



## **Walk 8 - MAPLEDURHAM**

Allow at least two hours for this walk to Mapledurham, it is about five to five and a half miles in length and passes through some lovely countryside. You may wish to explore our neighbouring delightful village.

From Manor Road, walk up the High Street and around into Hardwick Road and along the pavement to the start of the allotment footpath. Then cross to the high level footpath which starts at Primrose Hill and finishes at the old farmhouse. Continue along Hardwick Road, the footpath on the right hand side is more obvious but nowadays there is a great deal of traffic so do take care. Carry on until you reach a footpath sign on your left. Go up this narrow fenced path alongside the hedge to the gap at the top, turn right here to a new kissing gate. Go through and follow the hedgerow again to another new kissing gate by the distant roadside.

Go through the gate and cross the road to the steep footpath leading up to the Baulk (a local story identifies it as being mistaken for a church and an eloping couple were 'balked' in their attempt to get married). As you emerge from your climb go through the new kissing gate and forward to meet a metalled road that leads pleasantly to the side of Path Hill Farm (now the Outdoor Centre). Turn right here onto a track that leads past the old farmhouse and into the wood, enter the woods and after about fifty yards take the first major turn to the left. This track drops down to the valley floor, as it turns to the left and starts to rise you will see two other tracks on your right; take the broad left hand one of these and follow it as it heads up the slope (the other is now a permissive right of way and will also lead you to the bridleway to Mapledurham). Follow the uphill path until it meets another at right angles, go straight across and head towards a section below a house, it is waymarked. You will need to ease gradually over to your left to reach the boundary of the garden of the house; turn left at this point and walk to the edge of the woodland. Here you will see a kissing gate leading into a field (which usually has horses in it), cross over and follow the right hand boundary of the field to a kissing gate on your right.

Go through and turn right to pass in front of the house (Hollycopse) and into the woods between the house and a lovely old cottage (Hollycopse Cottage) on your left. You are now on the bridleway which will lead you to Mapledurham. The bridleway drops to the valley floor down a well worn trackway to meet other paths. Head across to the left hand edge of the clearing, immediately ahead there is a footpath (Walk 4) but the one to your left is the one you are going to follow. The other paths on your right are now permissive rights of way. Turn left onto this bridleway as it meanders up the valley floor until it emerges through a gateway into a cultivated valley and becomes a lovely footpath as a 'green road or trod'. Enjoy this path as it follows the fields towards Bottom Farm.

When you reach the gateway leading onto the farm road put your dog on its lead. The road passes the farm and the farm cottages. This is a lovely farm dell and I hope that one day we will see it return to its use as a sheep farm with lambs in spring. Note the lovely old granary hidden amongst the other outbuildings. The farm road meets the main road to Mapledurham, turn right onto the main road and follow it until you reach the signpost on your right which indicates the bridle road to Whitchurch and your return route. The White House was a pub but it was closed when the landowner discovered the drinkers playing bowls on a Good Friday.

You may wish to take this opportunity to investigate this charming village, its Church, Mapledurham House, the Mill and even look at the continuation of the bridle road (still the Tuddingway) which leads to the Warren at Caversham. Perhaps watch the film "The Eagle has landed" on your return home?

When you do turn onto the bridle road to return to Whitchurch this is an easy and pleasant walk (just over two miles) with a real sense of history. This is an ancient trackway which was well out of the reach of the floods, but the rights of the carriers who used it as a trade route from Reading to Whitchurch were suddenly taken away in 1479. After objections to this use by the two local landowners an inquisition was held in Whitchurch.

The twelve jurors determined that *'this road was no public road for wheeled vehicles (whether led or driven by the Prince of Whytechurch) but that it is however a lawful road for horses ridden or with packs but not otherwise'*. The Prince became Edward V but was imprisoned in the Tower by Richard III and Whitchurch lost its major trade route and its previous prosperity overnight. *(Since this is a section of the ancient Saxon route from Reading to Crowmarsh Gifford (the Tuddingway) which the jurors would have been aware of I wonder whether we might at the same time have lost our present right of access on foot or horseback? Now it is also a continuation of the King Alfred long distance cycle route.*

The road leads to, and through, a set of black gates to the Hardwick estate, along past Hardwick House, past the old Nursery garden, past Gardener's Cottage, all on your left. Then walk along and enjoy the view of the valley as you progress along the tree-lined avenue, with the stud on your right, to the second pair of black gates. Your journey is now one mile short of your destination, a pleasant return along Hardwick Road with the memories of the countryside you have just walked through.