

## Tuesday, 19th April “Down the Culm and up the Clyst” with Jon Roseway

Two days after Easter the car park at Killerton House was the rendezvous for the walk. We knew the weather forecast:

*‘Remaining dry all day at the coast with (at Killerton) a 50% chance of rain at noon’*

At our starting time of 10.00am fourteen OVA members were enjoying bright sunshine and expanses of azure sky interspersed with billowing white clouds, just as occurs in Provence in mid-May. The light breeze complemented this wonderful warm weather for walking.

Knowing the plan was to walk eight miles by about 3.00pm Jon’s reasonably brisk walking pace set the ‘timbre’. After passing between the tall posts and splendid gates of the driveway to the main house we walked westwards over the closely grazed pasture. Part of this section of the footpath follows the ha-ha that is between Killerton’s formal garden and where we were walking. At the field boundary the defined footpath took us northwards and upwards to the edge of Columbjohn Wood where stands a large wooden frame of classic proportion, about 16 by 9, through which photographers can position and frame a vista across the landscape.



Now our direction was westwards, through the wood where native bluebells were in bloom, their numbers lessened by recent timber clearances. Afterwards we saw two young calves, both lying alongside the wires marking the boundary of their field with our narrow footpath. Their mothers like the calves appeared untroubled by our touching-distance presence. The tranquillity was striking.

During the refreshment stop at nearby Columbjohn Chapel, from where there are fine views across the water meadows of the meandering River Culm, the peace and quiet apart from birdsong was surprisingly broken: a distant rumble followed by a green flash of reflected

sunlight from a London-bound train. Moments later a silver flash was seen from another train travelling in the opposite direction.

As our walk continued we learnt of aspects about the land use of this predominantly agricultural and sylvan landscape that we had not expected. From an information board we read that the usage of the River Culm's water meadows is changing, for this is where National Trust (NT) plans to establish an extensive wildlife conservation area, thereby encouraging carbon sequestration too. Though the grazing of cattle on these meadows alongside the river has continued by successive generations of local NT tenant farmers this grazing practice is not now compatible with NT's future strategy for the locality.

Not far away, well before we reached our lunch stop in Broadclyst, the forward edge of the expanding urbanisation of Exeter is unexpectedly visible along a distant ridge. Much nearer, amongst the lattice of irregularly shaped fields and within an 'island' site enclosed by hedgerows, accessed only by a minor road, we walked by a modern, metal-clad, windowless, warehousing building and outdoor storage development, all of far greater vertical mass and extent than any of the farmsteads we saw that day. Within its high-fenced compound blue metal boxes were stacked in double decker formation, the type of boxes that can be carried by articulated lorries and transportable on ocean-going ships. It was strange to see this type of commercial development in such a bucolic setting: neither did we expect to see in the far distance a field covered with solar panels reflecting bright sunlight, nor hear sounds towards the end of the walk of a surprising nature.

Having followed a causeway interspersed with wooden mini-bridges across the normally boggy floodplain of the upper reaches of the River Clyst the clock of Broadclyst Parish Church struck one o'clock as we sat in its grounds during the lunch stop. Jon's meticulous planning and steady walking pace meant there was time to browse around the church yard. We saw the military graves of local men, several in their teens, who had fallen either in the first or in the second World Wars. Their profound message was:

*'We must remember them and never forget their sacrifices'.*

We knew already that the M5 motorway bisects NT's Killerton estate. Wherever we were, and especially in this church yard, we observed that vehicle noise was much reduced when one faced in the direction of the breeze and at the same time listened to the Spring birdsong.

And so back to Killerton, with its elegant, cuboid-shaped, flat-roofed house built by the Acland family that had been visible between the tall silhouettes of trees for most of our well-signposted walk. Along this last section of footpath we noticed, for only the second time that day, another of the many wildflowers we had spotted on the verges and in the fields. Lady's Smock (or Cuckoo Flower so named as it flowers when cuckoos return from the Tropics) were standing like sentries on parade.

The insights and pleasures that we gained from walking in this varied landscape are many. The wildflowers in the lanes and hedgerows, the buzzing bees searching for nectar ensuring that the flowers are pollinated, the cattle, sheep and pigs in the pastures, and the stimulating conversations with fellow walkers all contributed to our enjoyment.

The weather remained dry. The sight just before lunch of an approaching large black cloud whilst walking in the parish of Poltimore was a tease, but the cloud's direction which was towards us suddenly changed. There was an intervention which altered its tract: our Easter blessing!

What were the other unexpected sounds? After the visual enjoyment of our second sighting of Lady's Smock we were serenaded .... by sows and their numerous squealing piglets!



Thank you, Jon, for your splendid efforts in preparing and leading this excellent walk.

Derek and Elizabeth Carter