

## Notes for the 18 Mile LDWA AGM walk

### Geology

Our walk takes us from Horward House to Ivinghoe through part of the Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire. The bed of the Vale is largely made up of clay formed at the end of the ice age. Most areas are underlain with limestone and sand of Portland Beds and the Kimmeridge and Gault Clays.

The southern end of the Vale is bounded by the Chiltern Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which are of highly permeable chalk. Our walk takes us through land that drains to the River Great Ouse, the River Thames catchment and the River Ouzel, which joins the River Great Ouse at Newport Pagnell.

### Horwood House

Horwood House was built in 1911 for Sir Frederick Arthur Denny, who made his fortune in pork and bacon. It was designed by architect Detmar Blow in a 'William and Mary' style. The Denny's owned much of Little Horwood but the whole estate was auctioned off in the 1940s when they left.

Since then it has been a girl's school, owned by British Rail, the GPO and subsequently BT as a training venue. It has been a hotel since 1992.

Horwood House is the birthplace of Percy Thrower, whose father was head gardener when the house was built.

### The Varsity Line

We cross over the disused Varsity Line railway which connected Oxford and Cambridge via Bletchley on the West coast main line railway. Passenger services were withdrawn between Bletchley and Bicester in 1967, but the line was still used for freight and waste transport in the 1980s. There are future plans to reopen the line for passenger trains in as part of the 'Oxford Cambridge arc'.

### Mursley

The village name is Anglo Saxon in origin meaning 'Myrsa's woodland'. The actor David Tomlinson, who played Mr Banks in Disney's Mary Poppins, lived in the village until his death on 2000. The Beechams estate in the village draws its name from the conductor Thomas Beecham who lived in Mursely Hall.

### Dunton

Dunton's Parish Church is dedicated to St Martin; it is the only public building in this small village. The nave dates from the 12th century, the chancel from the 13th and the Tower to the 15th. It was rebuilt and restored in 18th century.

### Cublington

The church is dedicated to St Nicholas. It is in the perpendicular style and the cancel arch has unusual corbels of a man and a monkey. Near the church is a small man-made hill known as 'The Beacon' which is actually the motte of a small Norman castle.

In 1971, the Report of the Roskill Commission on the London Airport expansion selected Cublington as the location of a proposed third airport for London on the basis of Cost Benefit Analysis. Cublington and two other villages would have been totally demolished. However it was subsequently rejected on environmental grounds.

The nearby airfield (known as Wing Airfield), was used primarily as a training venue in the war but did see some operational service by 268 and 613 RAF squadrons. It was closed in 1956 and nowadays is used for agriculture and chicken farming.

### Wing

Wing lies on an ancient track, which was once part of the pre-historic Icknield Way, linking Oxford with Cambridge. The track was used in the Middle Ages and led to an increase in size of the village. The Anglo Saxon origin of All Saints Church makes it one of the oldest churches in England; it is reputed to be the oldest continually used religious site in the country.

### Ascott House and Estate

Ascott House is owned by National Trust. It was originally a farmhouse built around 1606. In 1873 it was acquired by Baron Mayer D'Rothschild (of the neighbouring Mentmore Estate) who gave it to his nephew Leopold d'Rothschild, who transformed it as a country house and an informal hunting retreat. It was given to the National Trust 1947. There is an extensive collection of paintings, fine furniture and oriental porcelain. The extensive gardens are a mix of the formal and natural with specimen trees, shrubs and herbaceous borders. Part of the garden is laid out in style of Gertrude Jekyll.

The Rothschild family played a prominent role in the formation of Buckinghamshire County Cricket Club who played at least once a year on the Ascott House cricket pitch (first used on 28 August 1880) in the Minor Counties League until the late 70s.

The 4,400 acre Ascott Estate comprises of over 3,500 acres of arable land, 300 acres of grassland, 300 acres of woodland and 40 residential letting properties and is still managed by the Rothschilds.

### **Mentmore**

Mentmore Towers was built between 1852 and 1854 for Baron Mayer D'Rothschild. The site was chosen for the mansion because of its fine elevated position. A new Mentmore village was also built in the style of 'Tudor meets Victorian' around a village green and the mansion gates. Mentmore Towers remained with Rothchild family until 1977 then sold to Maharishi Foundation. It was sold again in 1999 and bought by a property investor and run as a conference centre.

In World War 2 part of the British national art collection, British state and royal collection and the state coach were stored in Mentmore Towers. It has also been used as a location for films, including Brazil, Eyes Wide Shut and Johnny English. In Batman Begins it was 'Wayne Manor' and used as the 'rave party' location in the Inspector Morse TV series episode called 'Cherubim and Seraphim'.

### **West Coast Main Railway Line**

We pass under the West Coast Main Railway line from London Euston to Birmingham, Manchester, Penrith and Glasgow.

The next bridge away to the left is Bridego Bridge which was the location of the 1963 Great Train Robbery where 120 mailbags holding over £2.6 million worth of banknotes were unloaded.

### **Grand Union Canal**

We pass over the Grand Union Canal Grand near Horton. This canal was originally called the Grand Junction Canal and allowed boat travel from London to Braunston (and subsequently to Birmingham). It was constructed from 1793 to 1805 as a 'wide' or 'broad' canal so that its locks could accommodate two narrow boats side by side or one single wide barge.

### **Ivinghoe**

The large church dates back to 1220; following a fire in 1234 it was rebuilt in 1241. Ivinghoe had, unusually for a village, a town hall rather than a village hall. There are some fine examples of Tudor architecture, particularly around the village green. The Old Brewery House used to be Youth Hostel but unfortunately this closed in 2008.

The nearby Pitstone Windmill is owned by the National Trust. It is a post mill where the whole building rotates; it was built in 1627 and is the oldest dated windmill in Britain.

We finish our walk at the Memorial Bench installed by the BBN Group and dedicated to our founder members.