



Walk 12 - THE BOUNDARY WALK (6+ miles)

This is a special walk for me since it was the last major walk I led for the village. Whitchurch Hill and Whitchurch were originally one combined village and this walk will cover most of the old boundary. It is a long walk but timed correctly there is the opportunity to rest and refresh at 'The Sun'.

The walk follows our southern boundary (the river) until we reach Hardwick East Lodge. So, as before, go up the High Street to its junction with Hardwick Road, turn right and walk along (with care) to reach the West Lodge of the Hardwick Estate. Just before the black gates take a moment to look at Iain Tolhurst's new Veg Shed in the field on your right. Continue through the pleasing Hardwick estate to and through the second set of black gates. At this point the boundary runs down to the river on your right and up to Bottom Wood on your left. After 150 yards go through the kissing gate on your left and follow the uphill path to the top of Westford Hill Copse.

Turn and pause for a rest alongside our eastern boundary and see the river and our neighbour, Mapledurham, below (this is their land!). At the top there is a kissing gate on your left, go through to enter Bottom Wood. Your path is slightly to the right, it joins another wider path coming in from the left and then it drops diagonally down to the valley floor. To your right there is the obvious sign of the extensive replanting occasioned by the recent disastrous outbreak of Ash-dieback. You reach a multitude of paths, turn right to head back along the valley floor to meet our boundary with Mapledurham again.

At this point (the edge of Bottom Wood and before the gate leading to Bottom Farm) turn left at a marked post and up a steep permissive path and work your way gently up this small path to the next post indicating a left turn along a splendid path. There is a broad logging track above running parallel and either can be used as they both follow the north-eastern boundary. Eventually the smaller but more charming path turns up to, and left onto, the wider track to reach an open space above Holly Copse Cottage.

Turn right here, the larger house (Holly Copse) on your left was originally the first King Charles Head pub where Charles drank when he was allowed to visit from his imprisonment in Reading to play bowls here in 1648 - the year before his execution. Immediately cross over to the right hand one of the two gates opposite. Your path (the continuation of our boundary) now goes straight down by the fence with the Pump House on your right; there may be horses in this field, if so dogs on leads please. The Pump House supplied the estate cottages and local fire hydrants with water distributed from a well at Collins End and has been recently been used as a meeting house for the local community. You leave the field through the gate ahead (please ensure that the gate is then closed) and join Bunces Lane by Holmes Farm. Follow straight on down this lane until you meet the road coming up from Path Hill. Still following the boundary, go straight across and down the restricted byway opposite to reach the Goring Heath Road at the corner by Ladygrove Farm.

Turn left onto this road and now proceed with great care (it can be a very busy short cut for cars) to pass Copyhold Farm. The boundary crossed the fields to your right to go behind The Sun. Eventually a widening of the road will allow you to escape onto the wide verge on your right. Following this verge will lead you to the Hill Bottom Road and then turn right up to our port of call 'The Sun'.

The route (and boundary) continues straight up this road until it meets the B471 coming up from Whitchurch. We can't now follow the boundary as it switches over to the left and crosses the road, heading towards the line of trees on the driveway of the appropriately named Boundary House opposite where two trees and a marker stone denote the boundary.

However you have to cross over (with care) to the road opposite; just past Pine Paddock on your left you reach a gateway marked Boundary Farm on your left that gives access to a chestnut tree lined drive. Turn down this drive but please ensure the pedestrian section of the gate is closed afterwards. Your path now passes the rear of Boundary House and leads into Beech Wood down a marked entrance to a fenced path. This is your last contact with the boundary today.

At this point I think there is still a marker stone on your right as the boundary now heads off to below Coombe End Farm and Mount Pleasant Farm. It then turns south to the river, crossing the bridleway to Goring at the rise beyond the Hartley Steps on the edge of Upper Hartslock Wood, again denoted by two trees.

This closely fenced path reaches a kissing gate, go through and turn left to leave the wood by another gate. Go through and follow the right hand fence to a kissing gate by the barns. Go straight across the farm road, round the outbuildings to another gate and then down a pleasing fenced path to another gate and the continuing field path alongside Stonycroft Plantation. Go through the kissing gate above the War Memorial and drop back down to the village.