

PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

HISTORY

distributed with Sept/Oct'10 prog

Aldermaston (April '10):- On a lovely sunny day we left the centre of Aldermaston with its 17th & 19th century houses, many listed, and headed for the peacefulness of the Kennet Valley. Up on the hillside we spotted the 12th century St Mary's Church, partially hidden by trees which were now sporting fresh new leaves. Our path proved delightful with frothy blossom along the hedgerows, and numerous greens in the fields around us.

Soon the noise of rushing water floated on the air and we headed across a field to find, firstly, the calm, smooth water of the millstream. Then came the contrast, and the source of the noise, as we crossed a bridge over the water, now a foaming torrent as it dived down into the depths below. Beneath a further bridge the water calmed once more, and we stood to gaze at the lovely view of Padworth Mill which in the past would have used the power of the water to grind flour.

We joined a pleasant path beneath a canopy of chestnut trees to arrive at Aldermaston Wharf just as a boat had manoeuvred through the lift bridge. We enjoyed a coffee during our break in the sunny garden of the Visitor Centre before continuing our walk by following the course of the Kennet & Avon Canal. Fish broke through the glistening surface and mallards paddle along beside us. Cheerful boats lined up along the water's edge where the banks billowed with mace, comfrey and lady's smock. Meanwhile, orange-tip butterflies vied for attention within the colourful scene. Further on, two buzzards patrolled the blue sky above horse chestnut trees, sporting their huge 'candles' of blooms. Eventually we left the canal to join a lane leading to the 18th century Old Mill, another former flour mill, set in its idyllic waterside spot. Through a copse and across a series of very green fields we arrived back at Aldermaston where lunch was enjoyed in the Hinds Head.

Bagnor & Boxford (May '10):- The start of our walk featured yet another mill for we began near the Watermill Theatre which, although 19th century, stands on the site of a mill which is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086! We passed the pretty clematis and wisteria covered cottages of Bagnor to cross the clear waters of the River Lambourne. We joined the Lambourne Valley Way which took us along country paths from where gaps in the



hedgerows allowed us splendid views over the lush Lambourne Valley. Suddenly our path plunged into the epitome of England – a stunning bluebell wood. Sprinkled with the white of stitchwort and the yellow of archangel it was a sight to behold! We continued through arable farmland and soon the river, which had never been far away, flowed in to join us as its banks widened. We followed its course amidst a froth of cherry blossom, pussy willow, and the huge candles of the occasional horse chestnut. This pleasant route led us to Boxford, a 'chocolate-box village' of old thatched cottages set in beautiful riverside gardens. We admired the former mill with its white, lattice windows, and door set high in a wall. This mill is also mentioned in the Domesday Book and it was interesting to learn that the thatch opposite was once the Bakehouse. We were

reminded of further 'times gone by' when we crossed the Lambourne via a bridge dated 1880, glad that we were on foot and not in charge of 'a locomotive traction engine or other ponderous carriages' as these are deemed too heavy for the bridge as outlined on a plaque! We passed the 13th century Church and then left Boxford on an uphill lane from where we enjoyed far-reaching country views. We reached the next historical point of our walk – Boxford Common, once an Iron Age settlement. After a break we cut across the middle of the Common, edged with bright yellow gorse bushes, and grazed by sheep and gambolling lambs. Oak trees just coming into leaf drew us beneath their canopies and, once inside the wood we came across a large dip filled with bluebells and looking just like a lake! Emerging from the trees, we were greeted with splendid views over rolling open countryside – a mixture of yellow rape and oh so green fields. As we plunged through the centre of this marvellous scenery, ahead we spotted Cottington Hill and Watership Down on the horizon. With the sun shining on us, and birds singing joyfully around us, we made our way back to Bagnor where The Blackbird served us with a delicious lunch.

Sulham & Cherry Acre (May '10):- Exactly eleven years to the day since Pathfinder's first ever walk, we left Purley Village with splendid views from the bridleway and made our way into Sulham Wood. Meandering through the bluebells we breathed in the delightful scent and scene within. Eventually we dropped down a field where deer could be seen bobbing up and down above the crops. Across the lane we entered pleasant meadows on the edge of Pangbourne which led us into the village. From here, the footpath was joined with its lovely views to take us back to Purley, wiggling a little on the way to pass along the path burgeoning with colourful shrubs which borders the former home of the Sheik. Back in Purley Village everyone gathered in the sunny garden of Cherry Acre to eat their picnics. Afterwards the birthday cakes were cut in celebration of eleven years of Purley Pathfinders. Yeah!!

Birthday Trip to The Seaside:- In celebration of our eleventh birthday we boarded our coach early in the morning, determined to make a full day of it! At last we could see the sea, and having made good time we fitted in a coffee break before excitedly boarding our Yellow Ferry. We were soon on our way across the Bay, taking the



opportunity to look at the houses which make up part of Millionaire's Row at Sandbanks. Brownsea Island is 500 acres of peace and tranquillity and, once on the island, we set out on a walk which took in its wide variety of habitats which make it such an important place for wildlife – and location for Autumnwatch and Springwatch! With cliff top paths, heathland, mixed woodland, pinewoods, freshwater lakes and brackish lagoon we enjoyed a very varied walk and even dropped down at one point to walk along the beach. We were delighted to be greeted onto the sand by the island's resident oystercatchers, flitting in and out from the sandy banks and strutting along beside us. Magical! By its very nature as an island, we were treated to stunning sea views for much of the walk.

Despite keeping our eyes peeled we didn't see any of the 200 red squirrels which make the island their home, but we saw plenty of evidence of their presence in the chewed fir cones scattered on the ground -not surprising as each squirrel eats the seeds from 100 pine cones a day! The peacocks, however, did their best to make up for our disappointment, popping up throughout our walk to 'strut their stuff' in magnificent displays of feathers!

With this being our 'History' themed year we learnt some of the island's varied past, from its daffodil and pottery industries, through its' use as a decoy to protect Poole Harbour in World War 11, to its hosting the very first Scout Camp under the leadership of Robert Baden-Powell. We took our break at the Baden-Powell Visitor Centre to look at the displays there.



We ended our walk with a picnic on the expansive lawns, joined by several hens and a few peacocks. Afterwards there was a period of free time during which we could explore further – the Church with its interesting interior and displays, the Visitor Centre with more displays and an informative video, the hides overlooking the lagoon, the shop and the café. There were, also, over 50 benches to relax on – many with spectacular views.

All too soon our ferry came to collect us, but more treats lay in store as our coach ferried us the short distance to Bournemouth. Free time here gave us chance to stroll along the Promenade past the jolly beach huts, get the sand between our toes along part of the 7 miles of award winning beach, enjoy a Pimms on the Pier or an ice-cream amongst the flowerbeds of the Winter Gardens, play crazy golf, or browse in the shops. There was only one way to end our day at the seaside – Fish and Chips! - so we all met up at Harry Ramsden's to finish our day out in traditional style!

Henley & Greys Court (May'10):- In 1851 Mary Russell Mitford described Greys Court thus, 'Framed like a picture by the rarest and stateliest of trees and erect amongst the remains of a vast castellated mansion' Over 150 years later we recognised this view and looked forward to visiting this wonderful National Trust property after our walk. First, however, we set out in the sunshine following one glorious field edge after another to eventually arrive in Henley beside the ornate, gothic gatehouse of Friar Park, once home to George Harrison of The Beatles fame. We climbed beside its boundary to take our break at the top, admiring a weathervane sporting two Red Kites.

Soon we were crossing the Golf Course towards a gap through which we delved into the welcome shade of Lambridge Woods, a SSSI. We enjoyed a wander through these glorious woods, emerging onto National Trust parkland from where we made our way amongst the sheep back to Greys Court. Blankets were spread out on the grass and picnics devoured before we made our way to the property. The series of gardens were as beautiful and interesting as ever with clematis covered arches, the first roses in the Rose Garden, newts in the pond in the White Garden, healthy vegetables growing in the Walled Garden, and the magnificent wisteria 'doing its thing' for us along the famous Wisteria Walk! Fantastic! The 14th century Great Tower was climbed by an intrepid few who were rewarded with great views over the garden and surrounding countryside.

2010 has seen the exciting opening of the upstairs of the house for the first time so, armed with our timed tickets, we explored not only the downstairs, but the upstairs Library of Sir Felix and the bedroom of Lady Brunner, prettily accessorised with her embroidery and other pieces of craftwork, reflecting her enduring links with the Women's Institute. Afterwards we took advantage of the lovely sunshine to sit around tables in the garden with tea and cake. Aaah! This is the life! Many of us felt we were on yet another of our Special trips!!

NOTE:- Look out for pictures from these walks soon on revamped website!! www.purleypathfinders.co.uk
Read about the rest of our summer walks in the next write-up. We've had some lovely ones!