

## THE PALLADIAN WAY – 2016



The Palladian Way owes the title of ‘architectural trail’ to a style of building design developed by Andre Palladio in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Italy. This borrowed heavily from classical Roman precedents and was in turn copied and developed by such luminaries as Inigo Jones, Christopher Wren, John Vanburgh and William Kent, each adding their own refinements. At the heart of Palladio’s design for private villas was symmetry. Key features were wide front steps leading up to a large central area behind classical pillars supporting a pediment with a low triangular gable above. Broad house walls gave widespread views from all sides over formal gardens. Overall the size would reflect a cube shape or one governed by a mathematical formula where the width and height could be divided exactly by 6. To this could be added circular staircases, imposing estate rooms and a dome or cupola such as that later to top Wren’s St Paul’s. So a key feature of the walk was to see how far this Palladian style still graced the large buildings on the route, just as those buildings largely dictated the key destinations on the way.

### ***Stage 1 – Buckingham to Woodstock - Wednesday – Friday 23 – 25 February 2016***

***Penny, Hazel, Chas, David***

It’s late February; picture blue skies, a light breeze and almost wall to wall sunshine. You’d be imagining somewhere far away from England. Throw in deep overnight frost with several degrees minus and you might start to wonder. But Bucks, Northants and Oxon would probably still not spring to mind. So we were incredibly fortunate to have picked a week when the elements were with us. It would have been too much to escape mud in an English winter, but even this was relatively



limited, mainly confined to some woodland pathways, tractor ruts and cattle gateways. In fact the low sun was shining brightly in our faces for most of the time as we headed overall south-west, the air crisp, the skies full of birdsong and the rich smells of manure drifting across at intervals.

**Day 1 – Buckingham via Stowe to Brackley – c 11 miles**



avenue that was saved from development by the quick-thinking of architect Clough William Ellis of Portmeirion fame and the generosity of Eton College who bought and gifted the avenue back to the school. The avenue sweeps up and down the undulating hills like a roller-coaster (*above right*), the massive Corinthian arch at the entrance to the Stowe grounds only visible late on, with the huge Palladian mansion shimmering on another rise behind. The mansion is now the main building of Stowe School (*above left*), still a



road and great vistas across the countryside beyond. Having come largely north from Buckingham we were now heading west over fairly level country, along farm tracks, over fields and through sections of often soggy woodland, notably at Evershaw Copse and the aptly named Westbury Wild where the deep mud of the bridleway meant balancing and hopping on the edge of ditch-like pools and dodging spiky low branches (*above left*).



We started in the county town of Buckingham, where a chat with two sociable policewomen was immediately followed by our visit to the local gaol (*previous page*), now the tourist office and the start of the walk. Buckingham still has hilltop village feel about it, and is a prelude to Stowe, soon approached down a magnificent



bastion of traditional values of a different kind. On the way and in the grounds numerous elegant stone structures lounge around like basking prefects. Star among these is the Palladian Bridge over the lake and stream (*above right*), with curving pathways that lead to walks between shrubberies, temples and statues. Apparently there are separate Paths of Vice, Virtue and Liberty!

Working our way round the back of the main building took us to the school approach





The kissing gates, of which David never tires, gave way to more stiles, an intensive dairy-farming unit with a calf crèche attached, and then a wonderful spot on the edge of open fields with woods at our back to bask in the low sunshine and enjoy our picnics (*above*). Past an airstrip, possibly serving nearby Silverstone, we reached the neat village of Turweston before passing under the busy Brackley by-pass, up the hill to the striking church and through to Brackley high street.

We had already left our cars at our guest house (*below right*), being driven by our host, the long-haired Derek, to Buckingham in his trusty old Land Rover Defender. Our 'suite' was in the old garage and upper storey, now impressively kitted out by Lynette as sitting room/ kitchenette with twin room and bathroom above. Penny was in the garden room, with a temperamental shower. The garden and also the house, from what we could see when having breakfast in the morning, were ingeniously sectioned off for maximum utility, everything having its nook or cranny.



### **Day 2 – Brackley to Middleton Stoney – c 13 miles**



This was a long enough day and we were all glad to have cut down the book's 17.5 miles by stopping at Middleton Stoney (see day 4 minus 1!) After another vigorous frost we drove the two cars to our destination with a taxi back to Brackley, via manic Formula 1 style traffic round the A43 and M40 junction. The road noise still buzzed in our ears as we descended Brackley High Street, crossed a couple of junctions and reached the broad meadow of Evenley Park, where a faint frosty haze enfolded us in a quintessentially English parkland scene. Evenley

Hall hides its charms behind a wall and trees, but it's a nice traverse across the farmland to reach the pretty village of Evenley itself, neatly spread out around a huge square village green (*left*).

Off the green School Lane took us to a track running behind four country cottages. The ancient footpath weaves through the cottage back gardens, which now have stiles between them, to



reach the first of a series of open, stony fields where the larks were in increasingly fine voice as we approached the small village of Juniper Hill. This is Flora Thompson's Lark Rise, aptly so named. Now there is little to distinguish it apart from its place in literary history. After a flat approach we had a gentle downhill towards Tusmore, with history of a different kind where the old blue British blood gives way to the modern Mediterranean.

Palladian Way turns 90 degrees to the west at the approaches to Tusmore. Here stands a spectacular new memorial column (*above left*), dedicated to our current queen, with what might be cannons but are perhaps lions couchant at the base cosseted in neat green covers, all too new to be mentioned in our guide book. Lines

of recently planted trees lead away to where a striking mansion stands mirage-like in the distance (*right + above left*). The mansion itself is in fine and imposing neo-Palladian style, raised up to prominence, with alongside and slightly below it some more traditional English-style buildings. This huge Tusmore House was built only within the last 15 years for Wafic Said, a wealthy Syrian industrialist who endowed the Said Business School in Oxford and is now largely resident in Monaco, replacing many forebears. The original 17<sup>th</sup> century house was replaced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and extended over succeeding centuries until its last owner, Vivian



Hugh Smith (later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Bicester of Tusmore) died in 1956. Deemed uneconomical, it was demolished, along with its Adam ceilings and fireplaces, to make way for a neo-Georgian replacement in the 1960s before this too was knocked down to give way to Said's Palladian-style mansion, which won a major architectural award in 2004. Here indeed was a contrast to Lark Rise.







The path passes in front of the mansion, hidden below a great wall, and around a proliferation of post and rail fences to return to open country. Here it runs diagonally across the fields, but freshly-ploughed earth with huge furrows led us round the side before returning to the path on the unploughed section (*left*). This took us to the hamlet of Stoke Lyne, where the Pyrton Arms looked very un-open. Passing through lanes and woods, we returned to the fields where previously frequent Palladian Way stickers were

noticeably absent, requiring some re-alignment around Kilby's Barn to get the right side of the field hedges. At the neat village of Bucknell the Trigger Pond gives its name to the local pub – with its 'husband-crèche'.



The last stage of the day's walk took us across the busy railway (our Marylebone to Birmingham line) and to a minor road over the thunderous M40. Here we headed briefly north to pass beside the striking Bucknell water tower (*left* - very visible from the M40) and the scenic but noisy Trow Pool and a futuristic processing plant to our north-west (*right*). Now our sights were firmly set on 'home' via the A43, a short road walk into



Middleton Stoney and a warm welcome from the delightful Goyo, our B & B landlady. She is Mongolian, married to an Englishman, with three young children. Around them and between school runs the couple have a travel business specialising in bespoke activity holidays in Mongolia, where the husband was at the time. Apparently it was cold enough there for icicles to form in his nostrils!

Talbot Lodge, Goyo's B & B location, is a set of stone-clad L-shaped buildings on the busy



main road but facing inwards onto a private walled garden (*above left*). On Goyo's recommendation we ate at Rigoletto, an Italian restaurant set '5 minutes' walk away along the Bicester Road, well beyond the pavement and street lighting! Here we discovered a fine rich red wine from the 'Italian' Dolomites and enjoyed some repartee with the Italian proprietor, punctuated with profanities and imprecations about his ex-wife. It was good food too!



### Day 3 – Middleton Stoney to Woodstock – c 11 miles

This time we left the cars at the start, meaning we could get away around 9 am, a head start for the morning. There were, however, two kilometres of busy road walking before we turned off onto a lovely soft track alongside a ribbon of woodland (right). This was Aves Ditch, probably a boundary marker from Saxon times. The way ran beside fields, some richly ploughed, mostly on broad green tracks, down a slope beside a sheep field to the Northbrook farmstead, where modern horse jumps and associated structures were stacked awaiting delivery (below).



We could see a gradual change in the countryside. After the largely flat ground of lower Northamptonshire and north Oxfordshire we had entered the more rolling country approaching Oxford, with distant vistas opening up to the south-west as we approached the Oxford Canal and turned south to follow the long ridge route via the more gentrified looking Manor Farm to the elegant village of Kirtlington. Here was our next Palladian Mansion,

this  
time

an original built for Sir James Dashwood in the 1740s. To get there we crossed the village green, walked back up the main road and entered the park by the imposing gates and long, sweeping drive. At the mellow but dauntingly massive front of Kirtlington Manor (below) we amused ourselves watching a van driver seeking a response from behind the huge front



door, imagining a delivery to the stately home by an unmarked van from Sofa Workshop or Ikea.

The path then winds back away from the house and its huge range of 'associated offices etc.' across the parkland to the village, through the churchyard, elegant church (overleaf) - with offset arches and stained glass reflected in glass over floor heating panels - and a side street. Time for lunch. We settled in the Post Office/ village shop for





home-made sandwiches and a slice of local gossip. Next came a long, steady descent, beside a former quarry and now country park with precipitous sides, down past the colourful ‘Stables’ with its red and cream vintage cars, to Pigeon’s Lock on the canal. A long but narrow canal-side path then snakes down to Enslow, where the Oxford to Birmingham railway is crossed, to the busy but bedraggled narrowboat basin and yards at Gibraltar.

The next part was less pleasant. After tracking up to the road and crossing the River

Evenlode, distinctively cut into steep banks, we were forced to walk along a busy stretch of uphill, curving main road – waving the guidebook as a warning to oncoming cars – before reaching a side road. A woodland track with recently fallen trees as major obstacles (*below left*) led to a traverse



beside fields with the Column of Victory at Woodstock appearing in the distance (*right*). After crossing a minor road we reached a green route over more fields with the tower of Woodstock church and its surroundings growing ever clearer as we approached (*below centre*). We entered Woodstock town from the north-east and soon passed through to the High Street. After a short wait our taxi arrived and we set off back for our cars. The



delightful Goyo insisted we came in for tea, with a chance to chat to her children (or play ball with the two-year old Oscar) as she presented us with a personalised holiday itinerary for Mongolia! Then it was time to get on our respective ways, David kindly dropping the Thamensians back home, stopping long enough for the chill to come off the shower water before zipping off to WGC and later on to Essex to turn his virtual presence there into a real one.



**Prologue - Day 4 (day minus 1) - Tuesday 22 December – Woodstock to North Leigh – c 6 miles – Penny, Chas and Hazel** (This was the 'advance' half day to make day 2 above more manageable.)



The freaky late December weather gave us a 14C temperature and a 42mph wind. And by a day we had the happy tread of those who know the days are getting longer! Hazie worked out a way for us to meet at North Leigh, car shuffle to Woodstock, walk back to North Leigh, drive back to Woodstock and have our 'office' Christmas lunch there before making our respective ways back. Once again we approached the Blenheim Estate through the 'secret' side gate and climbed to the Column of Victory and thence down to the fence ahead. This time we turned left, back along the driveway towards the ducal palace, to drop down beside the great lake near the ornate Vanbrugh Bridge (*above left*.) Blenheim Palace showed perhaps its best side (*above right*) as we walked round the lake's south and west edge.

En route we passed Fair Rosamunde's Well (*below left*). Fair she might have been but it did not bode well for her. King Henry I, third and ultimately most powerful son of the Conqueror, first enclosed Woodstock Park for hunting. His grandson Henry II (Vowles writes 'son', which makes his directions better than his



history) extended the buildings and also his love life with Rosamunde, ensconced in a residence by the well. This unsurprisingly incurred the displeasure of Mrs Henry King, the redoubtable Eleanor of Aquitaine. Whether Rosamunde retired poisoned, as rumoured, knifed through the heart or simply to a nunnery we shall probably never know. Either way, the buildings decayed and a mottled square well section is all now left.



In any case it's a pretty walk around the lake and its side creek to track up through the wooded hillside and join a road by the Combe Lodge entrance (there's useful parking on this link road.) There followed a very muddy section across the fields and round a copse to approach the church of St Lawrence at Combe. Accepting that we were not suitably attired for Maypole dancing on the village green, even if it had been the season, we took the neat paved pathway past the equally neat cottages (*previous page, bottom right*) behind the village green to drop down the road out of the village. This led to a track over the railway line and down again to a smart new, raised footbridge over the meandering River Evenlode (*right*). The remains of the old bridge (*below left*) suggested the



power of the river water and the need to raise the level further. In fact a glance at the map shows how this whole area is cut by broad valleys and floodplains for the rivers Evenlode and Glyme, with the Thames/Isis and Cherwell not far distant in turn. So it was back uphill and around the furry outlines of the woods to East End, where we could see the contours rolling away and Combe straggling along the top of the facing crest.

Leaving East End and passing through an overarching thorny bower path we entered horse and

polo territory, offset by a basketful of miniature Shetland ponies in one field. The firm square tower of North Leigh was clear ahead (*below*), on a ridge at the lower end of the rather strung-out village. This gave us just time to try to decipher the lines of the older parts of the church before reaching Penny's car parked just beyond. Vowles states, somewhat cautiously, that this is '*an interesting example of a Saxon church*'. The Wikipedia entry claims that it is



*'architecturally*

*fascinating'...of late Anglo-Saxon origin with the bell tower probably built in the first half of the 11th century.'* This would take it to the reign of Canute or his sons, or possibly Edward the Confessor, by which time stone was just starting to be more widely used. Apparently sometime after about 1150 (back to Henry III!) the '*Saxon nave was abandoned and its arch in the west wall of the*

*tower was blocked up.'* There were many further changes, before '*The division between the nave and chancel was moved back to where it had been in the 12th century!*' So there we have it. Maybe we'll have clean boots and be able to look inside when we come back.



Day 4, 5 and 6 - North Leigh via Burford and Bibery to Cirencester – Monday 24 to Wednesday 26 Feb  
16 - Penny, Chas, Hazel and David (with Gillian driving)



We were again lucky with the weather. The first day featured a cold NE breeze at our backs as we continued to head broadly south-west, the sun in our faces, across some nice field edges, through attractive villages such as Hailey and occasional pond-like tracts. On one of these, a fenced-in section adjacent to an English Heritage site, the sopping mud came up over our boots (*left*). The site itself however was stunning, the ruins of Minster Lovell (*below right*), a settlement from Anglo-Saxon times where

later Radcliffe, the 'rat' of Richard III's inner cabal ('The Cat, the Rat and Lovell the dog/ Rule all England under a hog'), had inherited a majestic hall built in 1440, with a fine chapel adjacent. The spot is also graced by the charming Windrush, along whose valley we were walking, the river curving and sparkling in the low sunshine (*below*). The village now is set at a slight distance away, graced by the unmistakable signs and elegant historic buildings of new money.



At nearby Swinbrook the way passes through another village and churchyard with historic associations. The village was for a time the country retreat of the Mitford family which achieved fame and notoriety in

equal measure between the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, the cemetery of St Mary, Swinbrook being a memorial to well-known Mitford family names (*right*). The Palladian Way switches between the two sides of the river. By-passing the site of another, this time ruined and deserted, medieval village, we crossed to the south side for a lovely final stretch, keeping just uphill of the broad water (*overleaf*.) From there we climbed to a quiet road to take us into Burford – gateway to the Cotswolds.







Our accommodation was at Bibery, the end of the second day's walk. Gillian kindly drove Penny and I back to our cars that day and returned us all to Bibery at the end of the third, which made travel arrangements much easier. And Bibery, which I did not previously know, is a delightful place with a very pleasant B & B available for us (David and Gillian stayed in a cottage next to the hotel down the road.) The only drawback was that this was Cheltenham week, so the

choice or timing available at pub restaurants in the evening was limited.

The next day the route took us along the attractive Burford High Street (*right – looking north*) to cross the busy A40 which runs east-west below the town. It was slightly less sunny but warmer, mostly dry and firm underfoot, which was a relief. We had left the wonderful Windrush Valley but were compensated by walking alongside two other delightful rivers, the Leach and later the Coln.



As progressed west and the valley bottom flattened out, so did the river, more of a lake in parts (*left*). The middle section of the day was characterised by the old Roman Road of Akerman Street, a link between St Albans and the west, one of four Roman roads later to converge on Cirencester. The first stretch was a fine, open march along a grassy track, but after a drop down to the river and steep climb back up after crossing Sheep Bridge (*below right*), we reached a section of the same

Roman road that was metalled and a harder pound. This was a quiet road apart from the tractors on noon-stop dung-ferrying missions but something of a slog along the 2 ½ miles to a welcome picnic lunch stop on a circular seat around a tree at Hatherop, followed by a tea/coffee stop at adjacent St Aldwyn's. Emboldened by this refreshment we missed the first left turn out of the village but soon re-joined the route after some extra road walking which, judging by







what followed, may in fact have saved us from some especially sodden areas. Having met and crossed the Coln as it turned north we gradually neared it again as we approached Bibery. This is an extraordinarily attractive village, including a terrace of ancient cottages (*left*) spread along and away from the winding banks and fishponds of the Colne, but now a magnet for tourist coaches - with all that involves.

The third day began with a gentle route north-west before a right-angled turn at Ablington took us back on a south-westerly line via rolling fields being turned by the plough into contrasting shades of brown (*right*). Here were more stiles, a feature of this walk, but this time set on steps in a stone



wall, even if in one case the wall seemed little more than steeplechase width. Then came the huge frontage of the mansion (*left*), semi-Palladian style and now a hotel and spa, at Barnsley Park, with Barnsley village just south of it. It was then field walking south to Ampney Crucis where, having started in good

time, we were able to stop for a pleasant pub lunch at the Crown of Crucis, with the satisfaction of knowing that there were just another 7 kms to reach the centre of Cirencester. In fact the direct route is quite a bit shorter but the Palladian Way follows an anti-clockwise route round the fascinating north-eastern and north-western edges of the town to give an overview of its river, Roman walls (*right*) and old Abbey Grounds before leading to the town centre. It is a place to which we will want to return.



Unfortunately the day ended badly with Gillian waiting for us and a serious fall-out with David resulting. So we'll be walking separately for the rest of the Palladian Way.





getting there and back – itself quite a challenge as it's a long way for us, having to go round Oxford one way or the other. It was however a lovely area and all made the better by a delightful evening meal at Stephen and Caroline's.

The terrain was gently rolling for the most part (*above*), with mostly fields and meadows, few woods and some lovely river valleys with the going firm, even hard, underfoot apart from some wet fringe



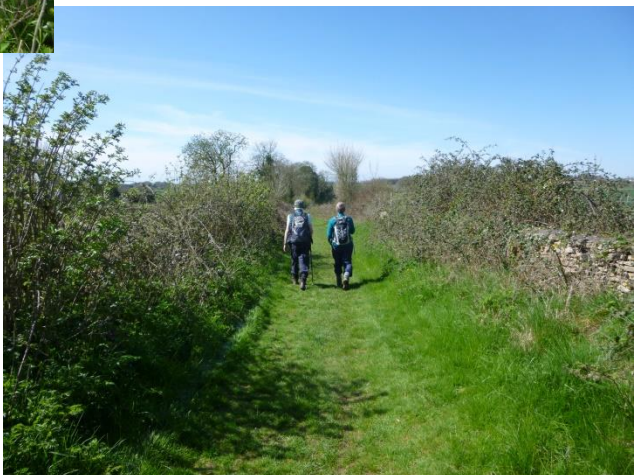
overall fairly slow. Indeed, only four years on since the guide was published it was staggering how much had already changed.

We stayed overnight at Tetbury, a lovely hilltop town with a superb old central market building. But it was busy as the intersection of at least two main roads, with huge trucks still thundering through the centre, and free parking in the small triangle at the top of Gumstool Hill fiercely contested! There was however a free all-day car park at

Once again we were uncannily blessed by the weather, with a gentle breeze behind us from the NE – very surprising given that the prevailing winds are SW – some pleasant sunshine with occasional warmth and blossom drifting in the breeze (*below*). Whilst the pain of the David issue was still there, it was easier walking as a threesome. The logistics were a bit tricky, but a taxi ride each day from the end back to the start meant that we did not have to box and cox with cars beyond



woodland sections. The presence of horses, however, meant a profusion of electric fences, one with a missing section of handgrip, and, especially on the second day, a seemingly endless procession of stiles, some of which were in poor order (*left*). Along with this, the route often needed intense map-reading and interpretation, made additionally complex by the three separate route options in that area, so that going was





the foot of the hill below by the old station, also approachable via a lovely little valley walk. We stayed at the top of the hill in a quaint terraced cottage with a quaint host and hostess, though we would probably not return. It served the purpose, however, and it was good to see something of the town which is certainly worth another visit.

We returned to start at the outskirts of Cirencester, over the manicured grounds of the Royal Agricultural College with its fine classical façade (*above right*).



The first main feature after that was at Coates where we crossed the route of the Thames and Severn Canal, disused at present (*left*) but possibly aimed to link up long-term with the Thames again near Abingdon. Above this sits the Tunnel House Inn, where we had firmly to ignore the blandishments of the tables and chairs set on the sunny pub lawn. Tarlton just beyond features an old Norman church that was thoroughly 'modernised' by the Victorians but still retains a cosy aspect outside. There were then some long and relatively uneventful

stretches to Rodmarton and thence turning west at Addy's Firs to reach Tetbury for our overnight stop.

The next day we drove the cars to the end of the walk and took a taxi back to the edge of Shipton Wood, just south of Long Newnton. This enabled us to take the Malmesbury route and put us roughly where we would have been had we continued south the day before rather than west to Tetbury. Whilst we missed out on



The Estcourt Estate as a result, we enjoyed linking up from time to time with the River Avon on our route south to and through Brokenborough and then to follow the river south-east at Boakley Farm through (*above*) to Malmesbury. This was a highlight and again well worth a return visit. The town itself is nothing grand, but the abbey and church ruins are. Our approach was fine enough, snatching glances up through the trees and the steep banks at the majestic building across the way (*left*), but the view looking (back) from the south is dramatic. On this side





the river cuts a deep channel between the higher level fields and the town rising up opposite, crowned by the massive, almost unreal bulk of the abbey (*left*). It reminded me of the great French hilltop citadels rising out of the plains, adorned by soaring church spires.

This arm of the Palladian Way then heads back south-west over mainly farm land and south-east to reach the village of Corston on the busy A429 road (not the mythical Cawston of Midsomer Murders which is often equated with our

home town of Thame.) From here we progressed via a sandwich stop by a stream south-west again to and through the long village of Hullavington and on west to Grittleton, a pretty settlement now dominated by a private school and served by the Neeld Arms. Sadly we were too early to enjoy the pub's delights, but this left us in good time to start our fairly lengthy journeys back home. We decided to omit the short, barren and seemingly badly served stretch through to and over the M4, so next time will start to the south for our two days' push through to Bath.



*Days 9 & 10 – Tues 14 + Wed 15 June – Yatton Keynell to Box and Box to Bath - Penny, Hazel and Chas, Caroline, Mary – cc 11 miles + 12.5 miles (c 23.5 overall)*

The southern edge of the Cotswolds runs south-west with sinuous curves from Woodstock to Bibery and Cirencester, then broadly southerly between Tetbury and Malmesbury. Past Castle Combe its southern apex is Bath, from where the Cotswold eastern scarp slope runs east then north via Cheltenham to Chipping Campden. So our route could almost have been called the Southern Cotswolds



Way. For this last stretch we were re-joined by Mary and welcomed Penny's sister, Caroline. Parking up close to the water tower (*above right*) just north of Yatton Keynell (about a mile and a half south of and across the M4 from Grittleton), we very soon found a complete lack of any sign of a path or signs for one. This left us having to force our way through a chest-high scrubland of drenched and entangled rape seed (*path left!*), leaving us all

soaking wet from the outset.



All this was accentuated by the fierce whine of motorbike engines and screech of brakes from the nearby Castle Combe racing circuit. Without any clear path or markers we were then faced with beating a way to and clambering over a double fence to reach a small trackway and then a quiet lane and steep path running down into the highly picturesque village of Castle Combe (*left*). Having thus tested our newcomers, and after earlier long drives to Box and then back to the start, we decided

to stop at the village pub for an early sandwich lunch before pressing on. I was surprised that the very private and apparently well-heeled golf club had bought up and enclosed a side road with a row of gorgeous-looking cottages, making them inaccessible to non-golfing visitors.



The worst was over. For almost the first time on the route we had faced a south-westerly, with its frequent companion, the rain. Fortunately the rain gradually cleared, the sun came out and the day warmed up, but

there was a long way still to go. For the first part of this we were accompanied by the delightful By Brook (*above*), the river curling and whirling along below us as we walked through woodland. We dropped down to a section close to the water, with Penny and Caroline admiring the various orchids, past tempting stretches with dire warnings about the dangers of catching Weil's Disease through swimming. This took us to the attractive village of Ford, where the busy A420 cuts east-west across the river valley.



Crossing some fine flower meadows we braced ourselves for a steady climb up to Coleherne Down (*above left*), with fine views emerging across to further hills at Thickwood (now almost devoid of trees) and Coleherne itself in the distance. From here we dropped steeply down, which inevitably meant another climb up afterwards (*right*), temporarily losing our way at the foot of a long hill where the route description had become complicated by the reduction of two fields into one large one.





This was a really hilly section, but we were later rewarded with good views to our destination at Box, nestling in the valley below the delightfully named Ditteridge, with the Box railway tunnel carrying the main train line from Bath. As we descended the spire of Box church showed us the way to where the cars were parked, with our B & B – White Smocks at Ashley – just up the road. As it turned out our planned arrival had been temporarily overlooked by our host and hostess so, whilst Caroline kindly drove Penny back to pick up her car, Hazel, Mary and I were ‘forced’ to relax in the Northey Arms, where we all later returned for a good meal.



golf club and a steady descent to the edge of Monkton Farleigh. Skirting the village we then headed west along the ‘Monks’ Conduit’ path to reach Bathford Hill, the steep hillside edging the River Avon, with the old quarries for original Bath stone still evident. For a while it was easy going along the soft woodland floor with the river just

The next morning started cloudy but a stiff climb up out of Box, with superb views back across the valley to Coleherne (*left*), soon warmed us up and the sun came out. We’d reached a long ridge where the Kingdown Hills form one flank of a natural gateway to the west. The ridge took us beside several holes of the well-kept but appealing (to me at least!)



strangled the path – and nearly strangled us!

glimpsed below us and occasional views across to Claverton Manor and the American Museum on the other side of the valley (*left*). Then came a steady descent, via a well-sited hillside which gave us an ideal lunchtime picnic spot with fine views over river, railway and canal running along the opposite slope. Down by the water what would in earlier months have been a pleasant riverside path had now become another section where lush conditions had encouraged rampant plant growth which had largely





Monkton Combe, another village that seemed to be dominated by its school with its huge buildings, well-groomed sports grounds (with picture-book cricket pavilion – *right.*) We knew it was coming but even so the c200 foot climb straight up the hillside above the village was enough to encourage

Once through this we were at a busy canal section, crossing the River Avon by the striking Dundas Aqueduct, part of the Kennet and Avon Canal, then bending west past the Brassknocker Basin, a boatyard on the old Somerset Coal Canal (and a welcome drinks stop) as the rain set in. This led us to



us to pause to enjoy the view back (*left*) across the valley of the Midbrook below us. By the time we emerged from the school gates at the far side the rain was streaming down, but not so much that we were going to miss the stunning Prior Park Gardens. The main feature here is the impressive Palladian Bridge (one of only three in England) spanning the lake, with its family of swans and splendid views back up to the huge mansion on the top of the hill (*below.*) The path continues on the other



side, with the substructure of the bridge like a reflection in the water.

We might have been on the edges of Bath but the Palladian Way had still some way to go, leading us bit by bit to the Kennet and Avon Canal as it wound its way round the east side of Bath.







We passed through a short tunnel, under one of a set of cast iron bridges, through a park and along a saturated Great Pulteney Street to join the tourists on the, like us, weather-beaten Pulteney Bridge. Walk completed and cue for hugs and photos! Now all we had to do was get back to the cars near Box (catching the right bus at the last moment) and to find our guest house, Brooks, on the other side of the city! It remained only to find a good place to celebrate

the achievement. The Chequers up by The Circus proved ideal (bar a little confusion over white and pink prosecco!)

A great walk - overall rather more than the 123 miles in the book, a fine part of England, some splendid sights, a rich seam of history, lovely company and several challenges on the way! And good luck to Penny and Caroline on the Camino de Santiago Way!

