

Monday 4th December 2017 Exeter Green Circle – Part One with Penny and Paul Kurowski

Two phone calls, three buses, half a circle, two dogs, seven walkers, three who didn't make it and one loo ... half of the Exeter Green Circle.

As a walk leader, you never know who and how many people will turn up ... unless you specifically ask – we hadn't. On Sunday night, Haylor phoned and we confirmed that it would be muddy and that boots were needed ... the two of us plus two. Early on the Monday morning, David Connor phoned to say that he had a cold and that he and Rosie would not be spreading the germs by joining us.

No one was at the No. 58 bus stop in Budleigh Salterton and no OVA members got on later. Penny and I transferred to the No. 57 bus on the Exeter Road near A La Ronde – no one. Waiting at the East Devon Crematorium bus stop were Julie, Sue and Tony with Buster and Tansy (the two dogs); Sue said that Irvine had not been well enough to make the walk. Ruth and Haylor emerged from a bus on the other side of the road and we joined them. After a briefing about the walk, we set off on the first half of the Exeter Green Circle – according to the brochures we were in for 'miles of surprises'.

Starting in Ludwell Valley Park, the tarmac / muddy walk followed the quiet Northbrook overlooked by sloping meadows – on the 'rece' we had seen a kingfisher and an egret but not today. Quiet roads and lanes link Wonford and Whipton with names that echo the former rural nature of the area such as Woodwater Lane and Sweetbrier Lane.

Emerging from Georges Close, we started the Mincinglake Walk section and walked through the Hamlin Lane Playing Fields following the stream. The public toilets near Polsloe Bridge Station left a lot to be desired: the gents and disabled toilets were shut and there was only one ladies toilet – time for an orderly queue and Tony regaled us with tales of railways and with the help of Haylor recited the poem 'This is the Night Mail' by W H Auden. Crossing the Pinhoe Road, the local supermarket was a chance to replenish food stores. Under another railway and then we found the gates to St. Katherine's Priory open. Within two minutes, one of the volunteer gardeners was chatting to us and telling us all about the history of the priory – see below. We were able to go into the grounds, have a look around and sit at their benches for our coffee break.



We went along a few streets and then into Mincinglake Valley Park for a walk alongside the stream. We passed a reed bed – the ponds by the track are cleaning up the water in the stream – the valley was once the city rubbish tip and waste is still decaying beneath the ground. Haylor and Tony reminisced about their working careers in Exeter, the tip and other aspects that have since changed.

After we crossed Stoke Hill, the track became muddier and then there was a steady climb to a great viewpoint across rolling fields and a derelict farm building which Ruth and Haylor remembered having a roof last time they did the walk. We descended Pennsylvania Road to join the Hoopern Valley Walk section. We went into Duryard Valley Park to occupy the one bench for lunch with spectacular views over Belvidere Meadows and large houses opposite.



We entered the University of Exeter campus and were intrigued by the Archaeology Department's field work in the middle of a wood. A wooden bridge led us across a stream and passed a pond with mallards quacking. Feeling somewhat older than the student population strolling around, we crossed Prince of Wales Road to walk along a public footpath high above the Lower Hoopern Valley. After a couple of streets, we entered Bury Meadow Park – see below. After reading the interpretive board, we went through St. David's churchyard and down St. David's Hill; if you blinked you would miss the very narrow Peep Lane - this narrow lane runs down the steep descent to the River Exe. We arrived at the Iron Bridge to end the walk and in time to walk to the bus station for our 15.10 No. 58 bus back to Budleigh Salterton.

St. Katherine's Priory

St Katherine's Priory, also known as Polsloe Priory, was a Benedictine nunnery, founded around about 1159 and dissolved on 19 February 1539 (Henry VIII). It was one of only three priories in Devon to be founded by nuns. The original priory consisted of four main buildings around a quadrangle or cloister – a licence had been obtained for a burial ground when it was founded. The Priory was dedicated to St Katherine of Alexandria. The priory relied on rent from land in Polsloe, Cokesputt near Payhembury, Tudhays in Colyton and others, one of which was in Somerset, with an estimated income in 1635 of £164 8s 11d.

The first buildings were of timber, but were quickly replaced by more substantial structures. The surviving building, which is thought to date from 1310 to 1330, is the main part of the west range. It was originally built in local breccia and then rebuilt in the early 14th Century in the local sandstone. The ground floor was used as a storeroom with a parlour, while the upper floor was accommodation with a garderobe. The building has a 13th-century fireplace and has two stone corbels, of the same age, one of a man's head, and the other a woman's, both with carved head-dresses.

After many different owners, it now belongs to Exeter City Council and is leased to the Stoke Hill Community Association as a community centre with many classes, eg, Pilates and Tae-Kwondo, a model railway upstairs, and a community café every Friday.

The Mincinglake rises above Mincinglake Bridge on Stoke Hill and enters the Exe at Northbrook Park, where it is named the Northbrook. The stream ran past the Priory – the name was derived from the Anglo Saxon word *moenchin*, meaning nun. The nuns dammed the stream further up the valley to create a fish lake, hence the *nuns lake*.

Historic England provides excellent details about St. Katherine's priory at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1017595>.

Bury Meadow Park

This little park is situated near to St David's Church and was adjacent to Barrack Road (now Howell Road). According to Alexander Jenkins, the name derives from 'Berry Mead' which probably itself, comes from burh or earthwork as the Danes Castle siege earthworks are close by. Sir Edward Seaward, Mayor in 1691, was a principal benefactor of Berry (Bury) Meadow by donating four-fifths of the land, and Margery Gould providing the remainder to the City Chamber. Rental from the land went towards supporting the Exeter Workhouse.

A plot 92 ft by 109 ft was excavated as a burying ground for victims of the 1832 cholera outbreak; another outbreak occurred a few years later.

Bury Meadow was opened to the public in 1846. The park has municipal limestone gatepiers matching those to Exeter College, opposite. Bury Meadow Cottage was a former toll house. In the 1860s, John and Charles Ware built the pleasant paired villas of Velwell Road that overlook the park. Bury Meadow once extended as far as the Longbrook Valley. A nursery run by Richard Veitch and Son was established between the prison and Elmgrove Road with access from both New North Road and Howell Road.

Paul Kurowski

Photos by Haylor Lass