



Pilgrim Paths

**A 'virtual' pilgrimage from St Nicholas, Chadlington
to All Saints', Spelsbury**

We are going to make a 'virtual' pilgrimage together. A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to a sacred place. To help focus our thoughts, we shall be using Psalm 145 to inspire short reflections and prayers, often touching on aspects of the current Coronavirus emergency. You might like to follow our route on a 1:25,000 OS sheet or the satellite view on Google Maps.

We begin and end at Chadlington's ancient parish church of St Nicholas. We can't go inside at the present time because all churches are closed to the public in this period of lock-down, but there is much to enjoy from the outside on this sunny morning in Eastertide.



We find a quiet place to sit and place ourselves in God's presence. In a seemingly chaotic world, it feels a little easier in this beautiful, hallowed spot where, for many centuries, generations of villagers have come to worship God and honour their dead. Our sense of community has never been so important as at this present time of isolation, fear and difficulty.

PRAYER:

Father, thank you for the resources, abilities and opportunities you have given us. Help us to live in humility, do our best and serve our community, especially at this time of need. May all we do reflect your Father-love to those whom we seek to serve. Amen



PREPARING TO LEAVE:

Pilgrimage is ... a sign of contradiction, and of resistance to our prevailing value system, that of the market. Pilgrimage, after all, has no function other than itself; its means is as important as its end, its process as its product. Its utility value is small, and its benefits cannot be quantified or costed. Its value is intrinsic. It is something that is good to do because it is good to do. It states clearly that the extravagant gesture (because it is extravagant in terms of time and commitment) is an irrepressible part of what it means to be human and to walk on the earth. And whether the context for pilgrimage is solitude or community, we will be drawn deeper into the mystery of God and the care of creation. (Kathy Galloway)



Bless to us, O God,
the earth beneath our feet.
Bless to us, O God,
the path whereon we go.
Bless to us, O God,
the people whom we meet.
Amen

Psalm 145

*1 I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.*
*2 Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.*

Towards the east end of the churchyard is a rather striking memorial to Frederick Schofield and his two wives. The memorial takes the shape of an ornate winged angel, which really stands out in a graveyard full of table tombs and simpler headstones.



Many headstones speak of generations who have put their trust in God's powerful grace. These verses of Psalm 145 echo that confidence.

- ³ Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no-one can fathom.*
- ⁴ One generation commends your works to
another;
they tell of your mighty acts.*
- ⁵ They speak of the glorious splendour of
your majesty — and I will meditate on
your wonderful works*
- ⁶ They tell of the power of your awesome
works — and I will proclaim your great
deeds.*
- ⁷ They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

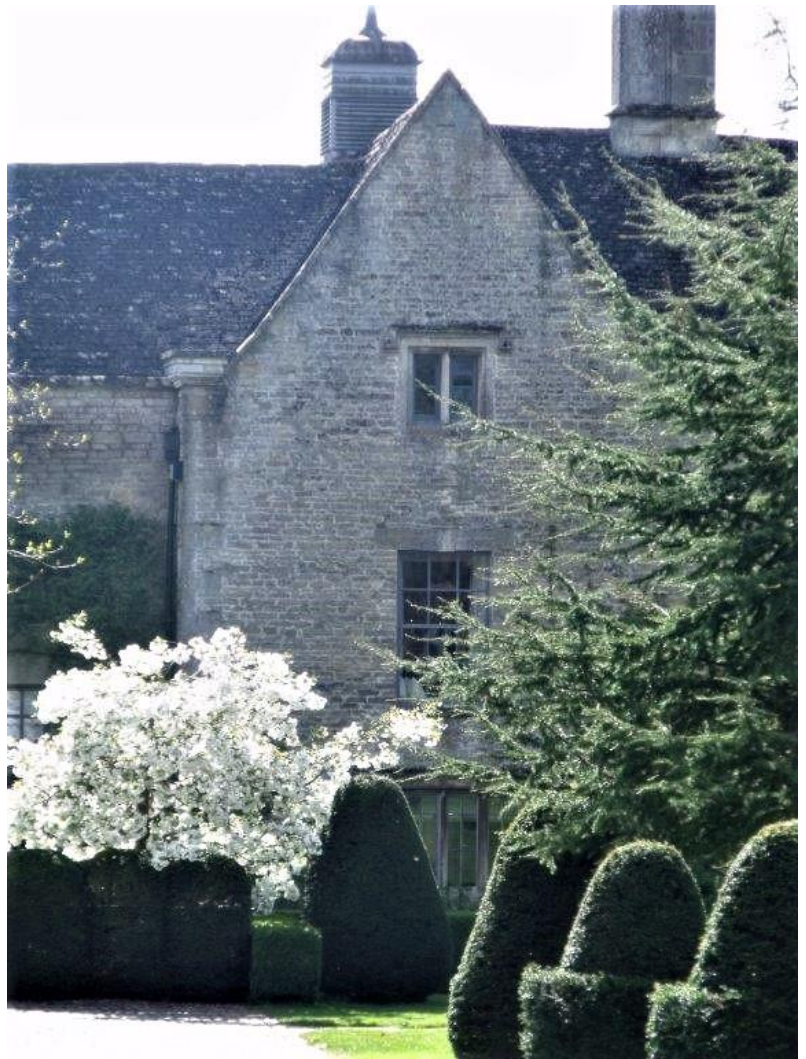
High on the east wall of the nave, above the chancel roof, is a splendid carving of a 'Green Man', an ancient symbol of new life and hope. But at Eastertide we remember that we have an infinitely more potent symbol of abundant and eternal life in Jesus' Empty Tomb.



JOURNEYING:

We go through the churchyard gate, turn left and walk along East End, passing Chadlington Manor on our left. Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, the renowned assyriologist, (the study of the ancient civilization and language of Assyria) was born in this house. He lived for many years in Baghdad deciphering cuneiform. Returning to Britain, he was feted by society and was knighted. He bequeathed his collection to the British Museum.

Proceeding a little further, we see on our right the village school, perhaps representative of the other end of the spectrum of scholarship, but no less important.

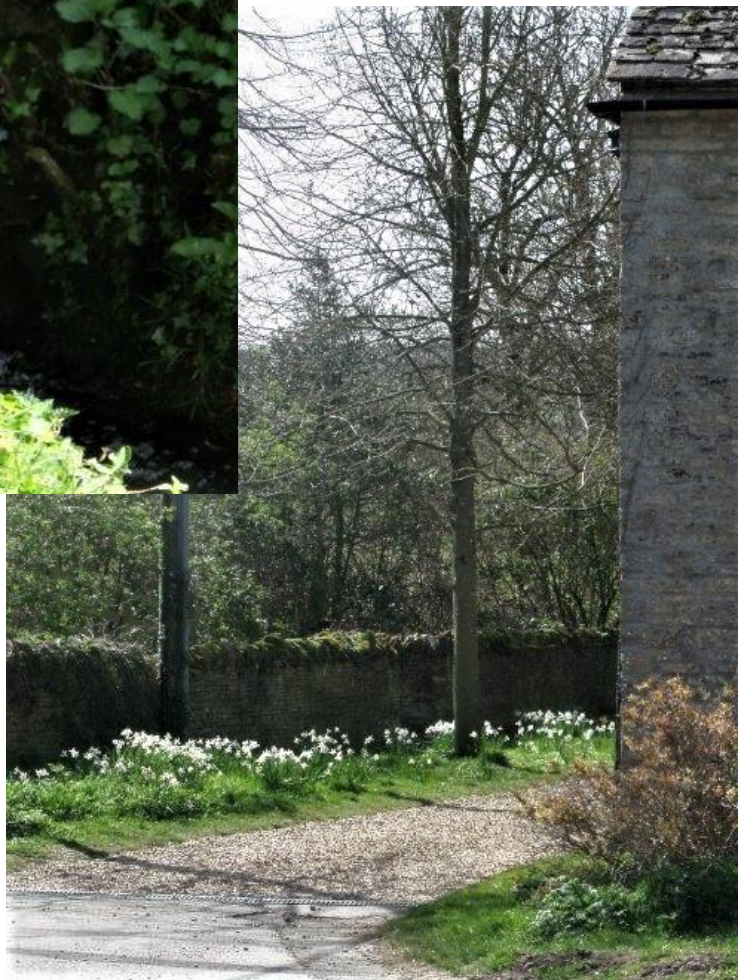


All schools are 'closed' for the foreseeable future but, like the Church, they are not just buildings and they remain in operation for the benefit of their pupils. This is challenging for teachers, children and parents, and many will be struggling to come to terms with this unfamiliar situation. We need to keep them in our thoughts in these unprecedented times.

PRAYER:

Loving Father, watch over all the school-children and students at this time. Keep them safe and well and help them to adjust to new circumstances and rise to the challenges facing them over the coming weeks and months. Bless their teachers as they strive to do their best for their pupils at the same time as coping with their own home situations. Amen

We turn left down Watery Lane, just before some terraced houses, following the high wall of the manor parkland. We pause as we go down the lane to inspect the former village well set in the wall on the left, now a rather unprepossessing pipe but with a good and constant flow of water that feeds a tiny stream.



After being crossed by the little stream that we can easily step over, the lane turns into a broad grassy path which we follow as it veers to the left and into the corner of a field. We turn left along the edge of the field and continue round it until we reach a kissing gate next to a field gate. As we have passed gaps in the hedge on our left, we have glimpsed charming views of the manor house across its park, and we have spotted the first cowslips beneath the hedge.



We go through the kissing gate but, before turning right, we pause and look back up to another lovely view of the manor and church.



Psalm 145 continues –

We can take some moments to see
how these words resonate for us and
acknowledge our thoughts.

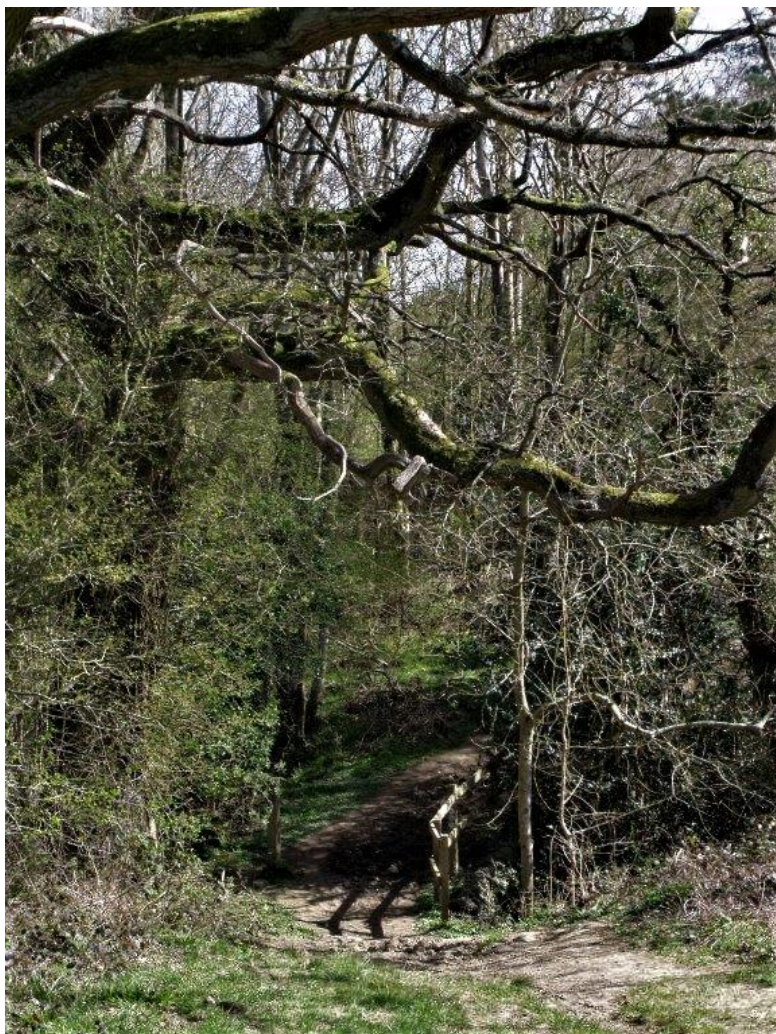
*⁸ The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*



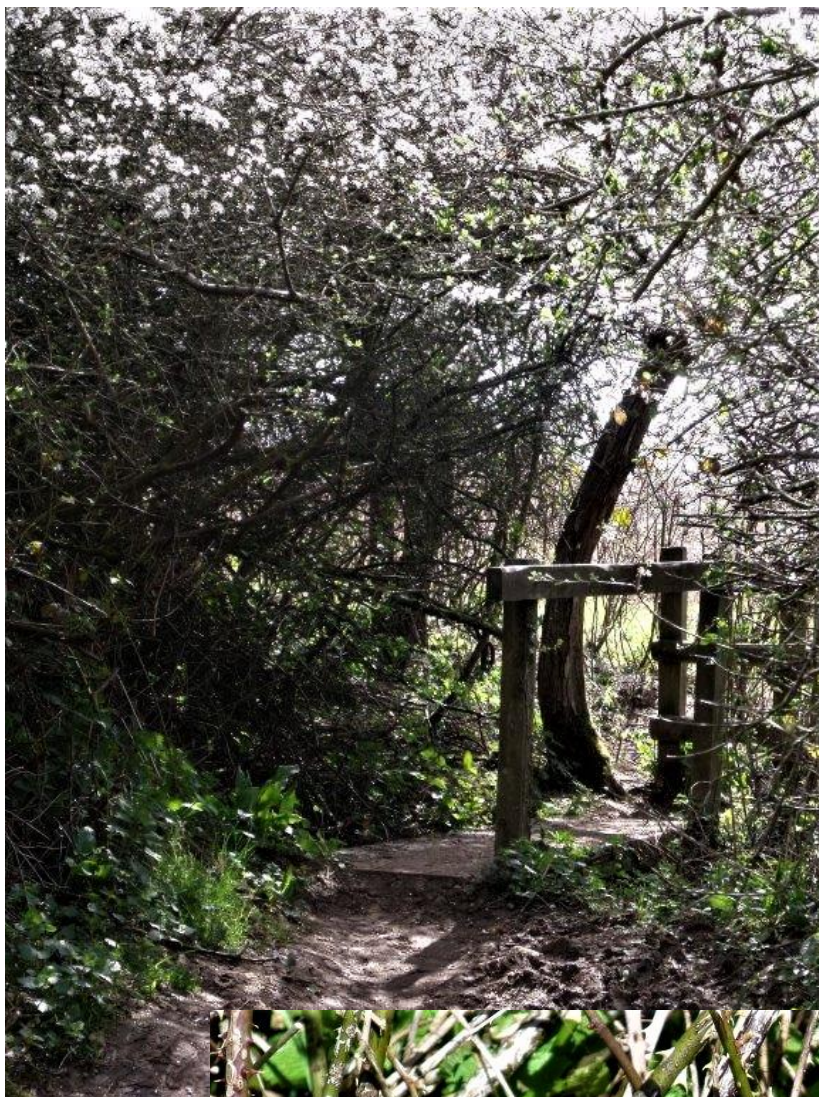
Continuing down the field, we go through another kissing gate and over a stream in a little woodland belt. We then follow the path diagonally across a small field (pausing to say 'Hello' to a couple of inquisitive horses) and through a third kissing gate, turning right onto a track along the edge of a very large field with a hedge on our left and extensive views to our right.



At the end of the field, we turn left on a broad green track. We now have a hedge on our left and a dark, coniferous wood on our right, but there are some fine free-standing oaks ahead.



From the corner of the wood, with the hedge still on our left, we drop down towards more woodland ahead which we enter by crossing a bridge over a stream. This is the Wychwood Project: a lovely area of restored woodland incorporating an old quarry. But, special as it is, we are not going to linger here today as our chosen path merely cuts through a corner.



So, forking right at the Wychwood Project information board, we continue to a tunnel-like gap in the hedge, shrouded by sparkling blackthorn blossom, and go over another wooden bridge into a field. Turning left, we walk along the field edge, enjoying the sight of some early bluebells in the sunny hedge-base on our left.



On reaching a wooden gate at the corner, we remain in the field but turn right along a track, again following the field edge. We walk through a small copse and continue on the track with the field hedge on our left, beyond which are tempting glimpses into Dean Grove. Eventually, just after the track bears slightly left, we pass a gap in the hedge and turn left through a kissing gate into another field where we see a magnificent group of shire horses grazing quietly in the distance. These mighty animals speak to us of power and perseverance, which aptly foreshadows our next reflection.



We walk along the field edge, keeping the hedge on our left, and turn left when we reach a kissing gate about 60 metres from the far-left corner. Bearing right, we walk along the right side of this next field towards a wood at the end, where we find another kissing gate in the corner, next to a wooden field gate.



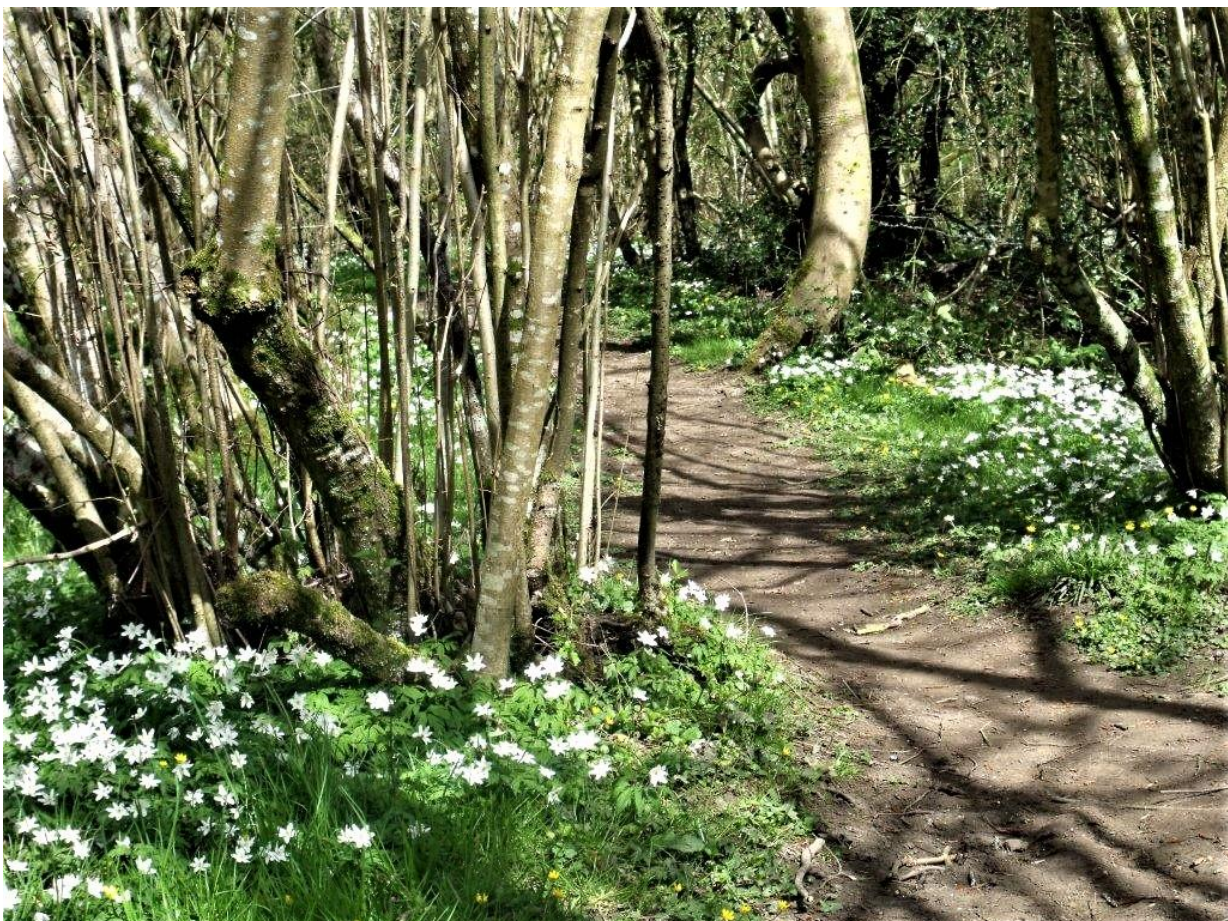
We have now reached, not the destination, but certainly one of the highlights of our pilgrimage – Dean Grove. As we enter the tranquil wood, with a burbling brook on our right, we proceed to the next kissing gate. Beyond this point we can see that the woodland consists largely of coppiced hazel, now grown lofty with large clusters of slender stems reaching up to the shimmering canopy of emerging, fresh green leaves. This is a precious moment.

The theme of Psalm 145 continues: God intends and does nothing but good to absolutely everyone. This means that no matter what we do, no matter what choices we make, the Lord will continue to do whatever can be done for our well-being and for our salvation.

As we 'walk' together, we can choose to consider our response.

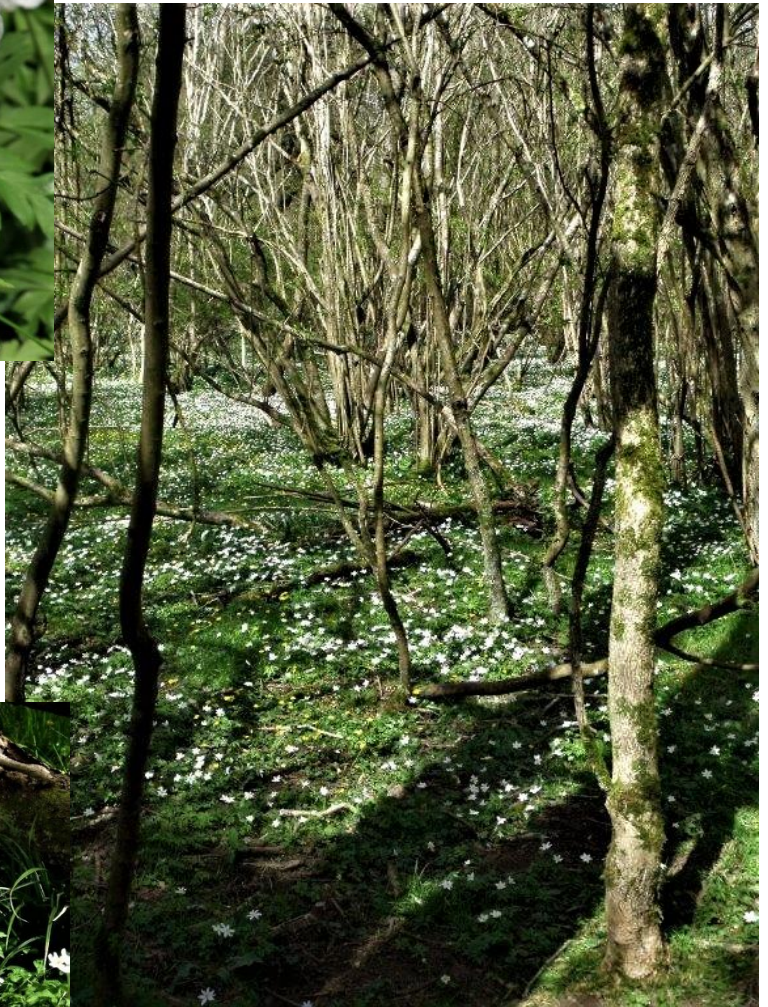
How can we "speak of [God's] might so that all people may know"?

- ⁹ *The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has
made.*
- ¹⁰ *All your works praise you, Lord;
your faithful people extol you.*
- ¹¹ *They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,*
- ¹² *so that all people may know of your
mighty acts and the glorious
splendour of your kingdom.*
- ¹³ *Your kingdom is an everlasting
kingdom,
and your dominion endures through
all generations.*



Keeping the meandering brook on our right, we continue straight ahead at a fork, following the lovely woodland path and marvelling at the carpet of starry-white wood anemones (windflowers) that spreads before us in all directions.







We pause under the canopy and take note of what we hear.
Against the background of Spring birdsong and the stillness of the wood,
we try to allow these next verses of the psalm penetrate our thoughts.

*The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.*

*¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.*

PRAYER:

Generous Father, we thank you for the beauty and bounty of creation. Help us to steward it well, to treasure the delight it brings us – particularly in hard times - and to pass on that deep appreciation to those who follow us. Amen

Where the signed footpath bears sharp right, we go through a kissing gate, across a clearing and through another kissing gate; cross a stream by a wooden bridge and then another stream to reach a large garden providing the perfect setting for Coldron Mill. The working water wheel is normally in noisy operation but, today, it has been removed from its bearings for maintenance and stands motionless and silent but still impressive.

[Note: an alternative route, avoiding the private garden, is to continue through the wood to the gate at the far end and then, after a further 150m, turn right on the bridleway to Spelsbury.]

¹⁴ *The Lord upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.*

Here the water is upheld by the wheel and its falling is part of the purpose, creating power through vulnerability and offering.

Could this speak to us?



Keeping the water wheel and mill house close on our left, we walk up to a clump of six trees and bear left through the orchard to a gate with a cattle grid.

We pause to enjoy the view of Spelsbury church before heading towards it.



The church is still a way off, but it is within sight.

As we read these verses we may well sense that God's provision can feel a way off too.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

¹⁶ You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Our Father in heaven, you created everything and you provide for our needs.
We are your children.

You tell us that when we have a need we should ask and keep on asking.

We pray for the needs of our world.

We pray for our own needs too.

I am your child - into your love I place my path, my direction and my goal
..... I place my life. Amen

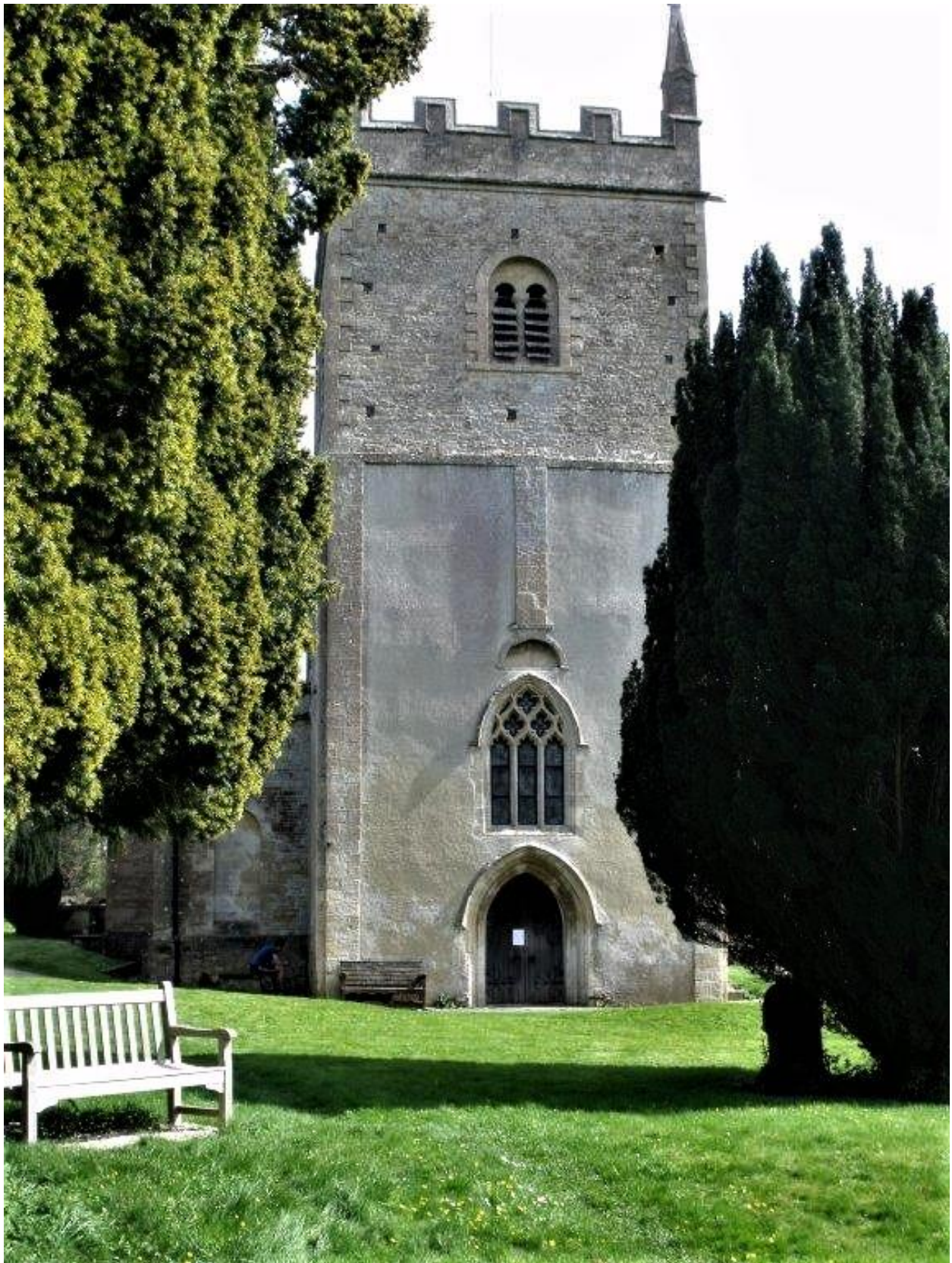
We cross the field (avoiding the cows with their calves) and go through another gate to the next field which has a charming dovecote folly to our right. Walking across this field, we head to the left of the churchyard and, in the corner, find a gate between two cottages (old on the right and modern on the left). We go along a track to the village street and turn right to reach the Church of All Saints, Spelsbury.



Today, we can't go in to look at the exceptional collection of recently refurbished memorials and tombs commemorating members of the Dillon/Lee family from Ditchley Park, but we can rest in the lovely churchyard enjoying the view of the tower, the lower stages of which are early-Norman or possibly even pre-Conquest. This is probably the earliest church structure for miles around. It reminds us of the faithful witness and service of the clergy and those in ministry over the centuries. They have never been more in need of our prayers.

PRAYER:

Gracious Father, uphold and strengthen our clergy and all in ministry in the Deanery and beyond. Give them wisdom, vision and energy to steer in uncharted waters, and let them know your great love and peace in everything they do. Amen



Though this lovely spot is the “sacred place” destination of our pilgrimage today, we remind ourselves that we encounter God as much in the journey as in the arriving; as much in the effort to achieve as in the accomplishment.

Leaving the enchanting churchyard somewhat reluctantly, we turn left along the village street and retrace our steps to turn left down the track again. However, just before the field gate, we take a footpath to the right and continue along to the field corner. We then go straight ahead through a gap in the wall, cross a track and climb over a stile into a field.



Bearing half-right, we cross the field to where there are step-over gaps in two parallel electric fences, then proceed along the edge of the section of the large field lying behind the houses and climb over a stile to join the road to Chadlington. Turning left, we walk along this road to a sharp left-hand bend where we bear right onto the bridleway to Dean.

On reaching a junction of tracks, our route is straight on along a narrow path between bushes.

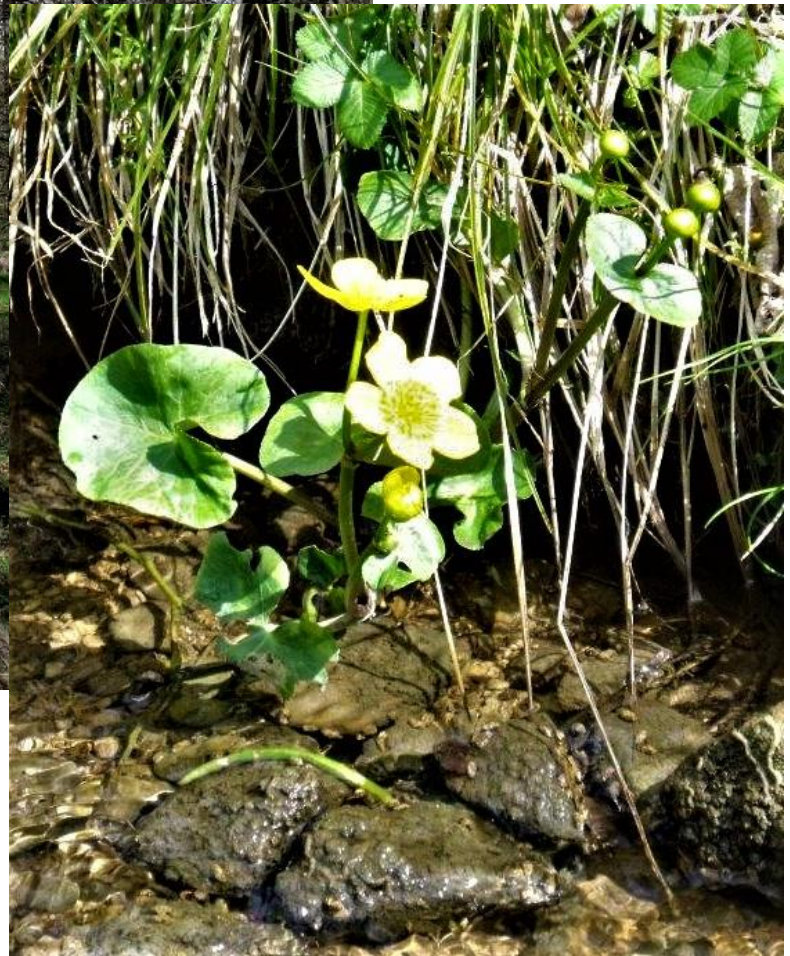
Before we negotiate the next part of the walk, where shall need to follow the path carefully and watch our steps, we can consider this prayer and keep it in mind as we continue.



*Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to
hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts,
our world, our universe.
Amen.*

We continue along the green lane, ignoring a track into a field on our left, then fork left where the path divides, dropping down through a wood and across a stream on a low bridge.





Continuing for 20m through a grove of poplar trees, we turn left to cross another bridge, noting a few kingcups or marsh marigolds in the stream, and go through a wooden gate into a field. Keeping the hedge on our right through this field, we pass Dean Cottages on our right and meet the village street. We turn left on this lane and then immediately right at the road junction, where we see the last of the cheerful daffodils in the foreground of the view to lovely Dean Manor.



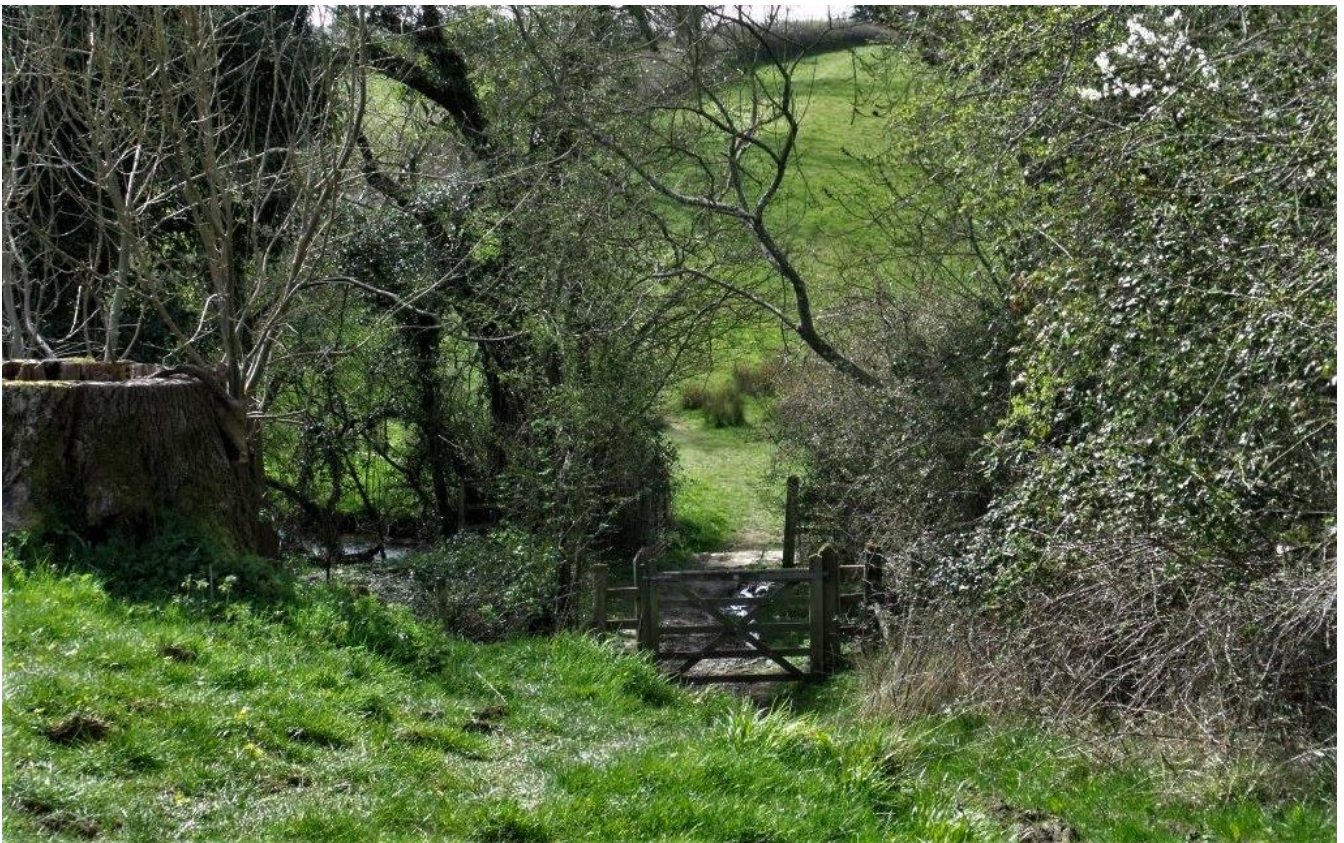
RETURNING:

We are about to begin the final leg of our journey back to Chadlington. From the junction, we continue along the lane and pass Dean Manor. At the point where the lane goes around to the right, we turn left on the bridleway to Chadlington, going through two gates and along the fenced-off edge of the field. As we look across to the houses of this tiny hamlet of Dean, with its well-known associations with celebrity and wealth, we reflect on the next verses of the psalm and remember those who are currently in distress, in need or facing financial disaster.

- ¹⁷ *The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.*
- ¹⁸ *The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*
- ¹⁹ *He fulfils the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.*
- ²⁰ *The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

PRAYER:

Righteous God, we lift to you all who are having to cope with the loss of jobs or income, or the potential collapse of businesses. We ask for your reassuring presence for the isolated and your strength and peace for those who are fearful. Heal the sick and comfort those who have lost loved ones. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen





We continue to the corner of the field, through two gates in the gap and cross the stream. Proceeding up the left-hand-side of the next field, we pass through a gate and along a track. At the road, we turn right and, re-entering Chadlington, walk past Langston House with its Spring blossoms towards the church. We reflect that our joy in being free to enjoy the countryside in Spring makes it all the more important to remember those who are working so hard on the front line of this disastrous emergency.

PRAYER:

Merciful Father, we thank you so much for the doctors, nurses, carers and support staff who are giving their utmost and working under such stressful conditions, fearful for what is yet to come. We implore you to have compassion on them and to grant them health, strength and peace of mind, now and in the weeks and months to follow. Amen

FINISHING:

With gratitude for this lovely journey, we return to rest for a moment in the tranquil churchyard and reflect on the final verse of Psalm 145

*²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.*

Gracious God,
As this pilgrimage finishes, our journey continues.
We go from here to new horizons.
Give us
Your peace in our hearts
Your presence to accompany us
Your grace to share
That we may speak of your love
So every creature may come to praise your holy
name.
Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Postscript:

This 'virtual' pilgrimage is based, with permission, on one of the thirty pilgrim path booklets currently being produced for Chipping Norton Deanery. It was designed as an online resource for the Chipping Norton benefice to be enjoyed remotely by those confined to their homes, but it could equally well be used as a guide on the ground, accessed through a hand-held device, for those able to walk the 3.7-mile route. The original document can be found at <https://pilgrimpaths.info/> along with booklets for nine other routes. Other publications will be added to the website very soon. The thirty circular routes form a linked chain, visiting every church in the deanery. In more normal times members of the Pilgrim Path team lead pilgrimages on these walks twice a month throughout the Summer period. These are advertised in the churches and on the website.

Easter 2020

Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright © 2011

This is the Day: Readings and Meditations from the Iona Community, Neil Paynter, ed., Glasgow, UK: Wild Goose Publications, 2002]

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