

## ADOPT A LOCK – HADDENHAM U3A

### Old Windsor Lock downstream to Bell Weir Lock

Haddenham U3A adopted Bell Weir lock to Old Windsor, an area of just under 3 miles. The area is of historical significance with Bell Weir close to Runnymede and its 3 important memorials.

Old Windsor lock marks the start of the “New Cut” built in 1822, which created Ham Island in the hook of the old river. The lock was originally a wooden pound but later rebuilt and banked on both sides with rows of stone steps, giving it the unusual appearance of a rectangular amphitheatre.

Downstream is The Bells of Ouseley, a former coaching inn. This was a ferry crossing point between the Royal Palace and the hunting grounds. It is thought the name is associated with the ringing of the ferry bell to alert the ferryman. Another theory is that it relates to the bells of Osney Abbey which were brought downstream at the Dissolution and disappeared into the mud at this point.

We walked past the two Edward Lutyens gate houses (one now a National Trust cafe and shop) and onto Runnymede, where the armies of King John camped at the signing of the Magna Carta. There will be celebrations in 2015 for the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing. As the document formed the basis for the American Bill of Rights of Freedom under Law, in 1957 the American Bar Association, holding their 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in London, decided to finance a permanent Magna Carta Memorial on Runnymede. The land was given by Egham Urban District Council.



We looked up at the star spangled blue canopy, with the eye of light at its centre and admired the classical design by Edward Maufe, R.A. (also the architect of The Royal Air Force Memorial).

The John F Kennedy Memorial was approached up 60,000 granite setts, representing a multitude of pilgrims, to the shallow steps leading to the Memorial, one for each year of JFK's life. We walked round the 7 ton block of Portland stone, representing a catafalque born on the shoulders of the multitude. The architect, Geoffrey Jellicoe based his ideas on John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, with the piece intended

to be seen as a journey through the landscape.

Crossing Runnymede to the riverside we walked along the path towards Bell Weir lock. On the opposite bank are the remains of Ankerwycke Priory, where it is reputed Henry VIII used to meet with Anne Boleyn. Also visible was Magna Carta Island. No-one is certain of the exact spot where Magna Carta was signed, the Island being one suggestion.

Bell Weir was built in 1817-18 and took its name from Charlie Bell, the first weir keeper and ferryman. The original weir collapsed under the weight of ice in 1827. Bell Weir's original lock house was converted to a pub, The Angler's Rest, now the Runnymede-on-Thames hotel, where we lunched on the terrace, watching a swan with 6 cygnets gliding into the lock (& out again).



We had a fine day to cross Runnymede to walk back up Cooper's Hill. Egham Races were held here 1734-1884 and at one time Egham was considered to be the best country race course in England. On our visit, a fair was assembling on the site.

After a short climb we reached The Royal Air Force Memorial beautifully maintained by The War Graves Commission and passed through the solid English oak gates into a grassed quadrangle. The central feature is the Stone of Remembrance, a single block of Portland stone bearing the inscription "Their name liveth for evermore". Above the central doorway are three statues representing Justice, Victory and Courage. The cloisters continue round each side of the central tower. Each bench in the cloisters has a stone escallop on the front edge, a sign of immortality. Coats of arms are on the vaulted ceiling above the peaceful cloisters with 20,455 names commemorated on stone panels.

Within the tower is a small area for contemplation with an engraved window. The inscription is part of the 139<sup>th</sup> Psalm, with two angels with trumpets, the sun and the moon and vapour trail designs, copied from those made by aircraft during the Battle of Britain. The view from the top of this stirring Memorial is terrific, with the King George VI reservoir glinting and the Thames flowing into the distance.

The area between the locks became memorable for us all.