

PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

OUR HERITAGE

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Hailey (October '15):- Beerhouses came into existence in 1830, the same year as King William IV came to the throne. Many beerhouses were named in his honour and we started our walk at one such place, the listed King William IV at Hailey. We joined a path with views across a sunny sheep field to the towers of Didcot veiled in an early autumn mist. Two red kites sat at the top of a skeletal tree and whistled at us, their shape outlined against the blue sky with which we were blessed. Autumn colours were much in evidence in our surroundings and their wonderful colours drew us into the woodland ahead. It proved a pleasant walk through the wood and from it we joined the Icknield Way, a Celtic trade route linking the Ridgeway at Goring with the North Sea coast. Pheasants, including an albino one, strutted over to the cover of a band of maize while we enjoyed the far-reaching view over a green and pleasant land tinged with autumn colours.

Soon we joined the Ridgeway, another ancient long-distance route, which we followed for two miles. What a wonderful route it proved to be as it ducked into strips of woodland with views on either side across undulating chalk downland. Sunlight glinted through the trees in shafts of golden light, illuminating the russet ferns beside us. We crunched acorns and beech nuts as our path followed the line of Grimms ditch, an Iron-age boundary which, despite its great age, shows very clearly here.

Eventually we walked beside rolling fields bathed in the autumn sunshine coming from a cloudless sky. Framed on either side by bands of autumnal trees, Wittenham Clumps rose in the distance, clearly visible after the earlier mist had been burnt off by the sun. Eventually a green lane led us back to the King William IV for a tasty lunch with stunning views out of the window.

Chazey Heath (October '15):- Our walk began by a pub with a name betraying the Heritage of the area - The Pack Horse. Pubs evolved along the Pack Horse routes to provide rest and refreshment for travellers. Nearby Mapledurham village is accessed by a steep narrow lane so pack horses would have been invaluable to remote villages such as this. Soon after passing through an attractive woodland strip near Tinkers Green (more Heritage clues in the name perhaps?) we came alongside Cross Lane Fruit Farm - or should I say the former fruit farm. Sadly after 37 years, Gill Franklin has sold the farm, leaving behind over 60 varieties of apple, pear and plum, including old English and Heritage varieties enjoyed by many Purley residents after purchasing them at the Farmers Market. Sadly we saw evidence of trees being grubbed up to provide equestrian facilities. However, we enjoyed seeing the colourful apples shining from the remaining trees for now before heading down into autumnal Walk Shaw (Shaw being the old English for thicket or small wood). In contrast to the cosy woodland, next we crossed vast open fields showing the first leaves of an autumn crop. Back at the Pack Horse we travellers were welcomed with rest and refreshment just as travellers in the past!



October 'Holiday' Walk:- A jolly group of Pathfinders enjoyed a crisp autumn walk through lovely Sulham Woods, returning to The Barn for coffee at the 'Pop-Up Cafe'.

Upper Basildon/Ashampstead Wood (November '15):- Standing aside to allow two horses and their riders to pass along a narrow bridleway was a fitting start to our walk as horses would be visible on several occasions along our route. The edge of an arable field was negotiated, there being no path yet made through the emerging crop. Fine horses looked quizzically at us from over their white ribbon fence and along the tree-lined drive of Buckholdhill Farm more horses directed their stare in our direction. A wooded path dropped towards the valley below and we enjoyed spotting various bracket fungi clinging to the trees as we made our way down. Reaching the hamlet of Slade Gate a pleasant path took us along a valley with trees rising on one side and a view up over crop fields to the woodland of Ashampstead Common on the other. Soon we were immersed in the golden glow of orange from the beech trees of this lovely wood. Next we faced a climb which eventually brought us alongside a converted Methodist Chapel dated 1872. We paused to admire this building, one of many converted chapels in this once predominately Methodist area. Dipping back into woodland we eventually arrived at The Red Lion where we were welcomed in for lunch.



Remembrance Walk (November 15):- It dawned a dull, grey day for our next walk which perhaps reflected the sombre mood as we set out on our walk of Remembrance. It was difficult to remain sombre for long, however, as we walked beside the pretty River Pang to Pangbourne. Joining the River Thames we walked beside the Gothic - style houses known as the Seven Deadly Sins before turning into woodland. At first we enjoyed walking between autumnal beech trees but then we passed through an area of conifers which kept out much of the light causing us to think of the dark woods of fairytales! However, soon back beneath beech trees we noted also spindleberry with their attractive pink and orange berries. Obviously a noteworthy plant in the area for later we passed Spindleberry Barn and a house simply called Spindleberry!

Emerging into a field we realised how sheltered we had been in the wood. Snuggling our coats closely around us we crossed a green, lush field and soon turned into a lane leading to Pangbourne College, founded in 1917 to educate and train boys for the Merchant Navy. During this week of Remembrance it was apt to visit the Falkland Chapel, built to commemorate the lives and sacrifice of those who died in the South Atlantic in 1982. Opened in 2000 by Her Majesty the Queen, the building's shape is reminiscent of a ship. Outside we took time to look at the circular memorial garden, planted with plants and grasses indigenous to The Falklands. We saw the beautiful sculpture of three albatross in flight, erected to mark the 25th anniversary of the conflict,

and behind the Chapel a poignant memorial cairn holds 255 stones brought back from the Falklands - one for each serviceman who died. Inside the foyer of the Chapel their names were found listed on plaques along with those of three islanders who also died. In the main area 550 kneelers are beautifully embroidered and 258 are embroidered with the names. We took time to sit and reflect, our gaze fixed on the striking memorial window depicting the Falkland Islands within Christ's Cross, surrounded by a lively sea in vibrant colours. We left to make our way down towards Tidmarsh and with a cold wind blowing we were pleased to reach The Greyhound where we warmed up over lunch.

Sulham (November 15):- Kicking the fallen autumn leaves as we descended through woodland, we emerged into an area of grassland and were soon enjoying the view from beside the Wilder Folly. Built by the Reverend Henry Wilder in 1769, rumoured so it could be seen from Sulhamstead House, the home of Joan whom he was courting, as well as from Sulham House where he lived. The glorious Pang Valley lay below us and it wasn't long before we were walking either beside green grassy fields or fields of emerging crops. Behind us the folly stood prominently on its hillside while ahead Sulham House nestled cosily amongst protective trees. Berried trees edged our route and at one point crab apples lay strewn across our path, all reminders of the autumn season.

We took a break at Sulham Church where, inside, we found memorials to a long line of Wilder reverends. A beautiful embroidered wall hanging commemorates 500 years of the Wilder family in Sulham. Our return route took us up through lovely Sulham Wood and on across fields back to Little Heath Road where we were reunited with our cars.



Rotherfield Greys (November 15):- Down through woodland we reached a valley path with a good view across rising fields towards Greys Court. Soon we were walking in front of this striking National Trust Property which offered us our Heritage link having been listed Grade 1 by English Heritage with its Great Tower, Cromwellian Stables and Donkey Wheel. We took advantage of the glorious woodland surrounding the property by making our way through it, eventually dropping down to then climb beside an orchard where we spotted a large herd of deer. They stood for some time before running off en masse to the sanctuary of trees. With this, amongst other special memories gleaned during our lovely walk, safely tucked away in our memories, we made our way back to Rotherfield Greys for a tasty lunch in the Maltsters Arms and a chat to the enthusiastic new owners.

Turkey/Tinsel (December 15):- We began our walk along a stretch of land once famous for one of Reading's three Bs - namely Bulbs, for we were walking through part of the Floral Mile. On this winters day there were no flowers to be seen as we cut across past polytunnels housing potted shrubs. Open fields led us to a copse in which we followed a winding path, often crossing plank bridges over wet areas draining into a pond. Emerging near the attractive 16th century Northbury Farm, a former Mansion House, we crossed into Church Lane to soon reach the entrance of St James the Great Church set in the heart of Ruscombe's conservation area. We took advantage of our break to look inside this interesting 12th century church where we found 13th century wall paintings, a 17th century pulpit and pews, beautiful stained glass windows and the Ten Commandments written above the Chancel as ordered in 1560 by Queen Elizabeth 1.

The clock on the west wall, installed to commemorate those who fell in WW1, signalled it was time to leave. Passing a large flock of pheasants in their paddocks we continued along field edges to eventually return to the Horse & Groom for a festive lunch. Our festive mood continued as we crossed to the Wyevale Garden Centre to browse amongst their Christmas goodies.

Christmas Party (December 15):- As usual our party day began with a walk in our local Winter Wonderland, this year along the Thames with all its usual waterfowl present in great numbers either on the water, along the banks, or, as in the case of the cormorants, perched in trees.

Back at St Mary's the aroma of mulled wine greeted us and soon we were enjoying a glass, or two, whilst tucking in to the vast and varied dishes which made up the shared lunch. Over a cuppa and slice of Christmas cake a review of the year's Heritage themed walks was heard before we were entertained by one of our talented members, Marjy, with renditions of some of her amusing poems. The Pathfinder Choir treated us to a selection of carols before we ended with a rousing We wish you a Merry Christmas. As always a jolly time was had by all and a perfect way to end the Pathfinder's year of Heritage walks.

May I use the space here to thank you all once again for your very generous gifts, presented to me by The Queen and Prince Philip! I have booked a Patisserie course with Alexis, former contestant on Masterchef and Roge has booked our caravan onto a site in nearby Bourton-on-the-Water, turning what will be a very special day into a mini-break! We plan to do similar in Bath to coincide with the spa treat! The pictures I coveted at Gilbert White's will soon be installed on the wall now the Christmas decorations have come down. I will love looking at their fine detail and remembering a lovely day out in Hampshire. Thankyou!