

PURLEY PATHFINDERS WALK REPORTS

Distributed with Sept/Oct '11 programme

Rotherfield Greys (April '11):- From the church in Rotherfield Greys a blue haze beckoned us into a wood where our path led us down a waterfall of bluebells. At the bottom we were greeted by a rising field drifting with cowslips. Already the endorphins were rising as we continued along the bottom edge of the field to join a medieval hollow-way alongside a field of sheep with their sweet lambs. This walk was just getting better and better! More was still to come as, after climbing through more lovely woodland, we arrived at the blissful hamlet of Shepherds Green where pretty cottages were swamped in wisteria, cherry blossom and lilac – a heady mixture for both the eyes and the nose!

Through further bluebell woods and across open parkland, dotted with the occasional majestic tree, we discussed the heart-warming news that the once threatened red kites now have over 400 breeding pairs in the Chilterns. It was great to watch their aerial acrobatics in the blue sky above us. Soon we were walking through the grounds and in front of a farmhouse, home to actor Simon Williams and his actress wife, Lucy Fleming, niece of Ian Fleming, creator of Bond - James Bond, providing a good link to our 2011 Arts theme! From National Trust bluebell woods and green meadows we emerged alongside Greys Court from where we made our way back to Rotherfield Greys for lunch. Before driving home, several of us took the opportunity to visit Greys Court where the wisteria was at its most stunning, set off by the carpet of bluebells beneath it. Magical!

Watlington (May '11):- (Thanks Laura for these details) A lovely morning was spent walking from the Chiltern village of Watlington which included a climb up Watlington Hill. Efforts were rewarded with outstanding views! As well as this view the walk will be remembered for the stunning rape fields, lovely bluebell woods, and the multitude of red kites soaring overhead. At the halfway point a welcome interlude was taken in Christmas Common where new owners of the pub welcomed us in for coffee – very generous as the official grand re-opening was not scheduled until that evening!

Birthday Walk & Picnic (May '11):- On 11th May we celebrated our 12th birthday by recreating the very first walk. After enjoying the splendid views to be had along the bridleway from Purley Village, we walked in Sulham Woods where unfortunately, unlike the first walk in 1999, the bluebells were virtually over. The woods, however, still proved a lovely place to walk and to take a photograph of members who were on that first ever walk. Back in Purley Village picnics and birthday cakes were enjoyed in the sunshine in the garden of Cherry Acre.

Richmond & Kew Trip:- Further birthday celebrations were had on a trip to Richmond Park. This huge National Nature Reserve provided much variety with woodland, grassland, and ponds. William Wordsworth's sonnet records the choirs of nightingales he heard here but we were satisfied with the songs of numerous other birds, especially the parakeets as they flew in a green flash from one ancient tree to another.

Entering the gardens of Pembroke Lodge we paused at Poet's Corner with its reference to James Thomson, famous for his series of poems known as The Seasons. Surrounded by purple and lilac irises we found Ian Drury's bench engraved with the title of his song, 'Reasons to be Cheerful'. We had plenty to be cheerful about as we continued through the lovely gardens beside colourful rhododendrons and rose gardens. Reaching King Henry's Mound we read the quote from The Seasons on the ground, but our eyes were soon drawn to the wonderful clear view over the Thames Valley, spotting Windsor Castle, 13 ½ miles, Runnymede 12 miles, and the distant Chilterns. The opposite direction held a very special view protected by an Act of Parliament, to St Paul's Cathedral 10 miles away. One of England's most famous artists, J.M.W. Turner is buried in St Paul's but his work lives on. His painting of the view from Richmond Hill hangs in the Tate Gallery.

Pembroke Lodge was once home to Nobel Prize in Literature winner, Bertrand Russell, and from the terrace in front of the lodge an expansive view lay before us, inspiration to many artists and writers. We took our break with time to enjoy coffee in the lovely garden before walking along the escarpment edge, making the most of the view.

Soon we entered the Isabella Plantation where a meandering route led us past many of its special areas. Rhododendrons and azaleas in many beautiful colours formed banks beside our paths. A pretty stream trickled between water-loving plants, linking two reflective ponds where ducks and coots dabbled with their chicks.

Leaving this magical place we walked towards the blue surface of two lakes beside which we sat to eat our picnics.

We were entertained by the antics of the wildlife, especially two herons, their huge wingspan stretched to maximum as they vied for superiority on the lake. We finished our walk, spotting White Lodge across the lake. Once a Royal Palace it gave us yet another link with The Arts for it is now home to The Royal Ballet School. Crossing a large area of grassland we were delighted to walk close to a herd of about 30 young fallow deer. They stood for photos before eventually taking off, running in a long line in a scene worthy of any



wildlife programme! As we approached our coach through trees we came upon a herd of adult deer sporting fine sets of antlers, a lovely scene on which to end our varied, interesting and picturesque walk. We made the short drive to Kew Gardens. Holding the finest plant collection in the world within its 300 acres we knew we would have to be selective as there was so much to see. A ride on the Kew Explorer afforded a glimpse of the main areas of interest, whilst on foot several areas could be explored further. Highlights were the Rhododendron Dell, the lake with its numerous ducklings and cygnets, huge waterlilies in the Waterlily House, roses on archways, and the experience of walking level with the crowns of trees along the Treetop Walkway! Time was allowed to visit the galleries to view the marvellous Botanical Art lining the walls. We all met up in the Pavillion Restaurant where delicious scones were served with cream and interesting 'orange jam' ! A first!



Reflective lake at Kew

All in all a great day out to celebrate our 12th birthday!

Henley/Marsh Lock (May '11):- It was a perfect day for walking – sunny with a slight breeze – as we walked beside the sparkling Thames from Henley. After a while we left the river to make our way towards Harpsden where we paused to look inside the 12th century Church. Outside again, our eyes were drawn to the barns of Harpsden Court Farm opposite, for the walls are made up of old wallpaper blocks. The hand-carved patterns could be clearly seen. We enjoyed walking through this Area of Outstanding Beauty appreciating why it is popular as a film location. Episodes of Miss Marple, Midsomer Murders, and even parts of the James Bond film, Quantum of Solace have been filmed here, but on this day all was peaceful and quiet. Quiet that is but for the loud tweeting of baby birds, coming from inside a hole in a tree trunk beside us as we climbed into the trees of Harpsden Wood! We took a break in a sunny glade before making our way through this Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Dropping down a bridleway we crossed into Bolney Lane to walk beneath a grand avenue of horse chestnut trees. We paused beside the magnificent gardens of Thameside Court with its narrow gauge railway track complete with impressive station building. Soon we were beside the Thames and as we walked along the stretch known as Cottage Reach we mused over Jerome K Jerome's description, 'It is a part of the river in which to dream of bygone days'. Sigh!! As boats made their way through Harpsden Lock we entered the wooden foot bridges over the powerful weir. We couldn't help but linger, especially as a pair of swans brought their family of four cygnets to show us. Our route back to Henley took us through a Nature Reserve and on beside the river. Lunch was enjoyed on the terrace of The River & Rowing Museum, home to the animated Wind in the Willows display. This being 'Chelsea' week it was interesting to see 'Ratty's Refuge'. This garden was sponsored by the Museum in the 2008 Chelsea Flower Show where it was awarded a Bronze Medal. The garden was transported to its present position and formerly opened by Alan Titmarsh. Several 'Rattys' (water voles) have made it their home. Now that's worthy of a Gold Medal surely!?



Old Thatch:- We met up socially during half term for a tour around the grounds of Old Thatch, former home of Enid Blyton. After looking around the fairytale gardens we enjoyed refreshments, sitting amongst cottage garden favourites planted beside Enid's well and the pond which she dug herself. The only thing missing was lashings of ginger beer, but we didn't complain when the lovely owner, Jacky, served us with cups of tea and homemade cake!

Ewelme (June '11):- On this first walk in June the gardens of the pretty cottages of Ewelme were awash with colour as we made our way along the main street. The clear waters of the chalk stream led us to the Watercress Beds Visitor Centre. We remembered past visits to the 6 ½ acre site cared for by the Chiltern Society. We continued our walk to an historical complex made up of the School, Cloisters and Church. We took time to soak up the atmosphere exuding from each one. Firstly the school built in 1437, then the Cloisters where the attractive almshouses surrounding the courtyard are built with the earliest known bricks. Birds have made the rafters their home and we were delighted to see house-martin chicks peering open-mouthed over the edge of their nest. Entering the ancient Church we were surprised to be greeted by a film crew! We agreed that Ewelme is a worthy choice of location for their future BBC4 programme on Medieval children, for here children attend a thatched playgroup before moving up to what claims to be the oldest Church school in England! The crew kindly took a break while we explored inside this wonderful place with its Chaucer family tombs and exquisite wall paintings.

Our walk continued by leaving the village behind to head out into glorious countryside. At first, crop fields were edged with the bright red of wild poppies, then the more usual crops were replaced with commercially grown poppies which covered the ground with a delicate shade of lilac, stretching to the horizon on either side of our path. This marvellous sight continued across several fields before we came alongside a field of happily routing pigs. From amongst them came the raucous song of crows like a large pack of drunken hooligans. Not at all as sweet as the choirs of skylarks which had accompanied us for much of the walk so far! Soon we were back in the village where the new owners of the Shepherds Hut served us a delicious lunch – the perfect ending to a perfect walk.

Bradfield & Stanford Dingley (June '11):- Rushall Farm is managed organically which not only benefits wildlife but also benefited us when we walked across its meadows rich in wildflowers. Our route took us to Stanford Dingley where walking through the village on this sunny June morning was bliss. Cottage windows peeped out amongst roses and clematis while the River Pang trickled its way through the flower-filled gardens. More beauty lay before us as we followed the Pang for about half a mile. Ducklings paddled on the reflective



Amazing poppy fields

surface and trout darted in the clear water. We left the river via a path between gardens where the 'bugles' of honeysuckle 'blew scent instead of sound', just as described by Samuel Pepys! After enjoying the cluster of attractive buildings of Bradfield set beside the Pang we headed into open fields. Walking through the middle of these was an amazing experience for they were red with the bobbing heads of millions of wild poppies.

Wow!

We finished by walking through the lovely woodland of Rushall Farm, then gathering our picnics we returned to Stanford Dingley to picnic in the splendid garden of Ingle Spring. After offering us tea and cake, Indra took us on a guided tour of her 2 ½ acre garden complete with its own river. Indra proudly showed us a patch of orchids which have sprung up in an area disturbed by Purley Pathfinders in 2009 when planting daffodils during our 10th birthday year! The garden, and Indra herself, were both as delightful as ever. What a lovely day it had been!



Indra's Garden

Salisbury Flower Festival & Constable Exhibition (June '11):- Several Pathfinders attended this 'extra' trip, many eager to return to the interesting city of Salisbury following our trip in 2010. Despite a very wet journey we arrived in Salisbury in sunshine! There was time for coffee before gathering at the North door of the Cathedral to be fast tracked to the inside. WOW!! Over 500 flower arrangers had worked, between them, over 100,000 hours using thousands of flower stems to transform every part of the Cathedral into a scented floral triumph!

Later in the afternoon we were allowed access into the Salisbury & Wiltshire Museum where paintings and drawings by the artist, Constable, had been gathered. It was wonderful to see so many of his paintings all in one place. We wondered who was fortunate enough to own the painting set in pride of place – that of Salisbury Cathedral as seen across the water meadows, and labelled as owned by a 'Private Collector'. Our ticket also allowed us to wander round other parts of the Museum and we were particularly interested in the area dedicated to Stonehenge after our autumn 2010 visit. Free time allowed further exploration of Salisbury, and a must was to walk beside the river in the Queen Elizabeth Gardens to look at that special view captured on canvas by Constable. Fab!



Constable flower festival exhibit

Marlow (June '11):- To tie in with our Arts theme our route was planned to pass the former home of Percy Bysshe Shelley and his wife, Mary where he wrote *The Revolt of Islam* and she finished *Frankenstein*. Further along West Street we saw the blue plaque signifying the former home of author and poet, Thomas Love Peacock, and still further, another on the one-time home of T.S.Eliot. Soon we left the 'bustling, lively little town' as described by Jerome K Jerome, and headed for the countryside above it gaining lovely views down over the tops of trees and into the valley below. Blackberries in the hedgerows beside us promised a bumper autumn crop but we were content to enjoy this glorious summer's day. Our route down was via a lovely, wide grassy path cutting through rising meadows grazed by numerous butterflies including several Marbled Whites – a lovely sight. We could appreciate why this stretch is known as Happy Valley! It certainly cheered us as we dropped down to join the Thames near Temple Lock.

We enjoyed the river as a canoe whizzed past whilst a heron stood motionless. Swans paraded their four cygnets, and coots fussed over their tiny offspring. Soon on the opposite bank we spotted the lovely buildings of Bisham Abbey, now the National Sports Centre, sitting beside the attractive 12th century Bisham Church. Floating on the clear surface at the water's edge, buds of water lilies hinted at the yellow flowers which would soon be open wide. Here the riverbanks support a wide range of water-loving plants often draped in fronds of weeping willows. Suddenly, however, a magnificent rose stopped us in our tracks with its glorious froth of pink flowers. Lovely!

Eventually the landmark church spire of All Saints in Marlow came into view. In 'Three Men in a Boat', Jerome describes the river here as 'at its best'. We left the 'Sweet Thames' to 'run softly' (T.S.Eliot and Edmund Spenser) beneath the impressive Marlow Suspension Bridge and made our way back to our cars, walking in front of Court Gardens, passing the bronze statue of Sir Steve Redgrave unveiled by the Queen in 2002 to honour his achievement of winning a gold medal in five consecutive Olympic Games. He had certainly mastered the Art of Rowing!