

## PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORT

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### THANKYOU! THANKYOU! THANKYOU!

My day at the Jean-Christophe Novelli Academy was absolutely fabulous!! Thankyou so much for giving me such a wonderful gift for Christmas! I've probably bored several of you describing my day which took place on 19<sup>th</sup> July, but make no excuse for telling you here all about it!

At 10am the gates opened and I entered the courtyard in front of an attractive, large Hertfordshire farmhouse, home to Jean-Christophe and his family. I had chosen a course called 'Here come the Girls' and 'the girls' turned out to be a very friendly



The table in the garden

bunch of 11 of us in all. We were shown into an area at the side of the courtyard where stood the most amazing marble table set with cafetiers of coffee and plates of homemade shortbread. Yum! Behind this a host of vegetables grew, and nearby, a wall topped with tubs of herbs concealed yet another table. Here we were introduced to various herbs and given advice on how to prepare and use them in the kitchen. Afterwards we were ushered into the farmhouse and were faced with a breathtaking kitchen with, standing in pride of place in the centre, a huge bright yellow range embossed with the name, Jean-Christophe Novelli.

On either side, marble worktops formed a horseshoe and having chosen our positions around it, the cooking began. A wonderful lady led us through a range of dishes throughout the day – nothing pretentious, but all items I felt I could replicate at home. I was most impressed that she showed no signs of airs and graces despite having worked on the television. Carefully and clearly she showed us what to do, and with much laughter and jollity accompanying our efforts, the group gelled quickly.

The morning was spent making bread, preparing a cake base for a cheesecake and a risotto to use later. We also used ring moulds to form attractive salad towers topped with pancetta & quail's eggs. A round loaf of bread was presented to us and, once the top had been cut off, inside was revealed a melted camembert cheese. This was eagerly devoured for lunch! In the afternoon the topping for the cheesecake was made and fresh fruits mulled to accompany it. We each boned a plump chicken leg and stuffed it with the risotto prepared earlier, and made potato latkes topped with smoked salmon. Taking a break back out in the sunny garden, we found welcome jugs of Pimms awaiting us. The range had been working overtime and our break gave the chance for the large gas bottle fuelling it to be changed. This took longer than expected but we didn't mind a bit, especially as the jugs of Pimms had been replenished! Back in the kitchen we set about making tarte tatin. Left-over caramel gave me the opportunity to attempt something I've long fancied trying – making a spun sugar basket just like James Martin!



Making Spun Sugar Baskets



With all the food now prepared, cutlery was laid and wine glasses filled and we set about eating the fruits of our labour! The salad tower became the starter, and the stuffed, boned chicken and potato latkes the main, served with chunks of our handmade bread. There was a choice of the two desserts but as no-one could decide, we ate both! – the cheesecake and the tarte tatin!

We were just finishing off when in walked Jean-Christophe to chat to us all over a glass of wine. Thoroughly charming, he wanted to know all about us, and how we had enjoyed the day. He (quite unnecessarily) apologised for the delay over the gas bottle, and as way of an apology presented us all with a special bottle of extra virgin olive oil. Photos were taken in the garden then at 5.15pm the truly fabulous day ended and I made my way out through the gates to leave Jean-Christophe to play with 2 year old Jean-Christophe junior! THANKYOU! I had a great day!



Jean-Christophe & Me!

**Hampstead Norreys (June 10):-** We admired the newly created Pangside garden beside the Grade 11 oak structure over the Hampstead Norreys well before crossing into the churchyard of the 12<sup>th</sup> century St Mary's Church. Here we found the unusual Lousely monument, cast from 3 tons of melted iron implements. Woodland led us into fields where the paths followed the course of the Pang, leading us out of the village to eventually cross the river beside a ford. Climbing up through a field with many splendid orchids at our feet, we gained a lovely wide view. Reaching the outskirts of Yattendon, we crossed meadows full of sheep with their sweet lambs before making our way back to Hampstead Norreys via the site of the airfield constructed during WW11. Here Wellington Bombers were first based, and Albermarles & Horsa gliders left from here for the D Day Landings, 66 years ago. It was good to see the hangars filled with planes for pleasure rather than war, and the skies filled with melodious songs of skylarks rather than gunfire. From the hilltop we 'flew' down the hill to the White Hart for lunch.

**Swallowfield (June 10):-** Set within the triangle of the Rivers Loddon, Whitewater and Blackwater, it was the latter we followed as we set out from Swallowfield on a sunny morning. The river looked splendid with clumps of water lilies on its surface and wild flowers tumbling down its banks, grazed by dragonflies. We paused at Thatcher's Ford where the old Roman Road, The Devil's Highway, crosses the river on its way from Silchester to London. With the river never far away we walked along the edges of several meadows before climbing a tree-lined bridleway, made colourful by clumps of rhododendrons. During this week of the World Cup if we had had any hopes of escaping from football during our walk we were disappointed as, from the brow of a hill, we had a good view of the Madjeski Stadium! The wind turbine alongside it looked resplendent in the sunshine, as did the water tower on its distant Tilehurst hill. Soon we entered the parkland grounds of Swallowfield Park with sheep grazing beneath stately trees. After a brief view of the mansion we turned to walk between newly planted hedgerows to the George & Dragon for lunch.

**Inkpen & Walbury Hill (June 10):-** Inkpen stands in an area of outstanding beauty and we weren't going to argue with that description as we set out past some of its numerous thatched cottages and on through glorious open meadows. Up on the hillside we spotted the Coombe Gibbet erected in 1676 to hold the bodies of a murderous pair as a lesson to others! Later we would be standing beneath it, but first we continued down in the valley to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Inkpen Church. The Treasurer was on hand to give us a quick, informative tour of the inside with its marvellous wall paintings and wooden carvings. Soon we were walking between fields of broad beans with Inkpen Beacon on which the Gibbet stands looming up ahead of us. Our climb began gradually with skylarks encouraging us with their songs. As we neared the summit the climb became very steep



but we pressed on valiantly beneath the hot sun. Eventually we reached the top! Hoorah! With little breath left, we stood in awed silence with a vast panorama laid out before us – magnificent! We all agreed the climb had been worth it and we wouldn't have missed it for the world! With a new spring in our step we walked across the Beacon towards the Gibbet, enjoying the view all around. A further climb was to come, however, but thankfully a very gradual one to reach the highest point in Berkshire on Walbury Hill. Infact our path was a pleasure, strewn with orchids and other wild flowers, and still with an outstanding view all around from this Iron Age Hillfort. Increasingly the valley below became more wooded, and amongst the trees we spotted West Woodhay House. We dropped down the hillside and, once down in the valley, walked along the road into West Woodhay to pass its manor house. We looked up towards the Gibbet

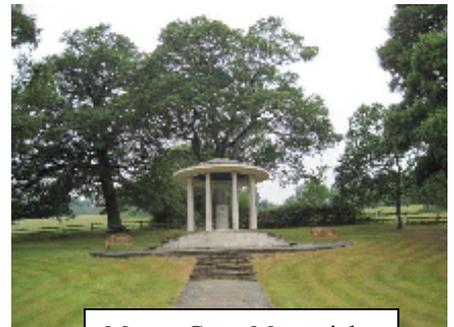
– amazed that only a few moments ago 'we were there!' Back at the Crown & Garter we enjoyed a well-deserved lunch, the exhilaration of our achievement making for some rather rowdy conversation!

**Mapledurham (June 10):-** From Chazey Heath we joined the Chiltern Way where a sign announced 'Mapledurham 1 ½ miles'. We followed the twisting path with manicured grass of the golf course to one side, and rough, flower-filled meadows on the other. Various landmarks popped into view between hedges, with the distinct curve of The Blade in Reading town centre level with us at one point. We entered the woodland of Park Wood, once the 'garden' of Mapledurham House and landscaped by William Kent & Alexander Pope. We came upon Old Palm, a statue probably left over from this time in the 1740's, and enjoyed his view over the Mapledurham estate. Once down in the village we wandered through the historic street to take a break at the church set beside the manor house. We took a look inside before wandering along to look at the watermill, the only working watermill on the Thames. With fond memories of our 2008 birthday trip to the village we left via a path made in the 1600's to link Mapledurham with Reading. We followed it as far as the Warren in Caversham, enjoying the view over to 'our' side of the river. Eventually we climbed up to join a footpath, once more through the golf course, which led us back to Chazey Heath where we lunched in the sunny garden of the Pack Saddle.

**Silchester (July 10):-** Meeting at the car park beside the remains of the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum we began our walk beside the ancient ramparts, enjoying the cooler air after weeks of hot weather. Soon we had our first glimpse of the Roman defensive wall which would have surrounded the settlement all those years ago, yet, amazingly preserved. We continued through several meadows, some grazed by cows with their calves, and some holding healthy crops, despite the dry weather. Hedgerows promised a good future harvest with hazelnuts and blackberries in abundance. Eventually we came across a wonderful section of the eastern Roman town wall, several feet high, with the church of St Mary's beside it. Inside the 12<sup>th</sup> century church we found many treasures, including embroidered kneelers, Tudor chancel screen, 13<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings, a canopied pulpit and lovely stained glass. Back outside we passed more sections of the ancient wall as we made our way to the Amphitheatre. Walking around the edge above the arena we could appreciate its grand scale. We walked through the centre of the arena, imagining seating on the banks filled with, typically, up to 7,250 spectators eager to watch gladiators in combat, wild beast fights or public executions! We left the, now peaceful, spot and walked beside well preserved parts of the north wall where a notice board next to the one-time North Gate entrance showed how grand it was in Roman times. Soon we spotted the community of tents, home to archaeology students for 6 weeks each year since 1997 when excavations began, following earlier excavations by the Victorians. We were met by our Guide for the rest of the morning, Amanda. From walkways we watched students busily digging, scraping and recording various areas within the 'dig' site while Amanda explained that they were excavating only a small part of the former 107 acres of Calleva Atrebatum. She trained our eyes to spot rooms, fireplaces, footings, wells etc from what at first appeared to be just a dusty piece of land with mounds and dips. Gradually, life in Roman times unfolded within our imaginations, and feeling we knew so much more of the early life of Silchester, we gathered in front of a table where the 'Finds Manager' held an exciting-looking box. One by one she took out items discovered during the 'dig'

so far this summer, including possibly the earliest dated find – a bronze image of a winged Egyptian God. This rare find from the 1<sup>st</sup> century was probably imported from the Mediterranean. We felt privileged as she passed round one treasure after another including brooches, glass beads, a bronze handle in the detailed shape of a leg and foot, a flagon lid shaped like a dolphin, and even gaming counters and dice! The feeling of holding these ancient pieces of history in our hands was amazing – perfect for our History themed year!

**Summertime Special – Runnymede, Eton & Windsor (July 10):-** Disembarking from our coach at Runnymede, anticipation mounted for a fabulous day full of history. A clear path tempted us to cross Longmede Meadow, used for centuries for hay making, and soon arrived at the first of three historical monuments which we would be visiting during our walk, the Magna Carta Memorial. In 1215 King John met with rebel Barons at Runnymede to seal the Magna Carta, one of the most important documents in history, proposing equality of all men before the law. The same principles were exported to the United States and in 1957 the American Bar Association commissioned the erection of the Memorial before which we now stood. Designed by Edward Maufe, it looked stunning within its hedged and neatly mown enclosure, reminiscent of a Greek Temple sheltering a pillar of granite. From upon the pillar we read ‘To Commemorate Magna Carta – Symbol of Freedom Under Law’.



Magna Carta Memorial

To reach our next Memorial involved a gentle climb, but even this proved symbolic as we climbed the 50 granite steps thought to represent the 50 American States, or 50 years of the life of John F. Kennedy, for they led to the John F. Kennedy Memorial. Set in an acre of land given to the USA in honour of his memory, the simplicity of the 7-tonne slab of Portland stone speaks volumes. Quotes from his inaugural speech are engraved on the stone, and behind it an American scarlet oak stands, its leaves poignantly turning red in November, the month of Kennedy’s assassination.

The route to the next Memorial took us through the woodland and meadows of Cooper’s Hill with views down to the River Thames. After a short refreshment break we walked between stone pillars towards the striking building of the Air Forces Memorial. It’s hilltop position seemed appropriate for those who spent their lives in the skies. Beneath the figure of an eagle with outstretched wings is inscribed the RAF motto which, translated, reads ‘Through Hardship to the Stars’. Thoughtfully, we walked within cloisters where are recorded the names of 20,456 members of the Allied Forces who died during World War 11 but have no known grave. Giving the impression of partly opened stone books, the ‘pages’ seemed endless. At each end the cloisters curve outwards like wings, ending in look-out points for a view across the valley. For those who wished to climb the spiral stairs, a gallery above gave an even better view. Further steps led up to the roof where a 360 degree view took in Windsor Castle, River Thames, Heathrow Airport, and the Fairhaven Memorial Lodges where our walk had begun. We read from the Queen’s speech, made upon her opening the Memorial in 1953, ‘the men and women who possess it (freedom) will thank them and will say they did not die in vain’. We signed the Visitor Book and left to walk *freely* within the waving grasses of Runnymede Meadows, passing Langham Pond, a SSSI. Soon we reached the Thames to walk beside its reflective surface, rippled by boats and waterfowl.



Henry VI statue in School Yard

Back at our coach picnics were collected and devoured before we were transported to Eton for the next stage of our day – a tour of Eton College. Our guides gave us an insight into life at the College both past and present as we toured various areas including School Yard with its statue of the founder of the College, Henry VI, and Lower School where we sat on uncomfortable wooden benches behind desks engraved with names of former pupils who had become bored during lessons! The Colonnade below Upper School holds names of former Etonians linked with World Wars 1 & 11. We recognised the name Archibold Selwin Pryor, Chaplain of the Forces, and father of Purley resident, Sybil Pryor. We entered the Chapel with a WOW! Amazing stained glass windows took our breath away. We were told that virtually all the windows had been replaced 60 years ago after the originals were blown out by a bomb which landed in the School Yard during the Blitz. We were lucky that a choir attending a summer school were practising in the Chapel for a concert later in the day. With the music floating out from the highly decorative organ pipes we were treated to a preview! What a treat! Housed in the cellars of College Hall, the Museum of Eton Life illustrates the life and history of Eton since its foundation in 1440. A model of a pupil stands dressed in the same style of uniform as it

remains today, although the top hats were discarded during the war when the boys found them impossible to deal with alongside gas masks! The fierce reign of headmaster, Dr Keates is highlighted with a display of his tricorne hat, birches and swishing block, while happier times are recorded with a mock-up of a Fourth of June procession with crews standing precariously in boats with oars raised vertically. One wall holds photographs of several famous Old Etonians. Along with the Princes William and Harry, Matthew Pinsent is popular as the boys were given a day off for each of the four gold medals he won at the Olympics. David Cameron is also popular – nothing to do with politics – but his victory in the election meant another day off!

Our tour completed, we wandered down the interesting Eton High Street to cross the Thames into Windsor. Here ‘free time’ gave the opportunity for a boat trip, open top bus ride, shopping etc. We met up again in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Drury House once home to Nell Gwyne, History oozes from within with original mouldings, panelling and fireplaces. The restaurant’s cellar now stands at the entrance to a tunnel along which Nell would travel for secret rendezvous with her lover, Charles 11 at Windsor Castle opposite! In these historical surroundings we ended our wonderful, history-filled day with a delicious cream tea.