

PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

Distributed with February/March 2013 programme

Bucklebury (October '12):- Thankfully the day dawned clear and dry and within moments of leaving Chapel Row with its avenues of historic oak trees we were walking beneath a canopy of slightly autumnal trees down a rather muddy track. Mud was a feature also as we entered woodland but eventually we joined the grassy edge of a very large field with lovely views across the Pang Valley. We crossed the River Pang via a bridge alongside a ford – a nice place to linger, but we continued up a track beside a field of jolly pigs that didn't mind the mud created by days of rain at all! After walking along a lane beside them we re-crossed the Pang via an ancient road bridge and entered the churchyard of St Mary's Church at Bucklebury. This church contains many interesting treasures but, with mud on our boots, we decided to leave investigation to another day. Instead we climbed up a field edge with lovely views back over the Church surrounded by a cluster of old cottages. Soon we were walking beside the grounds of Bucklebury Farm Park with a few goats spotted through the hedge. Then, at the top of the climb we could clearly see the herds of deer for which the Farm Park is famous. Our route now took us downhill through trees, passing by the ancient Coronation Oak, so named for in 1902, 1,200 people gathered around the tree for a service to celebrate the Coronation of Edward V11. Further history was noted when we continued beside two medieval fishponds built by the Monks of Reading Abbey in the 12th century to supply fish to the Abbey and to the Abbot who lived in the nearby Manor House. We ended the walk with a pleasant walk through the trees on Bucklebury Common which led us back to the Bladebone where we were warmly welcomed with a delicious lunch.

Harpsden (October '12):- Walking into woodland proved a good place to begin our autumnal walk around Harpsden, for the trees were starting to show their autumn colours, and plenty of fungi poked out through bright green mosses. Our route took us alongside the parkland grounds of Crowsley Park edged with russet brown ferns glowing in the sunshine. Fallen leaves around our feet completed the scene, although, sadly, we were unable to crunch them as we would have liked due to the rain of the previous night! We climbed a hillside, leaving a lovely cottage below backed by orange trees. At the top of the climb we gained good views over Crowsley Park with its huge satellite dishes. Several pairs of Red Kites wheeled overhead as we made our way through a series of lush green fields. Reaching an arable field we were conscious of the absence of birds for, although marked on the map as several fields, we were now faced with an enormous space in which hedgerows had sadly been grubbed up. No doubt this made life easier for the farmer to work the land, but we couldn't help but count the cost to wildlife. Eventually we arrived beside Harpsden Church from where we entered the glories of Harpsden Wood. Rays of sunlight glinted through the canopy to light up the trees, and a flurry of golden leaves fell silently around us. Soon we arrived back at The Bottle & Glass where horses stood patiently tethered whilst their riders enjoyed a *bottle* or *glass*! We were tempted to take our lunch and join them outside in the sunny garden, but tables had been thoughtfully set for us inside by our welcoming hosts.

Pangbourne College (October '12):- After a night of heavy rain we noticed how full the Thames looked as we left Pangbourne, mercifully in the dry. Soon we were climbing through trees which provided an autumn glow around us, whilst colour at our feet was provided by *Noddy & Big Ears* fungi with their white dots on large bright red domes! Fungi became a real feature of this walk for as we walked the edges of several fields on our way to Upper Basildon we spotted more and more varieties. Sadly we had left our identification books at home, but were impressed by the large *dinner plate* ones!

Once in Upper Basildon we headed for Pangbourne College to take our break at the Falklands Chapel. This gave us time to look around this wonderful building with its striking Memorial Window depicting the Falkland Islands surrounded by a lively sea in vibrant shades of blue, green, yellow and grey. Poignantly we examined the kneelers, 258 of them individually embroidered with the names of those who had died during the conflict. Outside we enjoyed the sense of peace from the *hug* experienced within the circular Memorial Garden. At the back of the Chapel, stones make up a Memorial Cairn, each stone representing one of the fallen. Some had been inscribed by the families – one stood out with its simple inscription, *Daddy*. As we made our way to leave the Chapel we passed the stunning bronze statues of three life-sized albatross. Sculpted at the 25th anniversary of the conflict, they represent not only the Courage, Endurance and Fragility of the campaign, but also the Past, Present and Future of the islands. With Remembrance Day not far away it seemed fitting to pray for peace in the world. Freely we walked down the hill towards Tidmarsh, scattering pheasants along our way. Once in Tidmarsh we noticed *Bishops House*, aptly named for it is the home of the Bishop of Reading. We ended our walk with a pleasant walk back to Pangbourne beside the swollen River Pang.

Nettlebed (November '12):- Our first walk in November celebrated 50 years of that great *Best of British* institution, Bond – James Bond. It was only right, therefore, that we began in the Fleming's family village, Nettlebed. Ian Fleming's grandfather, Robert, lived at Joyce Grove which is now a Sue Ryder hospice, while Ian's brother, Peter, is buried in the village churchyard. So, the Church of St Bartholomew was a good place to start our walk and once inside we weren't *shaken* but were certainly *stirred* by the two glorious stained glass windows designed by local artist, John Piper, whom we celebrated on a walk recently at Fawley Bottom. The sunshine of a lovely morning accentuated the deep colours of both windows, the East window, and the window above the font which is a memorial to Peter Fleming.



Leaving the village with its kiln, preserved to commemorate the brick making industry in which the Fleming family had played an important part, we savoured the *feel good feeling* as we walked on this perfect blue sky autumn morning. We passed Soundess House to soon reach the Warburg Nature Reserve. Here the beech trees shone in the sunshine while at our feet the fallen leaves made a spectacular burnt orange carpet. A climb rewarded us with a magnificent view of the world of Bix Bottom. Wow! Once at the *Bottom* we walked past the ruins of St James Church and continued within the beauty of Chiltern beech woods back to Nettlebed.

We had seen no fast cars, villains, *M* or *Q*, only a stunning location worthy of any Bond film!

Chazey Heath & Mapledurham (November '12):- In the sunshine of a lovely autumn morning the beech trees of The Chilterns glowed deep orange – surely a *Best of British* sight! Their intensity deepened as we walked within the beech woods from Chazey Heath on our way to Mapledurham along The Chiltern Way. Our route twisted and turned, avoiding the colour-contrasting deep green of the adjoining golf course. Snatched views were gained towards Reading, the iconic, 128metre high Blade building clearly visible. Further meanderings brought another distinctive landmark into view – that of the water tower in Tilehurst! Emerging into an open area we watched a large flock of gulls circling and swooping over a ploughed field, their white bodies looking stark against the orange backdrop of Park Wood. Soon we were walking within this lovely woodland on a gently descending path. Halfway down we paused at *Old Palm*, an intriguing statue of the Greek God, Pan holding his mischievous pipes. From high on his plinth he enjoys a superb view over the Mapledurham Estate. Trees now obscure much of this view to those standing at ground level, but spotting the rooftops of Mapledurham spurred us on to continue down towards it. After a short but interesting wander through Mapledurham village with its ancient cottages and almshouses, we arrived at St Margaret's Church set beside Mapledurham House and near the only working watermill on the River Thames. We took our break at this sleepy spot which allowed us time to look inside the Church. It dates from the 13th century but was restored in 1834 at the expense of William IV. The clock on the tower was given by William and it signalled it was time to drag ourselves away from this peaceful place and return through the village to resume our walk. Along a track leading away from the village we turned to have a good view of the attractive front of Mapledurham House. Across the Thames flowing parallel to us yet hidden from sight, we noted landmarks on *our* side of the river such as the imposing Purley Magna, and The Roebuck. We needed to climb back up to Chazey Heath and our path proved very pleasant as it passed through the autumnal Chazey Wood. Back at the Pack Saddle we tucked in to an enjoyable lunch.



Greenham Common (November '12):- The rain had been lashing down all night so it was a bonus to arrive on Greenham Common to walk in the dry. We would be visiting three Nature Reserves and here on Greenham Common, the first of the three, we appreciated how wildlife and wildflowers have reclaimed the Common after its use as a military training ground and then an airbase. '*Best of British*' Girl Power from those in the Womens Peace Camp had been instrumental in the decision to remove the 96 nuclear cruise missiles from the Common, and four years later 1 ¼ million tonnes of concrete were removed, returning the area to Nature. Now it is a SSSI and we enjoyed walking across the Common, passing colourful gorse bushes and with a misty view towards Cottington Hill mast and Watership Down. Eventually we left the Common and soon joined the Kennet & Avon Canal



towpath. A brave couple manoeuvred their narrow boat along the swollen canal and through the distinctive black & white lock gates. Passing through a gateway we passed between lakes to soon arrive at the Thatcham Discovery Centre. We took a break amongst the clambour of waterfowl, and as we looked out over the lake before us we appreciated its part as an important overwintering habitat. We reminisced over our recent trip to Slimbridge Wetland Trust then continued our walk through the Thatcham Reed Beds, one of the largest stands of reeds in the country. As rain began to fall we looked forward to the shelter ahead of a railway bridge. However, upon reaching the bridge we discovered it had filled up with water and now

resembled a ford! It even had waves going across it – more reminders of our autumn trip and The Severn Bore! Despite trying to persuade a postman to give us a lift through the water in his van (!) there was nothing for it other than to wade our way through! Rather soggyly we entered our third Nature Reserve, Bowdown Woods. We walked through this largest of Berkshire's woodland Nature Reserves along the orange-carpeted 'wildlife trail'. We appreciated its name when, down in the valley beside us, we spotted a fox sleeking its way, almost camouflaged by the russet brown ferns. Apart from spotting bird and bat boxes in the trees, we also noticed many large fungi clinging to tree trunks – just some of the 300 species to be found in this special wood. On returning to Greenham Common we walked along a path edged with yellow gorse bushes which was certainly more cheerful than the weather!

Bowsey Hill (November '12):- The drizzle of the morning failed to dampen our spirits as we set off from Hare Hatch to climb to the top of Bowsey Hill. Although long, the climb was not steep so we enjoyed walking amongst the trees of Bowsey Wood. Eventually we reached a clearing at the very top where convenient logs provided seating for our break. Perfect! Even the rain had stopped! Having climbed for the first half of the walk, we looked forward to the descent during the second half. It wasn't all plain sailing however, for we had to manoeuvre our way along muddy woodland tracks. However there was much laughter, especially when Pauline needed to be helped out of the mud after slipping over! The more we picked her up, the more she slid back into the mud! Having managed a rather adventurous descent we joined a lane which led us back to the Horse & Groom where we were enthusiastically greeted by the relatively new owners. After a lovely lunch we crossed over the A4 to immerse ourselves in the Christmas atmosphere of the Christmas shop in the garden centre.

Turkey Tinsel (December '12):- After a familiar walk around the area of Arborfield we gathered in Henry Street Garden Centre for a Christmassy lunch. Afterwards we wandered amongst the displays of Christmas decorations, taking time to look inside the grotto and outside where we found two of Santa's reindeer! Having taken in all the lovely displays we left feeling full of Christmas excitement!



Christmas Party (December '12):- The morning of the party proved too wet to complete the full walk intended, but we enjoyed walking along the bridleway before returning to St Mary's where tables groaned under the weight of a fabulous shared lunch. As usual everyone had 'done us proud' and even after filling our plates and going back for seconds there was still food left on the tables! The mulled wine flowed and happy chattering and laughter filled the hall. Eventually we quietened down with a slice of Christmas Cake and a cup of tea to listen to Marjy entertaining us with some more of her amusing poems. A treat as usual! Then it was time to finish with some lovely festive singing by the Pathfinder Choir, ending with the popular rendition of Twelve Days of Christmas! We were all invited to join in – as long as we did the actions which of course we did with gusto!!! (I did feel sorry for those cows being milked by the maids however!) Another happy party came to an end and we all tunelessly wished each other a Happy Christmas whilst joining hands around the tables. During the party I was pleased to announce that planting of a Jubilee Wood had begun in Henley so hopefully we will be able to visit 'our' oaks in the future. I was presented with some lovely presents (you generous but naughty ladies!) which include tickets for the Royal Albert Hall! Thankyou all so much!!



WELL DONE US! Thankyou to everyone who played a part in creating the Purley Pathfinder Christmas Tree entrant into the St Mary's Tree Festival. As you can see it looked great, and very natural with the branch bejewelled with berries, fir cones, honesty, old man's beard etc etc. A jolly morning was spent at Cedar Cottage wiring up all the components then in the afternoon it was all put into place in the windowsill of St Mary's where it was much admired by visitors to the Festival and churchgoers alike. We came runners up, only one vote – yes one vote! – behind the Brownies. Still, I'm sure they all enjoyed the contents of the tin of sweets given as a prize, and one lucky Pathfinder won the sweets presented to us after they were put into the raffle at the party! The branch was finally removed from Church and greeted all visitors to Cedar Cottage over the Christmas holiday from its position on the doorstep!