Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Bradfield, Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley
Carousing with the Backswordsmen

Distance: 21 km=13 miles or 20 km=12 miles or 18 km=11 miles
easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Berkshire — Date written: 20-mar-2011

Author: MacMeadow — Date revised: 18-jul-2015

Refreshments: The *Pot Kiln* and other pubs — Last update: 11-may-2026

Map: Explorer 159 (Reading) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

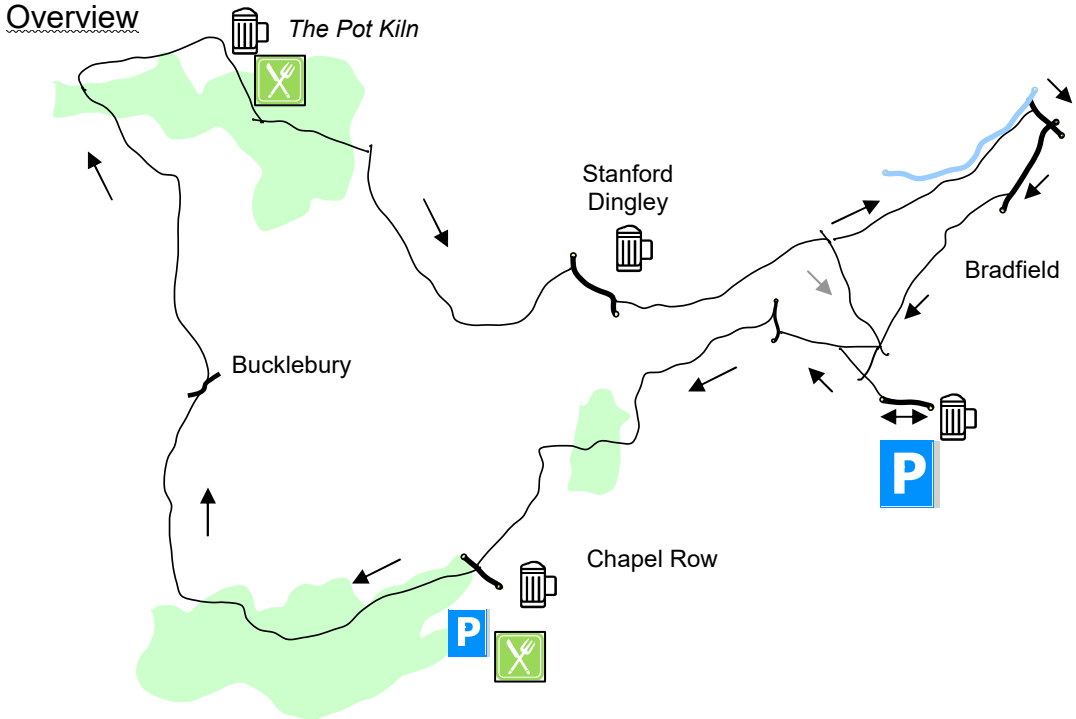
Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Lake, village, woodland, water, river, hills, heath

In Brief

This is a delightful walk through this gently hilly part of Berkshire, with a finish by the River Pang. It visits some charming small villages and a few unique pubs. This area was in the public light a few years ago because of a certain royal wedding, as it is home to the Middletons who were clients of the local pubs.

Overview



This walk was inspired by one of the *Adventurous Walks* by Raymond Hugh.

There is a gastropub en route, one of several fine watering holes. (To reserve or enquire at the *Pot Kiln*, ring 01635-201366.)

There are some patches of nettles on this walk making shorts inadvisable. In the more wintry months, some of the bridleways can be rather muddy, so

boots are recommended. The route seems fine with a dog; however, during March to July, there are ground-nesting birds in the woodlands and

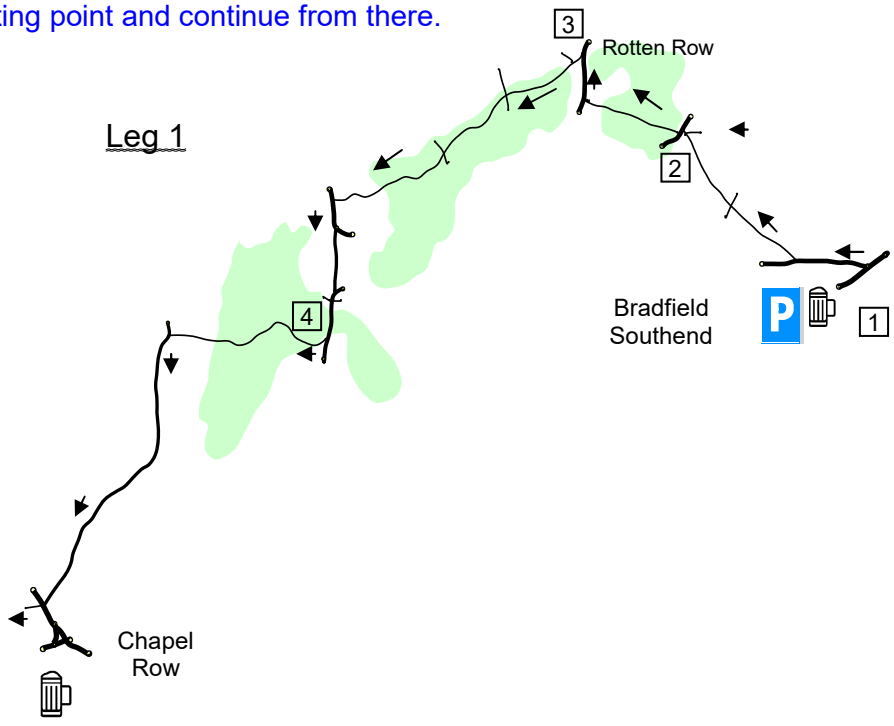
some of the fields have livestock where a lead will be required.

The walk begins near the *Queen's Head* in **Bradfield Southend**, postcode **RG7 6EY**, w3w:desktop.invisible.worry. Park in the Village Hall car park about 100m along the road (provided no 'event' is scheduled), or on the road side, e.g. in Cock Lane beside the pub. (Do *not* use the pub car park, especially at weekends, unless you have permission and are definitely a patron.) Alternative starts are near the *Bladebone Inn* in Chapel Row, postcode **RG7 6PD**, w3w:brisk.purified.lunch, and in several locations on the road side. The ideal start would be Bradfield but there is very little space there to park, except for a handful of spaces in the lane leading to the church. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Leg 1: Bradfield Southend to Chapel Row 4½ km=3 miles

Decision point. If you are parked other than in Bradfield Southend, scan down for your starting point and continue from there.



1 Go down Cock Lane beside the *Queen's Head*. Just after the school, turn **right** at a small fingerpost onto a wide bridleway. The track crosses a stream and reaches a crossing footpath. Continue straight over. The track joins a farm track and reaches a tarmac lane.

If you are **not** parked in Bradfield Southend, your route resumes here.

2 Go straight over the lane through a wooden barrier onto a very straight path through the hollies of Stanford Wood. The path goes through an archway

and through another wooden barrier. Turn **right** here on a lane downhill through the delightful hamlet of Rotten Row. *"Rotten Row" occurs often as a disparaging street name in towns and villages to describes a rat-infested line of tumbledown cottages – how things change.* Just before the bottom, turn **left** opposite *Farthings* on a bridleway.

3 Avoiding a footpath off right, continue through woodland. Keep to the main bridleway ignoring all turnings off: a right turn between tree plantations and another left, followed by more left and right. The bridleway zig-zags right-left and, after 1 km total, reaches a lane. Turn **left** on the lane. Where the lane bends left, keep straight ahead on a marked byway uphill, reaching a gravel drive by a white house. Turn **right**, disregarding some arrows 20m later. In 70m you pass a 4-way fingerpost. Continue on as the drive bends right and then left just after the last, large, house. Immediately leave the track by turning **right** onto a very wide grassy path that leads you downhill into woodland.

4 Go over a stile into an area which in spring is carpeted with bluebells. At a post with a yellow arrow, keep **right**. The path leads over a bridge, through a gate and into a meadow. Go along the left-hand side of the meadow and, at the end, turn **left** through a gate into a fenced path*, soon avoiding a bridleway off to the right. After ½ km you pass St Crispins Farm and some houses where the path becomes a track, finally arriving at a road at Chapel Row.

Chapel Row is part of the parish of Bucklebury and was a notorious place for carousing. In the 1790s prize fights took place (see e.g. Wikipedia for a hilarious account). In the early 1800s "backsworders" showed their skill at the Chapel Row Revels. A backsword was a sharp cudgel wielded by a fighter whose left arm was tied so that he could not ward off blows to the head.

The route is straight across the road. However, if you make a small diversion by turning left, in a short distance you will come to a green with the *Blackbird Café* (ideal for breakfast or tea), some parking spaces and the *Bladebone Inn*.

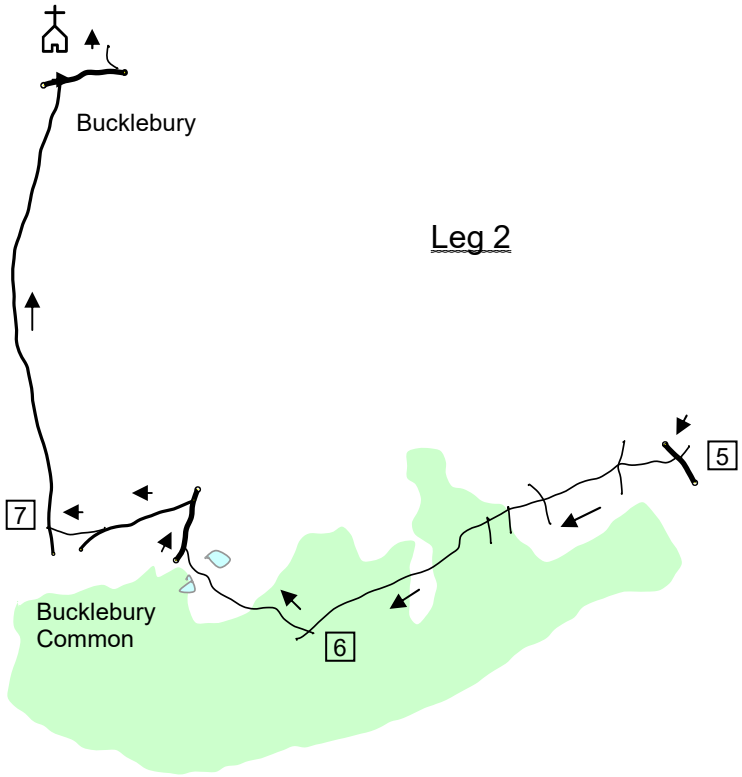
The Bladebone Inn is a pub with a legend. The object over the door which gives the pub its name is the bladebone of a mammoth covered in copper. There was once a monstrous mammoth prowling the Kennet Valley, roaming far and wide and spreading terror among the inhabitants. The men of the region finally raised an army and slew the monster and buried it on the banks of the Kennet. In the mid-1600s its skeleton was dug up and a Bucklebury man secured the bladebone and hung it as the sign of The Bladebone Inn. The sign has twice been taken down for renovation, and the bone inside was found to be in an excellent state of preservation. The pub was also the location for Courts leet and Courts baron (feudal courts dating from the middle ages).

Leg 2: Chapel Row to Bucklebury 3½ km=2 miles

5 **See map overleaf.** From the point where the footpath comes out to the road, go straight across the road, over a ditch, onto an unmarked path onto Bucklebury Common, following the overhead wires. You will be following the wires for over 1 km, making the navigation easy. In 400m you join a gravel drive and here it is easiest to follow the driveways of the houses of Scotland Corner **left-right-left** to avoid the undergrowth. In another 300m on an easier path you reach a 4-way fingerpost where two byways cross. Go straight over, still under the wires which bend slightly left here. You pass a big house on the right called *Barbers Pightle*: **stay under the wires**,

shortly avoiding a bridleway right. In another 400m you come to a driveway crossing your path by another 4-way fingerpost. Turn **right** here.

6 Veer **right** by the entrance to a large redbrick cottage called *Bucklewaite* and cross an overgrown bridleway. Follow the path downhill and between two ponds. Follow the main path round to the right and up to a road. Turn **right** on the road, passing *Nuttage House*, and in 150m turn **left** on a marked byway. The byway descends and rises with a meadow on your right. After nearly 400m, at a junction with a fingerpost, fork **right** on a bridleway through hollies. After 100m, at a wide crossing path, turn **right**.



7 The path now descends as directed by a purple arrow and enters beautiful open country, a welcome change from the woodlands. Avoid all footpaths branching off as you go through a gate and walk through tall pines, followed by a forest of birches and another gate. Shortly, on your right, you have a view of Bucklebury church below (summer foliage permitting). Go straight on through the gate. Continue straight ahead until the path becomes blocked. Veer **left** here into the field [Jul 2022: You cannot continue ahead on the official path as it is completely overgrown]. Once in the field, turn **right** and continue straight ahead with a hedge on your right . At the end go through either gate to arrive at the road in Bucklebury . Turn right on the road and walk past old Post Office beside the church. Turn **left** into the churchyard.

Bucklebury is a dispersed community and this is the ancient village. The much larger Upper Bucklebury is 3 km away, safe from the floods of the River Pang, and it is there that Kate Middleton and her sister Pippa were brought up and from where the butcher, postman and store manager were invited to the Royal Wedding.

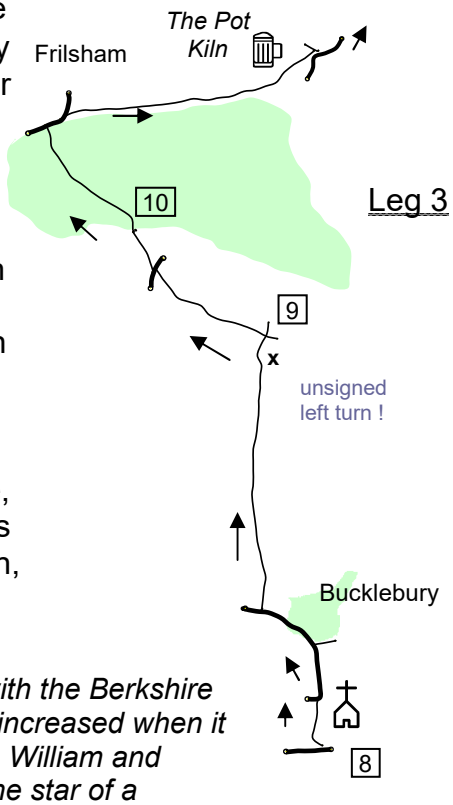
Bucklebury is probably named after Burghild, an Anglo-Saxon princess. The church of St Mary the Virgin existed before the Normans arrived and the manor was granted to the Abbots of Reading as a country retreat. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in the 1500s, Abbot Hugh refused to surrender the abbey and was imprisoned in the Tower of London and executed. It passed to the Winchcombes, a powerful merchant family, who built a fine Elizabethan mansion here. Several charming accounts of the history of the village can be found on-line.

Leg 3: Bucklebury to the Pot Kiln 3 km=2 miles

8 **See map below.** Go past the west door of the church, through the churchyard and across a drive with a swing-gate on each side. Go straight across a meadow and exit through a large swing-gate. Turn **right** on a lane, go over the bridge and stay on this lane, ignoring the road that joins from the right, signposted to Stanford Dingley, until 40m before the farm buildings, a (partially hidden) fingerpost directs you to a stile on the **right**-hand side of the road. Take this path and walk along the left-hand side of a paddock and over a stile (or through a large metal gate). Go over a track and proceed straight ahead, soon crossing another track, and then continue up the left-hand side of a large field for 700m. Just after you round the top of the field, look for a narrow path on your **left** through brambles and bracken. In summer this path is **extremely** overgrown: you just need to plough through somehow! It is very short. The only alternative is to continue **right** round the field edge for 300m to turn **left** through a (propped up) metal gate, doubling back to arrive at the other side of the bracken. The path goes through a wooden swing gate and brings you out into an open meadow facing a fence into another field.

9 Ignore the swing gate and marker arrows in the fence and instead turn **left** before the fence, continuing along the right-hand side of the grassy meadow. 100m into the next field, look out for a yellow arrow and small wooden gate under an oak tree and bear **right** into the trees through the gate, zigzagging to reach a tarmac lane. Cross the lane, go through a large wooden gate and walk close to the ancient buildings of Hawkridge Farm on your left. At the end, go **right** through a modern wooden gate and take a path along the left-hand edge of a sheep meadow. On the far side, go through another small gate.

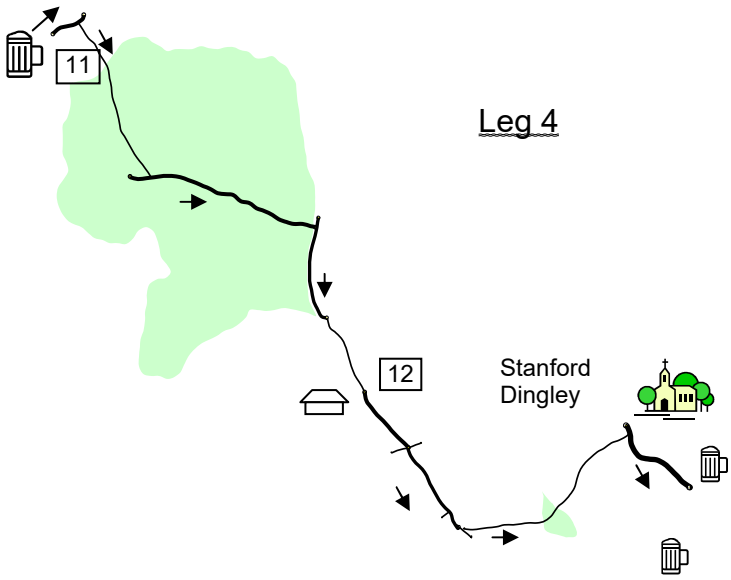
10 The path runs over a 3-plank bridge into deep woods. Once under the trees, be sure to keep **left**, ignoring any temporary forestry tracks. Your narrow path winds its way over another little bridge, by a marker post with a yellow arrow, and continues gently upwards under tall oaks and beeches and passes a pond on your left. You find yourself approaching a house on the outskirts of Frilsham. Keep straight ahead through a small gate onto the tarmac lane and turn **right**. In 50m, where the lane bends left, leave it by keeping ahead through a wooden gate by a footpath sign. Continue through another small wooden gate and then keep to the right hand side of the meadow, passing a redundant stile. Where the meadow narrows, switch to the left-hand side and, as you come over the brow of a hill, aim for a small red-brick house, eventually going through a wooden gate. The house reveals itself to be the celebrated *Pot Kiln* pub and, as you approach, you will become aware of families with children and groups calling in for food and refreshment.



The Pot Kiln was an isolated local pub until it became famous with the Berkshire folk, zipped up its menu and took on the media. Public interest increased when it emerged that it was one of the Middletons' locals. When Prince William and Kate were snapped there one Valentines weekend, it became the star of a tabloid story. Apart from all this, this really is a perfect country pub, in a delightful setting, with an good selection of real ales (including the local Renegade) and a really ambitious menu, and well deserving of the accolade as one of the best rural inns. The present tenants/owners have built their menu largely around seasonal local meats, such as wild venison and rabbit, served with vegetables

from the garden. The Pot Kiln is open from 12 noon every day. The Pot Kiln is also a hotel with three rooms in the pub and four superior rooms in the garden..

Leg 4: the Pot Kiln to Stanford Dingley 4 km=2½ miles

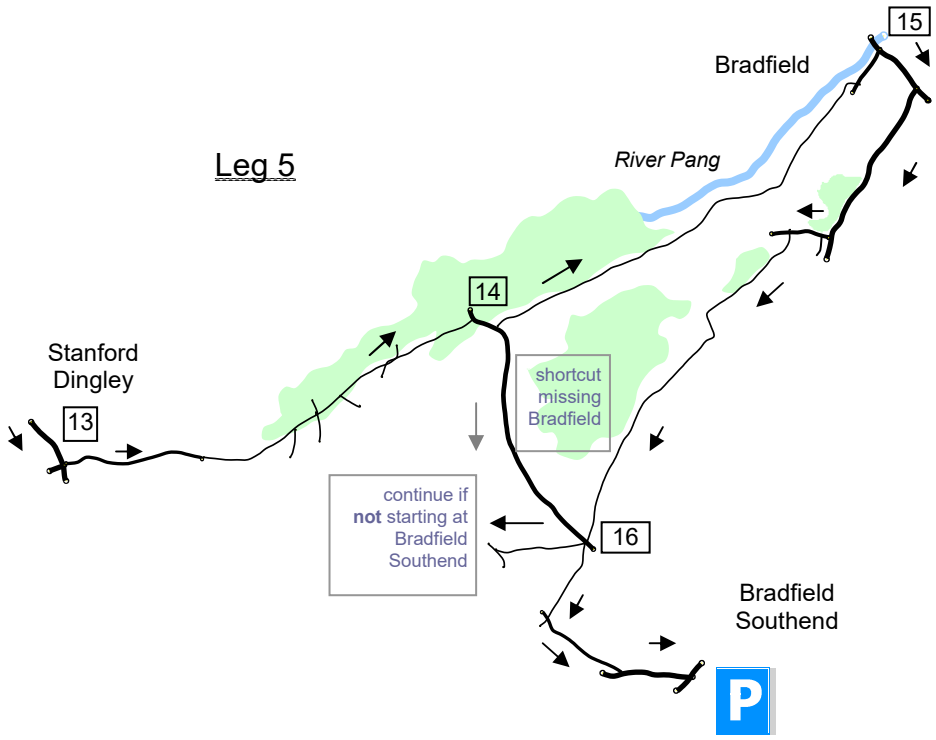


11 With the pub on your left, take the tarmac lane leading away. In 80m, turn **right** through a small metal gate and follow the path, through a small wooden gate and over a bridge, up the left-hand side of a small meadow. At the top, go through a metal gate, through rhododendrons, across a driveway and into a quite magnificent pine forest. In 300m, you reach a very wide crossing byway with a fingerpost. Turn **left** on this fine high path and follow it, bearing **left** when the path forks, with some good views, until in 700m it descends to a T-junction. Turn **right** on a track that runs between woodland and meadows. The path runs through some more trees and continues straight on between Pangfield Farm buildings and the farmhouse. (There is also a duller "Preferred Pathway" that you can take if you want to allow them privacy.)

12 Go down the tarmac drive and through a side gate to cross a lane, then through a gate opposite and along a track. Ignore a kissing gate and footpath right and go through the wooden gate to the **left** of a large metal gate into a meadow. Head for a wooden swing gate visible ahead on the far left-hand side. Go through the gate, across a bridge and through woodland, then another swing gate and into a meadow where you have a view of the white squat steeple of Stanford Dingley church. Go straight across the meadow aiming for the church. (Outside the dry summer months, this field may be very watery with no obvious bypass, so please take care!) At the other side, go over a stile to a lane by the church. After visiting the interesting church of St Denys, turn **right** on the lane (that is **left** if you visited the church) into the village itself.

Stanford Dingley owes its name to William de Standford, who was a lord of the manor in 1224 and to Richard Dyneley referred to in 1428 as son of William Dyneley Esq, bodyguard to the young Henry VI. Widely regarded as one of Berkshire's most beautiful villages, it enjoys a scenic setting in the Pang Valley. Its mill (now a house) is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Thomas Te(a)sdale, maltster and co-founder of Pembroke College Oxford, was born here. The interior of the church of St Denys is sunlit, having no stained glass, and four wooden beams at the west side sustain the belltower. There are wall paintings and painted arches. Stanford Dingley has two inns. The Bull Inn, which has just changed hands and been renovated, is a classic village pub with tiled floors and old wooden panelled and brick walls; it has a good choice of proper beers and the food menu is wide and varied. The Old Boot Inn, an 18th-century free house, has a regular Burns Night celebration at which Pippa Middleton has been known to carry the haggis accompanied by bagpipes. The landlord John Haley was invited to the Royal Wedding but mother-of-the-bride Carole Middleton has been upset by the pub's plans for a £15-a-head party on the Day which includes a "best prince and princess" contest.

Leg 5: Stanford Dingley to Bradfield Southend 6 km=4 miles or 3 km=2 miles



13 Continue down the main street, past the *Bull Inn* and over the Pang bridge until you reach a signposted road junction. The *Old Boot Inn* is 100m to the right. However, the route is **left** on a track marked as a footpath. Go through a wooden gate, followed by another, onto the shingly then grassy track, through a gate and along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture. Continue through a gate in the corner and keep straight ahead, ignoring paths on your right and left. Where your path enters trees and bushes, ignore a path that forks off right. Continue on an enclosed path beside a field on your right. Avoid a footpath right (one you may have seen from the other side on the outward journey). Go through a wooden gate, still on an enclosed path. Your path is joined by a wider bridleway coming from the right. In 40m, at a junction, go through a wooden swing gate, once more on an enclosed path. *On your left is a quite beautiful plantation of poplars growing in ranks sometimes with highland cattle grazing.* Finally exit through a gate to a tarmac lane and turn **right**.

> **Decision point.** If you want to return directly to the start, missing an interesting visit to Bradfield and a walk along the River Pang, stay on the lane, possibly taking an overgrown parallel path on the left for the first 150m, and keep straight ahead uphill at two road junctions (for Rotten Row and Tutts Clump) until you see two gates, both marked as footpaths, on the **right**; re-join the walk at section 16 below.

14 In 50m, turn **left** through a swing-gate and continue along the left-hand side of a grassy meadow, then through another gate where on your right is a golf course – the first evidence of Bradfield College. The River Pang rejoins you on the left like a genial silent companion and you stay beside it for some time. Eventually the path curves right to meet a road opposite St Andrews church (re-modelled by architect George Gilbert Scott). Turn **left** on the lane. The River Pang runs under the mill and then under bridges leading to cottages. At the main road, turn **right** into Bradfield, passing the buildings of the college.

Bradfield College is an independent co-educational school, founded in 1850 by Thomas Stevens the local rector. Every three years the college stages a Greek play (in Greek) in its own Greek Theatre. Old Bradfieldians include Richard Adams (author of Watership Down), Benedict Allen (TV explorer), Louis de Bernières (author), Tony Hancock (sad funny man) and David Owen (ex-foreign secretary, co-founder of the SDP).

15 At the crossroads, turn **right**, passing more of the college buildings. After the pavement ends, go another 200m along the road and turn **right** onto a tarmac lane signed to the Golf Club. Ignore a footpath sign near the start and in 150m turn **left** onto a signed footpath. Turn **right** and continue straight ahead. Go through a wooden gate onto a path that leads you through an avenue of large trees with golf greens either side. The path bends left at the end and then right through a gate. Cross a drive and go through a wooden gate opposite into a meadow. Aim for the far right corner and, having reached it, go through two gates to cross another meadow, going through a large, usually open, wooden gate. By the corner of a wood, continue by a fingerpost into the next meadow and choose the **left** fork which crosses the centre. At the end, go through a gate and cross a lane.

Here the shortcut to omit Bradfield rejoins the walk.

16 If you are parked in **Bradfield Southend** do as follows:

Ignore the small wooden gate ahead and instead go through the swing gate to its left. The path goes across the centre of a meadow, over a bridge and across the centre of the next meadow. Go through a metal kissing gate, turn **left** down an enclosed path. At the end, turn **left** on the road back to the *Queen's Head*.

If you are **not** parked in Bradfield Southend do as follows:

Turn **right** through the small wooden gate, ignoring the swing gate on its left. Follow this very narrow path with a hedge on your right and a field on your left. *Note the various pieces of old rusty farm implements scattered about.* At the end go through a small wooden gate. Cross the grass and go through another wooden gate in the far left-hand corner to arrive at a tarmac lane. Continue from Leg 1 section 2.

Getting there

By car: take the M4 to junction **12** (Theale). Follow the A40 west to the **second** roundabout and turn **right**, all the time following signs for Pangbourne. In 350m, turn left signposted **Bradfield**. In 2½ km=1½ miles, turn **left** signposted **Bradfield Southend**. In about 2 km=1¼ miles, you reach the *Queen's Head* pub on the right: park anywhere nearby.

By bus/train: bus route 105 from Reading or Newbury. Check the timetables.

*fancy **more** free walks?* www.fancyfreewalks.org