

PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

Distributed with Sept/Oct '16 Programme

Birthday Special (May 16):- With The Queen celebrating her 90th Birthday, London seemed a good place to celebrate our 17th



Birthday! Our day began in Regents Park and with showers forecast we were pleased to explore the Avenue Gardens in the dry allowing us to admire the pretty flower borders and some of the 30 stone planters, including the impressive Lion Vase - all beautifully overflowing with flowers. The planting reminded us of an episode of *Rosemary & Thyme* when the gardeners were *Caught in the Frame* replanting the borders here! Just one of several films & TV programmes *Caught in the Frame* in the park.

After passing the impressive Sicilian marble & Aberdeen granite Ready Money Fountain we reached the boundary fence of London Zoo. As we followed the boundary we looked out for some of the zoo's residents. The Reptile House could be seen and we recalled Harry Potter *Caught in the Frame* here as he discovered he had magical powers for the first time!

From the park we joined the towpath of the Regents Canal. Along this peaceful haven we spotted some of its waterfowl and a few boats as well as

passing the Snowdon Aviary with its peacocks, Ibis and Cranes. Next we headed for Primrose Hill where a gradual climb took us to the top for panoramic views over the capital, a plaque guiding our gaze over familiar landmarks. Unfortunately rain threatened so we hurried down the hill, but not quite as fast as Bridget Jones *Caught in the Frame* in the opening scene of *The Edge of Reason*! At the bottom, shelter was sought beneath which to eat our picnics. Thankfully the rain stopped as we continued our walk by rejoining the Regents Canal which led us back into Regents Park. Between attractive shrubs our path took us to the boating lake, *Caught in the Frame* in *Brief Encounters*. Numerous waterfowl with their youngsters milled around us while a line of serious-looking grey herons sat along the edge of the lake. We passed attractive flower borders as we headed for Queen Mary's Garden. We entered this special area through the Rose Garden where a few early roses were in bloom. We enjoyed the statues, fountains, waterfalls and lake before leaving through the decorative Jubilee Gates.

A short walk took us to Madame Tussauds where the afternoon was spent being *Caught in the Frame* as photos were taken of us posing beside waxworks of stars from film, sport, Royalty etc. We enjoyed a new display featuring characters from Star Wars before being entertained in the 4D film theatre. After a welcome coffee our coach whisked us off to the National Gallery. Here we saw works of art *Caught in their Frames* before heading to the National Dining Room where our trip ended with cream tea!

Sonning (June 16):- We began beside the Mill at Sonning where many *Caught in the Frame* actors have tread the boards. We noted the gateway leading to George Clooney's new home next door before crossing Sonning Bridge across which it is said Dick Turpin rode on Black Bess in order to escape from one county to another, the bridge being the boundary between Oxfordshire & Berkshire! We took a tour around the backstreets of this lovely village - described by Jerome K. Jerome as *the most fairy-like nook on the whole river* when he visited during his journey in *Three Men in a Boat*. It certainly holds a plethora of attractive cottages including Turpins - the cottage of Dick's aunt where the highwayman would hide out!

Soon we joined the riverbank passing Sonning Lock with its attractive floral displays. The Thames proved a glorious companion with its still, glassy surface reflecting the surrounding trees, disturbed only by the occasional passing pleasure craft or flurry of ducks and geese parading their young for us to see. Leaving the riverbank we entered a shady Nature Reserve - welcomed on this hot, sunny day. The ponds in the Reserve were patrolled by dragonflies, and one harboured the nest of a coot with several youngsters. We rejoined the riverbank to wander back to Sonning with some walkers branching off to lunch in the lock garden, or in the newly refurbished Great House, or on the terrace of the new cafe in the Mill at Sonning - all equally pleasant riverside venues on this lovely day.

Burghfield & The Kennet & Avon Canal (June 16):- We treaded carefully along the towpath of the Kennet & Avon Canal for little froglets, too many to count, hopped across our path! An unusual, yet wonderful sight. The Swan Bridge, originally built to provide passage for barge horses, gave us access across to the opposite bank which we discovered was lined with willows - a remnant of a basket-weaving industry. We noted another past industry when spotting the site of the Burghfield Mill, now a small housing estate. Birdlife was much in evidence both on the water and in the surrounding trees from where came the sound of a whole choir. At the water's edge coots, greylag geese, Canadian geese and mallards paraded or rested, all with young in tow, while a wagtail quivered on the black and white lock gates. The sunshine brought out a flurry of colour amongst waterside vegetation from the deep blue of dragonflies to the iridescent blue of damselflies and the multi colours of butterflies. Cows with calves grazed a buttercup meadow and with the whole scene one of lush countryside it was only the hum of the M4 somewhere nearby to remind us of our location.

We left the canal by heading off through a flower-rich meadow to cross the railway line. This led us to beside the Holybrook, often hidden behind lush vegetation. Soon we reached Calcot Mill, attractively converted into a dwelling, as is the nearby coach house. Further on the Holybrook became completely hidden from view behind tall waterside plants, but crossing a bridge over it gave us a good view up and down this delightful river which supplied the mills and medieval fishponds of Reading Abbey. Further lush meadows, their grasses reaching to waist height, led us away from the water and into the cropped grassy areas and playgrounds of Linear Park. Eventually an elaborate bridge took us back to the Kennet & Avon Canal alongside Southcote Mill, now an attractive home, for a pleasant wander past numerous colourful canal boats, ducklings and goslings back to the Cunning Man for lunch.

Bagnor (June 16):- Starting in lovely surroundings beside the River Lambourne in Bagnor we knew we were in for a scenic treat on our walk! It took us past pretty cottages and the attractive Watermill Theatre, *in the frame* as one of the most successful regional theatres, winning many awards. On reaching the grand Manor House we peeped through the ornate gates to see a life-sized sculpture of a bull on the front lawn! Our route along the Lambourne Valley Way proved delightful. We were led at first by two young pheasants along a lush, hedged track where numerous wild flowers added colour amongst the green hedges - dog roses, self heal, campanula, lady's bedstraw and knapweed to name a few. These in turn attracted many butterflies and dragonflies to add to our pleasure. The occasional gap in the hedge gave us excellent views across the green Lambourne valley. Eventually we entered a strip of woodland, revelling in the coolness on this sunny day. However, soon back out into the sunshine, we walked beside rising arable fields, their healthy crop of barley stretching away up to the blue sky from where patrolled songful skylarks. Suddenly the River Lambourne flowed in beside us as our path, now lined with pyramidal orchids, took us into Boxford. This picturesque village fits well into our *Caught in the Frame* theme as it is described as a photographers delight! It didn't disappoint as we passed firstly the converted Mill and then beautiful 'chocolate box' cottages. The owner of Brook Cottage paused from his grass cutting to pass the time of day as we admired his lovely garden. He pointed out low railings bounding his property. He explained that they had been salvaged from a skip and he was particularly pleased with them as they featured faces which reminded him of the fact that a wizard used to live in the cottage!

Reaching the Church we looked for the recently discovered Saxon window before finding the Quiet Garden abutting the river. It was lovely sitting there beside the flowers in the sunshine with the River Lambourne flowing gently beside us and swans gliding by. All too soon it was time to leave and retrace our steps to Bagnor for lunch in The Blackbird.

Burghfield Common & Mortimer (June 16):- Unfortunately recent rainfall had caused our woodland paths to become muddy but this didn't distract from the loveliness of the wood, especially when we were treated to an unexpected find - a Handkerchief Tree set amongst the more usual deciduous woodland trees! On reaching Pullen's Pond we paused to enjoy the reflections and the water lilies on the surface. Leaving the woodland we dropped down through a wonderful field of wheat and then one of sweetcorn with views across to Wokefield Park. Our arable route continued through a field of tall barley before returning to woodland in which holly trees had somewhat taken over - our leaders re-named the wood *Hollywood* as befits our theme!! Further on, foxgloves added colour to the scene before we reached Mortimer to walk alongside The Fairground - an expanse of green now quiet after the recent circus had left town! Despite its many uses we were pleased to see several puffball fungi surviving beside our path. Our next woodland, Starvale Wood, gave us an uphill path, passing another pond as we emerging onto Wokefield Common before a final path ended our interesting, mixed walk of Woodland and Commons.



Summer Special - Lacock (July 16):- Our day began with Morning Coffee seated in the flower-filled garden of the oldest house in Lacock, The King John's Hunting Lodge. The mother of the lady who now runs the tea room was very interested in Jane Austen and we were treated to some Jane Austen-shaped shortbread from her recipe book, *Tea with the Bennets!* *Pride & Prejudice* and *Emma* were both filmed in Lacock but this was just our first *Caught in the Frame* link as Church Street in which the Lodge sits doubled as a market place in Downton Abbey when sheep, pigs and a 1-tonne bull mingled with the actors! We took a wander through the village to soak up the unique atmosphere of this unspoilt place - we really could have been stepping into a scene from many period dramas which is why the village is so popular with film producers. We took a peek into the Tithe Barn which was transformed into an Ice House with a 25 foot high wall of ice for the filming of *Wolf Man!* We passed houses used in *Harry Potter* and *Cranford*. The 'Quintessentially English' shop featured in *Escape to the Country*, and The Sign of the Angel pub in *Harry Potter*. We paused to look inside the Church before heading out into the surrounding countryside via the Packhorse Bridge over a stream. From a path through a field of sheep we gained lovely countryside views across the Avon valley as we made our way to a hamlet consisting of a few cottages, each a delight to the eye! Soon we were walking beside the River Avon. A heron stood motionless in the water while a family of swans with four cygnets glided by. Several meadows were walked, all the while with the river beside us, and across the final meadow we caught sight of Lacock Abbey. After collecting our picnics from our coach we entered the Abbey complex, firstly to enjoy the garden. The Botanic Garden proved a lovely setting for our picnic stop with its borders of flowers and greenhouse of grapes. We passed trees planted by former owner, Fox Talbot,



and we discovered the Lady Elisabeth's Rose Garden, planted for his mother. We enjoyed looking through the various optical telescopes placed on the way to the Rockworks, the remains of a folly set beside the river. Inside the Abbey we were treated to two very different atmospheres. On the ground floor the Cloisters and surrounding rooms stood as original reminders of a different era. These are a magnet to film makers, becoming the school rooms in *Harry Potter*. In contrast, upstairs we entered the comfortable former home of Fox Talbot, furnished with well-loved family furniture. Named as The Father of Photography, his first negative, and the Abbey window featured in it,

could be seen. With our appetite wetted we continued our tour in The Fox Talbot Museum which follows the history of photography from this very first image through to the modern day I-Phone!

There was just time to wander back into the village to explore inside some of the interesting shops we had passed earlier before we all met up in The Red Lion. The front of the pub was used as a shop in *Cranford* and many of the staff have been extras in various productions. Their talents didn't end there, however, for they served us with one of the best cream teas we have had to end our fabulous summer trip to Lacock!