foggy morning the sun began to filter through as we began our walk along an autumnal lane, watched by horses peering over their hedge. Soon we were walking beside, and over, the clear waters of the River Enborne. Reaching Hyde End we walked along Hyde End Lane with sunshine glistening on frosty seedheads. We passed the grand Hyde End House, enclosed by a jewelled hedgerow. Huge horse chestnut trees lined the lane, their skeletal shapes outlined in the increasingly blue sky. However, a change of direction and an uphill stretch led us back into atmospheric, misty fields, their hedgerows ablaze with fiery red berries. Wonderful! Rounding a bend, suddenly, there in front of us loomed the spire of Brimpton Church, reaching up into the misty sky. We left the churchyard beside a sorbus tree, heavy with red fruits, to find the war memorial adorned with equally red poppies, reminding us of the recent Remembrance Day.

Walking field edges, the Kennet Valley remained veiled in mist and we took our break beside an eerily silent, shrouded lake. Afterwards we entered the Wasing Estate where, passing the original castellated stables from the 1770's, we entered the Church of St Nicholas to see the list of its priests dating back to 1362. Holding just 80 people, this lovely building holds memorials and windows to the Mount family. Outside, framed by two amazing cedars of Lebanon, we saw the Manor House, Wasing Place, which replaces an earlier one which had suffered from fire in 1945. Home to the Mount family since 1759 it is the ancestral home on his Mother's side of the Prime Minister, David Cameron. Once more the sun forced its way through the mist forming glorious bright rays of light through the woodland by which we now walked. Eventually we arrived at The Pineapple in Brimpton Common where we were warmly welcomed into the function room for lunch.



Misty Wasing Place &
Cedar of Lebanon

Dorchester (Nov '10):- With over 6,000 years of human occupation in Dorchester there were plenty of historic features to look out for on our walk. Dating from the 15th century, the George is one of the oldest coaching inns in the country and, beginning from here, we made our way along the High Street, admiring many other old buildings along the way. We turned to walk beside a row of pretty, thatched cottages which were once one building used as a malthouse where barley was prepared for brewing. Soon civilisation was left behind as we walked beside the Dyke Hills, remains of a substantial line of defence. Another form of defence, clearly visible, was Castle Hill, an Iron Age Hillfort, towards which we made our way via the Pooh Sticks bridge over the River Thames at Day's Lock. Castle Hill with Round Hill beside it make up the Sinodun Hills, the name coming directly from the Celts, but more commonly known now as Wittenham Clumps. Round Hill has its own history as there are traces of a Roman Villa on its slopes. The beech trees crowning The Clumps were planted by the influential Dunch family in the 1700's, making them the oldest known planted hilltop beeches in England. Instead of climbing up The Clumps we took a path through Little Wittenham Nature Reserve, a SSSI, firstly through Church Meadow and then through Little Wittenham Wood. Eventually a path between fields took us to the Shillingford Bridge Hotel, where the 1827 bridge looked stunning, the reflection of its arches in the Thames completing a full circle.

After a break we crossed the bridge and wound our way between interesting and varied properties to reach the main road. We were distracted from the short roadside walk by the view to the left of Wittenham Clumps, and the view ahead of Dorchester Abbey. Soon we were back beside the Thames as it peacefully meandered through water meadows to its confluence with the River Thame. Here in 635AD St Birinus baptised the Saxon King Cynegils making Christianity acceptable in England. He was granted land in Dorchester upon which he built a Cathedral. Dorchester Abbey, founded in 1140, stands on the site of the original 7th century Cathedral. It was to this wonderful building which we headed to take a look inside before making our way to The George for lunch.

Our **Turkey Tinsel Walk** around Arborfield finishing at the Henry Street Garden Centre for a festive lunch proved as lovely and well supported as ever. Our History year ended with the **Christmas Party** which was the usual jolly affair of good company and good food mixed in with a helping of humour supplied by Marjy and her poems. As usual we ended with a sing a long with the Pathfinders Choir. Thank you all once again for the very generous gifts!

New Year Celebration (Jan '11):- Our theme of 2010, History, and the new theme for 2011, The Arts, overlapped at the beginning of the year. We began by learning that the two parks we were to walk in were important clay producing areas, with tiles and clay pots being fired in kilns at Kentwood. In 1967 the last tiles were produced and the area filled in. We began walking through the resulting estate known as The Potteries. Soon we were climbing through trees into the first park to be explored, Arthur Newbery Park, donated by Arthur Newbery. The reason for the donation? 'To protect it from the ever encroaching housing development'. The year? 1932. Some things never change! How pleased we were with his generosity as we strode amongst the fine trees of

this, one of Reading's oldest parks. Enjoying the views towards the Mapledurham Hills we dropped down the hillside and made our way to the second park to be explored, McIlroy Park. The area has survived development due to an equally generous donation by William McIlroy. We would our way through a wooded area to emerge onto a plateau of green with lovely views along the Thames to Reading. McIlroy owned McIlroy Stores which, along with Heelas, was one of Reading's most successful department stores. From his office window above the store he could see the green expanse on which we now walked, and was determined to protect it. We were very glad he did for it made for a very pleasant walk which eventually took us to the aptly named Tyler's Rest for our New Year Celebration Lunch.

Stonor (Jan '11):- We had heard that 17th January would be the day when people feel least cheerful in 2011. As we left Purley in torrential rain it was easy to see how people's mood could be affected! But, as is often the case, upon reaching the starting point for our walk in Pishill the rain stopped and the car park buzzed with jolly chatter! Being set in the Chilterns we expected some hills and, indeed, we began on a roller-coaster of ups and downs through glorious fields. Numerous red kites soared above, while wild deer hugged the hedgerows as they shyly tried to hide. The climbs, although not too strenuous, gave us the excuse to pause to look over the wonderful landscape, looking very green after the rainfall. Along the level valley floor we came to the entrance gates to Stonor House. Nearby we entered a kissing gate into Stonor Park to climb steadily. Our efforts gave us an increasingly good view of Stonor House, otherwise hidden in the protective folds of the hills. The house looked stunning, and a fitting home for Victor Hazell, county squire played by Robbie Coltrane in the 1989 film of Roald Dahl's 'Danny Champion of the World'. In 1987 it was also the setting for the James Bond film, 'The Living Daylights' with Timothy Dalton playing the part of Bond.

From our lofty spot we could look down onto the Park's majestic trees, the Cedar of Lebanon looking particularly fine with its green branches positively glowing amongst the bare branches of deciduous specimens. We learned some of the history of Stonor House and noted the Chapel where the family's strong Catholic faith has been practised for centuries. Clearly visible were the Standing Stones bringing back memories of our recent trip to Stonehenge. We decided to nickname the stone circle, 'Stonor Henge'! Scattering large herds of the estate's deer we headed into attractive beech woodland, then back into the open our high field path gave us a good view across to the 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Windmill' above Turville. Reaching a cluster of houses we witnessed our first sighting of snowdrops this year. Gathering all these 'feel good' sights along the way on this S.A.D. January day, a large group of happy, smiling ladies arrived back at Pishill for lunch at The Crown. With the pub undergoing renovations we were invited to eat in the lovely events barn – the very place where in the 60's artists such as George Harrison and Dusty Springfield held jamming sessions! What a nice link to The Arts!



The Barn at The Crown

Pinkneys Green (Jan 11):- After last week's exertions we headed to the East of Reading to take a gentle, level route for our next walk. We began by walking in Maidenhead Thicket, now a quiet area of woodland owned by the National Trust. Things were not always so, however, for it was a favourite haunt of Highwaymen! As early as 1255 it is recorded that vegetation was cut back to make passage through the area safer. Dick Turpin was an 18th century Highwayman of the area, using an underground room in the Dew Drop Inn in nearby Burchetts Green to hide after his escapades in the Thicket! On this 21st century morning the Thicket provided a safe and pleasant place to wander. Beautiful mosses covered the ground and scrambled up tree trunks to turn the leafless woodland into a green oasis. Eventually a tunnel of gay catkins glowing in the sunshine led us to a bridge over a busy main road. Peace was soon restored as we reached one of the greens of Pinkneys Green. There was just the sound of small birds singing in the hedgerows and magpies squabbling at the top of trees, although on another day we may have heard the sound of leather against willow for cricket has been played on the green since 1885.

We walked two sides of this large expanse of grassland to arrive at the Stag and Hounds. The pub was soon full of happily chatting Pathfinders, each clutching a cup of coffee. After this enjoyable interlude we continued past another green and on to yet another. These expanses seemed ideal for camping out on. Perhaps the local Guide troop does just that for it was in Pinkneys Green that Miss Baden-Powell formed the first Girl Guide Troop in 1910. We were delighted that the commons were saved from development by public subscription in 1934 and given to the National Trust for everyone to enjoy – including us! Eventually we re-entered Maidenhead Thicket near the site of a small Iron Age farmstead known as 'Robin Hood's Arbour'. A horse suddenly appeared between the trees to cross our path. Luckily the rider didn't demand we 'Stand and Deliver!' so, thankfully, we arrived safely back at the Shire Horse pub for lunch!

Woolhampton & Midgham (Feb '11): We began beside the Kennet & Avon Canal which always proves a pleasant place to walk. On his February morning it held a lovely ambience with wood smoke curling up from the chimney stacks of colourful canal boats, the dark spires of bulrushes poking above other water-loving plants, the clean lines of the black and white locks, as well as the usual array of ducks, grebes, coots and swans. Eventually we spotted the spire of Midgham Church dominating the skyline from its hilltop position, and we left the canal to climb towards it along a lane with snowdrop sprinkled verges. Beside a plaque recording Midgham's mention in the Domesday Book we entered the churchyard of St Matthews. From its lofty position we could make out Cottington Hill mast in the misty distance, and closer, across the Kennet Valley, the spire of Brimpton Church. The Church sheltered us from a cool wind as we took our break amongst the snowdrops in the churchyard. Refreshed, we entered Midgham Park beside West Lodge and we followed ancient tracks between hay meadows to then cross the drive which leads to Midgham House. We gazed over the view enjoyed by the house, un-obscured due to the ha ha by which we walked. Climbing through rough pasture we reached the East Lodge to leave the Park. Now we had an easy amble down the lane beside woodland of Upper Woolhampton in which we spotted some deer. Back in Woolhampton we enjoyed lunch in the Rowbarge where in the 1970's Laurence Olivier and Cary Grant were regular patrons!

Swyncombe & Cookley Green (Feb '11):- We gathered at Swyncombe Church where snowdrops and winter aconites banished all thoughts of the long winter, and set us in good stead for the start of our walk. First, however,



we took the opportunity to look inside St Botolphs to admire the medieval wall paintings and other treasures held within. Our walk began by crossing stunning parkland of Swyncombe House overlooked by the fine Rectory and maintained by a flock of sheep. Numerous red kites swooped just above the ground, showing off their rich colours. We had hardly started our walk but already the 'feel good' endorphins were working overtime! Following the Chiltern Way through a pleasant woodland strip, we arrived at Cookley Green. A path edged with snowdrops led us into an avenue of beech trees and on to join a bridleway which eventually became a sunken track amongst trees. We came alongside Dame Alice Farm

which has connections with Alice, the granddaughter of the poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. Jolly catkins brightened our path and soon wonderful views were gained over to Watlington Hill from where red kites soared to entertain us with their aerial acrobatics while we took our break. Next we joined the ancient Ridgeway along a pleasant leafy corridor and out between arable fields across which we spotted Britwell Salome where the Midsomer Murders episode, 'The Creeper', was filmed. The Ridgeway turned to head us back towards Swyncombe on a route between glorious folds of the Chiltern Hills. We climbed through woodland to emerge with fabulous views over Swyncombe Downs to Wittenham Clumps, dominating the distant skyline. Arriving back at Swyncombe Church we took another lingering look at the display of snowdrops – a wonderful sight to take away with us.

Ecchinswell (Feb '11):- After a day of constant rain the sunshine coming from a clear blue sky was welcomed with even more enthusiasm as we left Ecchinswell beside the school, school house and old mill – just three of the many listed properties in this conservation village. After a climb we walked a wide grassy path edged with catkins dancing in the sunlight. We gained our first good view of Watership Down before plunging into a woodland strip. After a further climb we gazed over Watership Down, now seeming almost level with where we stood. Sheep grazed the field beside us, but we left these woolly animals to head towards Nuthanger Farm, associated with the furry animals of Richard Adams's Watership Down. Perhaps the Grade 11 listed barn, its roof prettily covered in moss, was where, in the story, friends of Hazel and Fiver were fattened up for the pot! With an increasing number of snowdrops lining our path we reached a house virtually buried in a drift of snowy white blooms. Wonderful! Dropping down the hillside we caught a glimpse of Highclere Castle in the distance, visible on this clear, bright day. Soon we were walking within the Sydmonton Court Estate with several of Lady Lloyd Webber's polo ponies grazing the fields beside us. On this Valentine's Day we enjoyed the songs of the birds in the hedgerows, no doubt with *aspects of love* on their minds as they sang to impress potential mates! We took our break in the sunshine with views over the immaculate Watership Farm to Watership Down. Recently a selection from Lord Lloyd Webber's wine collection sold at auction for £3 ½million, equivalent to about £670 glass, but we were content with our flasks of coffee and bottles of water! Dragging ourselves away from this wonderful spot, tracks and field paths took us back towards Ecchinswell where we finished with a walk down a glorious avenue, thickly edged with snowdrops. We wondered if these blooms were the inspiration for Lord Lloyd Webber's musical '*The Woman in White*' !