

THE CHURCH PATH IN HIGH SUMMER

I walk up the worn steps to the old churchyard, with its high grasses almost covering the beautiful old stones, some leaning at drunken angles. In places, the grass is mown, and purple and white clover invite one to tread and release scent. There is a patch of birds foot trefoil which we always called 'eggs and bacon'.

On the Church porch, a planning notice talks of new inner doors of glass, and better access for the disabled.

Then round the side path and into the gloom of the broad ash walk to the Burial Ground, its darkness relieved by shafts of bright sunlight shining through the tall trees – fir on one side, deciduous on the other. I am reminded of a great cathedral nave. I shuffle through the last year's autumn leaves and peer over the lower wall on Denman side. The lake reflections are perfectly still on this hot afternoon.

The gates to the burial ground clang open at my touch. So many memories here, of friends long gone, and a dear husband too. There are graves which are immaculately kept, and some quite overgrown. A beautiful angel with an exquisite face looks away into a thicket of yew.

I turn right into the Church Path proper, marked today but a patch of cranesbill with its clear blue flowers, and some familiar herb robert. The old iron railing of Denman park are on my right, and then the path opens wide – the leaves of trees meeting much lower than before. The majestic overarching branches make a lovely sunlit green tunnel.

Despite recent heavy rains, the brook on the right is a muddy ditch instead of the flowing water it can be. My children would often play here with a rope, swinging across the stream – all those years ago when we first settled in Marcham. A flaking bark shows a rotten tree trunk which is being colonised very quickly by ivy.

The white Denman gate appears and reminds me that here is a very good conker tree and that my grandchildren enjoy this spot like their fathers did before them.

The path now narrows, and becomes more open to the adjoining field, and, on the right, a stretch of privet hedge. The heady scent of its flowers instantly transports me back to the house of my birth. What an amazing thing is memory! An ancient yew leans across at head height, and here is a truck where lovers have carved their initials. The immaculate stone wall curves and gets higher. More flowers enjoy the heat produced by the wall, and here grow poppies, white campion and yellow nipplewort. Creeping buttercups and groundsel fight for space and a white bryony almost covers a bush with its pretty flowers.

At the end of the path, and into Ford Lane, a "June drop" of small green conkers lay scattered among the topless staddlestones where here, each spring, there is a lovely selection of blooms.

At Ford House, stone dogs guard the entrance and white bindweed is happily taking over a patch by the rough road. Here there are neat and well-maintained barn dwellings and cottages, one with a superb blue spruce. Fierce purple thistles grow opposite.

I turn to walk back down the great field, and stop to admire the open view. The distant downs, the tops only of the power station showing gentle white plumes on today's warm afternoon; and, spread before me, this enormous field of golden barley interlaced on its edges with poppies, white campion, wild carrot, and many grasses. Beneath my feet, the soil is sandy on the swathe of open ride that has been left around the field, and other flowers are growing here, such as Viper's Bugloss (vivid royal blue), bright orange hawksweed ('fox and cubs'), scented mayweed, and yarrow. The ride is dotted here with tussocks of white fungi.

The hawthorn hedge gives way to one of thistles and nettles, and

then several big thickets of blackberry, full of pink flower clusters. Rose bay willow herb throws up majestic spikes, and red admiral butterflies are busy in the warm sunshine.

I reach the end of the field and cross again to the Church path. The churchyard seat provided by 'Sweetbriar' residents provides a welcome rest for a minute or two.

I make my way along New Road, up Church Street, and through the little white gate into my own beloved garden.

CHRISTINE WHILD 5 July 2005

A real feel of the hot sun while we are in the midst of winter ED

A BIKE RIDER IN THE SKY

A young man he came riding out
One dark and rainy night
He rode into a five bar gate
Because he had no lights on his bike

His mother said, "My son, my son,
I know you're a trifle late
But would it not have been better
If you had opened up the gate?"

He jumped up on his bike again
And on his way he went
He travelled at speed on down the road
But his handlebars were bent.

Not only were his handlebars bent
The saddle it had gone
So he didn't stay in one position
For very, very long.

He got into the High Street
And created quite a breeze
But that is not surprising
He was pedalling with his knees.

Oh yes he missed the taxi
But the bus he saw too late
He's now working with the Devil's herd
Opening up those five bar gates.

MAURICE SHEPHERD

AFFORDABLE HOUSING EXHIBITION

An exhibition of the elevation and layout drawings of the units planned for Phase III Longfields will be held on Thursday 19th January 2006 between 3.00pm and 8.00pm in the sports pavilion in the Anson field off Morland Road. This exhibition provides an opportunity for everyone in the parish to view the proposals and to comment.



For those interested in being considered for one of the properties there will staff from Sovereign Housing Association who will be able to provide information on its letting and shared ownership schemes and the management of any new development. In addition there will be staff from the Vale of White Horse District Council's housing section to answer questions about joining the housing register, the eventual allocation process of the properties, and any local connection requirements. Also in attendance will be a representative from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council who undertook the initial needs survey in the parish. There will be feedback forms available and full opportunity to leave your comments about the development proposals. Any comments will be carefully considered and taken into account before proceeding to the next stage.