

# Don't Take Care . . . Take a Risk!

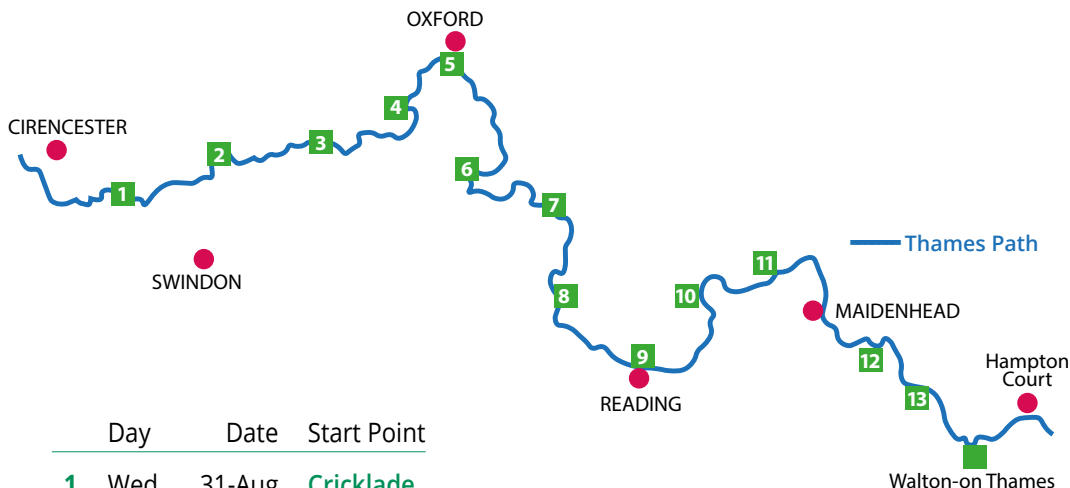
Tom Benyon OBE



Reg Charity No 1112949

ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Still walking for Zimbabwe's destitute pensioners



	Day	Date	Start Point
1	Wed	31-Aug	<a href="#">Cricklade</a>
2	Thu	01-Sep	<a href="#">Lechlade</a>
3	Fri	02-Sep	<a href="#">Buckland Marsh</a>
4	Sat	03-Sep	<a href="#">Bablock Hythe, Witney</a>
5	Sun	04-Sep	<a href="#">Port Meadow</a>
6	Mon	05-Sep	<a href="#">Abingdon</a>
7	Tue	06-Sep	<a href="#">Shillingford</a>
	Wed	07-Sep	REST DAY
8	Thu	08-Sep	<a href="#">Streatley</a>
9	Fri	09-Sep	<a href="#">Reading</a>
10	Sat	10-Sep	<a href="#">Henley-on-Thames</a>
11	Sun	11-Sep	<a href="#">Marlow</a>
12	Mon	12-Sep	<a href="#">Eton Dorney</a>
13	Tue	13-Sep	<a href="#">Runnymede</a>
			end at <a href="#">Walton-on-Thames</a>



Dear Reader

Zimbabwe's economy is in a state of collapse. Whilst those in government manage, as ever, to insulate themselves from economic hardship, the old, the sick and the vulnerable bear the brunt of the pain.

**Imagine** living in a country where the government has allowed chronic inflation to erode your pension and savings to zero.

**Imagine** living in a police state.

**Imagine** living without healthcare provision.

**Imagine** living without social services of any kind.

**Imagine** living in a country where, if you are sick and without family – which is sadly a commonplace – you face dying in squalor.

To draw attention to the plight of those living in these circumstances, Jane and I – along with our dog, Moses – walked 140 miles along the Thames Path. The challenges of this walk were nothing compared to those navigated daily by the destitute people of Zimbabwe who rely on ZANE to survive.

We walked because you, ZANE's loyal supporters, continue to respond with such encouragement, kindness and generosity. We walked to provide food, medicine and shelter to some of the most vulnerable people who simply have nowhere else to turn.

We hope you enjoy reading this walk commentary. Please be aware that the views expressed are ours alone – and although you may not agree with some of them, we hope you will continue reading to the end.

Please note that this booklet raises far more in donations than the cost of its production.

Thank you for your kindness and support.

Tom Benyon OBE



Jane Benyon



“ I have seen a little bit of ZANE's work on the ground and from what I have seen, it is very, very impressive . . . ZANE is one of those lovely organisations that make a little bit of money go a long, long way. ZANE is a good cause and the money is properly and well spent.

**John Simpson CBE**

World Affairs Editor of the BBC

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# Those Were the Days

30 August – The Day Before

**You may be wondering why we've called this year's walk blog *Don't Take Care, Take a Risk!*?**

Well, to start with, people telling me to "take care" really irritates me! It's a wholly negative sentiment, the sort of warning teachers give their pupils in order to comply with health and safety laws, and the polar opposite of Katharine Hepburn's lovely, "If you obey all the rules, you'll miss all the fun."

You don't have fun taking care. You get bored to death. When some people hear about our walk, they say things like, "Ooh... You know you shouldn't be doing that at your age. You must take care!"

## *Keep On Walking*

As they say in Northumberland, "Get hired!" I'm old enough now to be playing with the casino's money. Indeed, I'm at that age when you seriously wonder if it's wise to buy green bananas or worthwhile starting *War and Peace*. The astute author Kingsley Amis

suggested that no one over a certain age should stop doing what they enjoy on the off chance they might get to spend an extra year in the home for the bewildered – say in Doncaster's *Sea View*. There you'd sit on a plastic-covered chair (don't ask why) in a room whiffing of cabbage and wee, and with daytime TV burbling away. Bald, batty, doubly incontinent and gently dribbling, you'd be sucking lunch through a straw. And, of course, it would be raining.

Tell me again Grandad, about how you survived your childhood...



The children would be complaining, “It’s your darn turn to visit Dad...” and the reply would be, “No, it’s your turn!” And then they’d think, “What’s the point? He won’t know who the hell we are anyway!”

Sorry if that’s a bit close to the bone for some supporters – but we all know that life in extreme old age can be a total sod.

So, I say, while the going’s still good, walk away! I know we’re doing something useful by walking for Zimbabwe’s poor. If we die in a ditch, what the hell! And please remember, don’t “take care” – take a risk! Have a song in your heart and be with the people you love and who love you. Better by far than slowly rusting away in *Sea View*, Doncaster! Don’t you agree?

Paragliding anyone? Or a spot of white-water rafting?

### *Times Past*

When I was young, prizes were for those who came top in a school subject or won a race. Now, it seems that children are given an award just for enrolling in a subject (whose name they can’t even spell) or for coming last in a race! Apparently, it’s called “encouragement to be mediocre”. In my day, we knew we had to accomplish something of

significance before we deserved a prize or congratulations.

Experts now agree that it’s okay for children to play in the dirt with their dogs and cats so they can build up some immunity... Well, goodness me! Who would have thought that? My mum used to cut chicken, chop eggs and butter bread all on the same chopping board and with the same knife, but we didn’t seem to get food poisoning. Our school sandwiches

were wrapped in wax paper and stuffed in a brown paper bag, not in ice-pack coolers, but I can’t remember getting *E. coli*. We mucked out horse stables and played Kick the Can in muddy farmyards – amazing that we suffered no ill effects.

Almost all of us preferred swimming in a lake or the sea to a pristine, chlorinated pool (talk about boring?) We all took PE and risked permanent injury by wearing gym shoes or going barefoot. We didn’t have cross-training athletic shoes with air-cushioned soles and built-in light reflectors that cost as much as a small car. I can’t recall any injuries, but they must have happened because they tell us how much safer we are now.

### *Ps and Qs*

We were taught manners by our parents, how to be polite to our elders and to offer our seat on the

**“We were taught manners by our parents, how to be polite to older people.”**

bus or train to anyone who needed it. And we were expected to write a “thank you” letter when someone gave us a gift. Funny how we found the time to do that.

There were at least 40 kids in my class at school. Somehow, we all learned to read and write, do maths and spell almost all the words needed to write a grammatically correct letter. Funny that!

If anyone called us an unpleasant name, we worked out how to handle it, even had a fight or two. We never went crying to Teacher or Mummy for help or descended into a state of nervous collapse or suffered “stress”. We learned the hard way how to handle bullies and discovered that life can be mighty tough and is often unfair. Oh, and parents rarely complained to schools that they were being too hard on their beloved children.

We all said prayers in school, irrespective of our religious background; we sang the national anthem and saluted the flag, and no one got upset. We accepted discipline and detentions and grew up to accept rules and regulations. It went without saying that we honoured and respected those who were older than us.

I just can’t recall how bored we were without computers, phone screens, PlayStation, Nintendo, X-box or 270

digital TV channels. We weren’t! We talked to friends, we read and re-read books, we kicked balls around – and don’t even mention the rope swing across the river or climbing trees!

Oh, yes... where was the sterilisation kit or the antibiotics when I got that bee sting? I could have died!

We played King of the Castle on piles of dirt or gravel left in vacant building sites and when we got hurt, our mums pulled out the 2/6d bottle of iodine and then we got our backsides spanked. Now it’s a trip to A&E followed by a 10-day course of antibiotics, and then Mum calls a lawyer to sue the contractor for leaving a horribly vicious pile of gravel where it was such a threat.

To top it off, not a single person I knew was told they came from a dysfunctional family. How could we possibly have known that? We

didn’t know anything about drugs or porn. Our worst excesses were confined to a ciggie behind the bike shed. We never needed group therapy or anger management classes, and we’d never even heard of Prozac! How

did we ever survive?

Love to all of us who shared this era – and to those who didn’t, sorry for what you missed. We wouldn’t trade it for anything!

Those were the days.

**“We didn’t know anything about drugs or porn.”**

# Old Habits Die Hard

31 August – Day 1: Cricklade to Lechlade

**It's been 13 years since Jane and I first walked for ZANE. Six walking sticks, eight pairs of boots and five walking outfits later (and that's just me), here we go again!**

We found a kindly collection of ZANE supporters waiting to cheer us on our way. The weather was warm and dry. I was amazed to see how low the Thames was, but the conditions make for easy walking.

I should take this opportunity to remind readers that the views expressed in these blogs are ours alone and do not reflect the views of ZANE or of any of the people working with ZANE in Zimbabwe or in the UK.

## *New-fangled Ways*

A 1970 advertisement for Guinness read, "I've never tried it, and I don't like it."

Bill Gates once said that his biggest problem was people not knowing how to want what he could offer them. He must

have had my old Aunt Hetty in mind when he said that. She hated dishwashers – they were "new-fangled" – and she was comfortable with the good old ways. Of course, she only used a dishwasher once and that was when she dropped her spectacles into its guts. Her language when she saw them vanish into the bubbles would have caused Billy Connolly to blush! Of course, it was the dishwasher's fault, and that was that.

But it wasn't just dishwashers. My aunt didn't like duvets – "Sheets and blankets are best, dear" – or multi-channel TV either. It was just as well she died before the advent of mobile phones or iPads. And what Aunt Hetty would have made of Japanese-style bum-wash toilets doesn't even bear thinking about!

**"What Aunt Hetty would have made of Japanese-style bum-wash toilets doesn't even bear thinking about!"**

You can't easily teach people with ingrained habits that there's a better way of doing something. Often, their reluctance to face change stems from a blend of laziness and fear. It was Covid that forced people to accept another





way of working – if it hadn't been for the pandemic, I doubt workers would have readily accepted that commuting wearily back and forth every day, at substantial financial cost and stress to family life, was perhaps the wrong way of going about things. Now we will never go back to the old ways – many things are only appreciable in the light of experience.

Indeed, many good things are as unappetising in theory as they are enjoyable in practice. Re-read the Guinness advertisement at the start of this piece to see what I mean. However hard it may be to make people accept a new idea, once they have exhausted

**“Don't hesitate...  
Just go!”**

their grumbles and actually tried the new toy, that's it, there's no return. Take automatic cars, for example – who wants to revert to manual transmission?

Let's see how long it takes electric cars to freeze out diesel and petrol.

### *The Gift of Presence*

At the funeral of a friend who had once been kind, I found myself wondering why I hadn't bothered to visit him when I heard he was gravely ill? Was it laziness, or stupid fear I wouldn't know what to say?

The great atheist, the late Christopher Hitchens wrote that when you learn that a friend is ill or in trouble, go at once. Don't hesitate, just go! And if you can't go, then ring.

He was right, of course. People go to funerals but do not always take the trouble to visit when a friend lies dying. So, if I point a critical finger at you, I have three pointing back at myself!

We should all listen to Hitchens. Don't worry about what to say. Even if you arrive tongue-tied, your presence will be enough and hardly anyone else will be there. Just go!

# The Law of Unintended Consequences

1 September – Day 2: Lechlade to Buckland Marsh

Fancy being daft enough to set out walking in the UK without a waterproof! The Princess Royal says wisely that there is no such thing as bad weather, merely inappropriate clothing – and boy, did that prove true today! There have only been a couple of times on these walks when we have been caught in a downpour and today was one of them. We arrived back like dripping rats, and it served us right. I think I spotted Ratty and Mole along the way, with several sightings of Toad Hall.



## *Be Careful What You Wish For*

The reason why we are out of the EU can fairly be placed at the door of the late Paddy Ashdown. How can this be accurate when he was a staunch Remain supporter? Surely it is Farage and Cameron who were responsible?

Pay attention, for this history is yet another example of the mysterious workings of the law of unintended consequences! After the EU introduced a parliament, elections for membership in the UK used the “first past the post” system – the same system that is currently used in Westminster elections. It makes it vastly hard for candidates of minority parties to get elected.

In 1999, Paddy Ashdown – then the Lib Dem leader – persuaded Tony Blair to allow a “list” system of proportional representation to be adopted for UK voters in the EU elections.

This system acted like rocket fuel for UKIP. Farage won a bridgehead, and then over the years – largely due to his relentless refusal to accept the role of patron saint of lost causes – UKIP began to forge an unstoppable momentum. The more seats the party won, the more the British media felt obliged to take this peculiar idea

of leaving the EU seriously – and the greater the coverage, the more UKIP grew like Topsy. By 2016, its success threatened Cameron’s Tory heartland to such a degree, that he decided to conclude the issue by holding a referendum he was confident he would win.

The rest, as they say, is history. If the “list” system of proportional representation had not been introduced by Blair (as a concession to Ashdown), we would never have heard of Nigel Farage, UKIP, the Brexit party, or roles for Dominic

Cummings and Boris. There would never have been a referendum, Cameron would still be PM – and we would still be in the EU.

Come to think of it, Ashdown’s career was based on his passionate enthusiasm for the UK’s membership

of the EU and his desire for proportional representation to build up his beloved Lib Dem party.

Be careful what you wish for.

## *Pussy Galore*

Kariba spoke to me yesterday. I know it sounds daft, but she really did. It was early in the morning, and she wasn’t best pleased. Her green eyes flashed with irritation and her purr grew into a growl.

**“The reason why we are out of the EU can fairly be placed at the door of the late Paddy Ashdown.”**



“Listen Sunshine,” she warned, “I’m the boss here so please don’t forget it. You are darn fortunate to have me as your cat. But I’m putting you on notice – I’m considering leaving. I know you’ll be devastated if I go, and in many ways, I’d miss you too. But a cat must look after herself these days, and there’s no such thing as a free bowl of milk.

“If you really want to know, it’s about those darn dogs you bring into the house. Your own stupid Moses is bad enough, a mongrel with the fancy name of “cockapoo”. Of course, I marked his nose with a slash years

ago, so he leaves me well alone. But your daughter Milly! She brings with her a dog spawned from the sweepings of Bulgaria. All the silly creature does is eat, fart, wee on the lawn and chase me! I am not as young as I used to be, and simply put, I’m fed up.

“Just thought you should know.”

Luckily Milly went... and Kariba stayed.

**“Kariba spoke to me yesterday.”**

PS: Milly now tells me that her dog comes from Hungary, not Bulgaria. When I told Kariba, she shrugged and said, “Huh? Who said I was any good at geography?”

# Life Isn't Fair

2 September – Day 3: Buckland Marsh to Bablock Hythe

**I nearly twisted my ankle trying to avoid the vast number of cracks in the path caused by the lack of rain. Then Jane was furious with me for allowing gates to slam in her face. She had every right to be cross. The problem is that when I walk, I go into a sort of torpor, a dream world, as I ponder the meaning of life! Not that I have come to many great conclusions, but if I do, ZANE supporters will be the first to know.**

Our walk today was punctuated with small concrete bunkers, built, we are told, to provide lookout nests for Dad's Army to spot German frogmen swimming up the Thames! As there is no record that any was ever caught doing so, I reckon that acting as a spotter must have been the most tedious job imaginable!

## *Nanny Again*

I have never stated my political views on Brexit, and I never will. They may be glimpsed in my writing, of course, but why be explicit and run the risk of alienating at least 50 per cent of ZANE supporters?

However, I do enjoy pointing out the manifestations of the law of unintended consequences – and here is another on proportional representation (PR). People proclaim its beneficial effect in bringing about “electoral fairness”. Ah, but didn't Nanny say, “Life isn't fair”? Was Nanny right about that? Surely PR

brings about the joys of democracy, thereby enabling minority parties to have a say in government?

Many years ago, when I was a politician, I thought that PR was more democratic than our present “First Past the Post” (FPTP) system. So, with the enthusiasm of youth, I co-authored a pamphlet called, “Electoral Reform, as Easy as ABC” for the Tory party Bow Group. It is, I hope, gathering dust somewhere, for I have to say it was throughout no more than naive rubbish. Here's why.

Under FPTP, each party submits its manifesto to the public and, in the event of winning the election, enacts it. If it doesn't, then the electorate will chuck them out at the next election, and a good thing too. That's democracy working well.

PR would see effective minority governments replaced by coalitions in which all the parties would be obliged to dump their manifestos

and agree a new policy programme – which, of course, the electorate hasn't approved. Then politicians, freed up from the irritations of prior obligations, can do whatever they like. Since MPs would no longer be expected to deliver on their promises, they could not be held to account for their failure to do so.

If you doubt this dismal scenario, then please see the way PR is working in those EU countries that use this system. Take Belgium, for example, which is in a state of political paralysis.

FPTP is not an ideal system, nothing is – but as far as democracy is concerned, it's better than PR any day.

Sorry about that.

Nanny, as usual, was right.

*Mwah, Mwah, Hug*

I have an unworldly friend who surprisingly late in life fell deeply in

love. As the marriage to his beloved approached, he realised he knew nothing about the – ahem – physical

**“Nanny, as usual,  
was right.”**





Apparently he doesn't like  
being hugged



side of marriage. (Reader, bear with me, there was a time before the Internet!) So, my friend ventured to a local second-hand bookshop, where, hidden away on a back shelf, he found just what he needed – a handsomely bound book called *How to Hug*.

The book was wrapped in brown paper and my friend hurried home. That evening, he discovered, to his profound dismay, that he had purchased Volume Five of the *Oxford*

*English Dictionary*.

I've railed against the unhealthy practice of promiscuous kissing in previous blogs. So universal is the custom of greeting friends with a casual kiss that attempts to avoid the snog can easily be misconstrued as rudeness. And now, on top of kissing anyone with a pulse, it's *de rigeur* to hug them too!

Of course, touch is important – I'm all for hugging family members and

the small group of people I dearly love and who love me. But lingering hugs with everyone we meet devalues what should be an act of genuine intimacy, and it's plain creepy. When I'm grabbed by someone, I'm left wondering what the hug means – does it communicate something the hugger is unable to say verbally? It seems like a kind of mime, a substitute for words. Perhaps dumb silence can be excused in the context of an unexpected death, the jolting news of a one-way cancer diagnosis or a catastrophic accident. But that's very different from hugging someone in the street you hardly know: "Karen, my goodness... what a long time... you haven't changed at all!" Then comes the hug-hug – and it devalues the currency of the hug.

**"No more  
hugging as a  
default greeting!"**

So, I say, no more hugging as a default greeting! It's lazy. How often should we be saying something original but can't be bothered – so we hug instead? A casual hugger is virtue signalling, too: "Hey! I'm a warm and loving kinda person, and I like you – so please like me too!" Ugh!

You would have thought that Covid might have put an end to universal hugging, but if anything, it's

only made things worse. People are so pleased to see another human in the flesh that they incline towards squeezing whoever's presented.

I hope automatic hugging will wither away... but, until such time, we'll just have to go on performing like seals.



# The Big Adventure

3 September – Day 4: Bablock Hythe to Port Meadow

**We made a jolly party today, joined as we were by two loyal friends – who deserve a gold medal for cheerfulness and endurance – and our daughter Clare, the chaplain of Christ Church in Oxford. She brought her dog, Layla, who palled up with Moses. The pair of them ran together all day and now Moses is lying as still as a corpse, almost as tired as we are.**

We had another rather gloomy pub lunch served in that offhand way that seems the norm nowadays. I wonder how these undistinguished pubs that punctuate our walk can last when the pinch caused by rising inflation and surging energy bills is felt by Middle England?

## *Old Time Is Still A-Flying*

Death's a dark subject. Peter Pan's "To die must be a big adventure" is a far better approach than deciding the subject's so morbid that we should smother it with gin and small talk about the weather. Some men – in particular, men – are so afraid of death, they only go to funerals to tank whisky with chums at the wake. You wonder if that's fair? Okay... just check the body language when you're next at a funeral. Look to see who's gazing steadfastly at a phone, the ceiling, the order of service, a woman's legs – anything but dear old Henry's box.

None of us is going to get out of this alive. Funny that Christians seem to be as fearful of this harsh fact as anyone else. Not a good look for the faith, that. Maybe they think Larkin's

gloomy verse, "That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die" may, at least, have a sliver of truth in it?

But if no one can escape the scythe, how best shall we live with as few regrets as possible when the light's growing dim?

I read *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware, an Australian palliative care nurse. She got permission from a few of her patients to record their intimate regrets in a fascinating book. Here's a summary:

One patient, Grace, lamented she'd failed to embrace the preciousness of life while there was still time. She'd lived as if life were a "dress rehearsal" and deeply regretted that "all the dreams I've waited all my life to live are never going to

Great! United have just signed...



happen for it's just too late." Grace did not mean this in a self-interested way – she was a dutiful mother and wife. Rather, her words reflected her astonishment that she had regarded life as “normal” or “routine” when it is, in fact, miraculous. As Richard Dawkins writes in *Unweaving the Rainbow*, “We privileged few, who won the lottery of life against all the odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority have never stirred.”

“Look at me now,” wept Grace, “I’m dying, bloody dying. I’ve waited all these years to be free and independent and now it’s too late.”

Personally, I think that those with an awareness of the preciousness of life experience less regret when they come to its end. They enjoy a subtly different quality of experience whilst still alive. This was Jean-Paul Sartre’s main point in his book *Being and Nothingness*, where he encouraged readers to embrace the “existential miracle” of life, even while confronting its finite nature. “This,” he exhorted, “should not lead to hopelessness but to a thrilling kind of meaning.”

### *The Courage to Live*

Another patient, David, wished he’d had the courage to live a life true to himself and not waste his time living

out other people's expectations. We shoot out of life on fixed steel rails set by our genes, family traditions and upbringing. But if we have sufficient courage, why don't we climb off those rails and tackle the tasks that God meant us to carry out? For example, as a youth, John Betjeman rejected point blank his parents' expectations that he work in a shop and thus lived his life as the poet he was created to be. It doesn't always end so well. Our eldest son taught in a top London school; he was sad to see how many brilliant budding actors and those with marked creative talents march

**"I'm dying,  
bloody dying..."**

steadfastly into the city as bankers or lawyers to satisfy the wishes of insistent parents instead of following their obvious but more hazardous calling. I went into the army – not a career that matched my gifts by a mile – to fulfil parental expectations. Not that I regret it now, the experience proved valuable, but at the time I knew I was in the wrong job.

Laura's regret was that she hadn't allowed herself to be happy. "For goodness' sake," she pleaded, "happiness is right now, not at a rainbow end. Why did I work so hard

I've brought you a present...  
I'd have put it in a bag for  
life, but didn't see much  
point...



at vast cost to my loving relationships with my family and friends?" Laura wished she had lived a simpler life, not one revolving around possessions or the imperative need to "succeed" and make money – just to prove the folly of the saying, "The guy who dies with the most toys wins!"

Marcus mourned that he hadn't bothered to stay in touch with his true friends. Then he wondered if he actually had any real friends... On reflection, he realised that so many of his so-called "friends" were just a cloud of good-time acquaintances from work or the golf club. There was nothing to be expected from them but fleeting emotions, which leave no trace behind them.

**"Then Robert paused, and he wept."**

Robert's profound sadness is a commonplace for men: emotion had been filleted from him by frozen parents and the harsh disciplines of school. "Real boys don't cry, or read poetry or books", all that nonsense. Robert ended up without the courage to express his feelings. He had never

told those people he really cared about – particularly his sons – just how much he loved them. He had never even hugged them. Was it too late? Did he have the courage to start now?

"Do they really know I love them?" he asked. "Can I express this so late?"

Then Robert paused, and he wept.



# Long Live Stigma

4 September – Day 5: Port Meadow to Abingdon

**Three jolly ZANE supporters joined today's brisk walk. I spent time talking to Jacqui, a delightful English teacher from Oxford. She told me her mother is a ZANE supporter and wondered what else her mum might do to help the cause? I enthusiastically suggested she could leave a large chunk of her estate to ZANE. Jacqui looked thoughtful.**

## *Family Values*

To boast “left” sends a virtuous signal of being warm and kind, earnestly embracing social justice. On the other hand, mention “right” and you run the risk of being branded a Nigel Farage type on a bad day.

This concept is arrant twaddle. The truth is that the “left” are tribunes of “non-judgmentalism” who demand “lifestyle choice”. And they have taken an axe to the roots of the nuclear family, once the bedrock of society.

All major institutions swing left: look at Amnesty International, Oxfam, the National Trust and the Church of England. Nothing annoys the left more than the stigma created by “judgmental morality”, but that's the

only kind of morality there is – and the removal of it has radically gutted the concept of family.

Imagine that your son or daughter is a student at Durham University. Their authorities have decided to make it easy for little Jemima or Piers to participate in the sex industry – how nice for your family. The aim is to remove the stigma faced by prostitutes by rebranding them as “sex workers”. But the blinding reality is, of course, that all people involved in that pernicious trade are hookers, rent boys and “escorts”. Durham is acting the pimp, ignoring the fact that prostitution is rightly stigmatised because the trade is disgusting, immoral, exploitative, illegal and spiritually demeaning. This is not to say that the people involved should be regarded as outcasts, of course not – we must draw a distinction between the sinner and the sin, and we must hope they will turn away. But for goodness' sake, we must be able to condemn the trade itself as sinful and ghastly and refuse to cast a benign gloss over it. Stigmatising whoring is a good thing, and I suspect that for most people the stigma will not abate.

### *Everybody's Doin' It*

Next, the stigma that once surrounded divorce has all but been expunged. People today just shrug as if it didn't matter. I am sorry if this offends any ZANE supporters who may have suffered a divorce as the innocent party (ZANE supporters are always innocent). However, experience tells us that divorce is usually accompanied by

mendacity, guilt, sadness, bitterness and financial hardship, as well as the incalculable damage inflicted on children. As the stigma abates, of course, the number of divorces rises.

Nor is there any stigma now to "living in sin". Remember the old song "Everybody's doin' it, doin' it"? Today, "hooking up" outside marriage is what everyone's doing and anyone who claims it's a bad





idea is mocked as an old-fashioned Victorian prude. But it's us who are paying the price, not the Victorians. They knew what they were doing.

The stigmas that used to exist surrounding promiscuity, divorce and living in unmarried sin were inherited from Christian teaching and existed mainly for the protection of children. That protection has gone with the wind.

The bleak indicators are damning, with children born to cohabiting unions more likely to see their parents separate than if they were married. Parental separation damages a child's education and future life chances – those brought up by a single parent get worse

**“Hooking  
up outside  
marriage is  
what everyone’s  
doing.”**

grades at school, are more likely to suffer addictions or from mental health issues, are far less likely to secure a high-earning job and are

more likely to end up in prison. This all costs a fortune, to be paid by the poor old taxpayer.

For years, the left has been sawing at the branch on which the family sat. It has now fallen, not into a bed of scented roses but into a pool of raw sewage,

criss-crossed with barbed wire. It will cost a fortune to hook it out.

Long live stigmas! And, oh yes – cross out Durham from your list of preferred universities.

# Name Dropping

5 September – Day 6: Abingdon to Shillingford

**I stipulated at the outset of this walk that there should be no ploughed fields, major roads – for I have lost my nerve – or steep hills. I am also fed up with Jane and I losing our way, as it only results in walking more miles! The Thames Path suits us well and we are getting fitter by the day.**

## *Tea With Mother T*

With apologies to Mark Twain, I have been involved in many startling events in my time – some of which actually happened!

On 10 April 1994, I took tea with Mother Teresa. She had heard from a friend that I knew the Minister of Housing (I did), with whom she wanted a meeting. She hoped he could facilitate the purchase of a house in North London to shelter what she described as “fallen women”. (Incidentally, I would like to hear today’s cancel culture trying to correct Mother Teresa’s politically incorrect language. What sanitized name “fallen” women are given today is anyone’s guess.)

Such was Mother Teresa’s fame that she didn’t need me to facilitate a meeting with Sir George Young – or anyone else for that matter. She only had to tilt her rosary and the entire government would have danced a gavotte before her if she had demanded it. But I was told she wanted to see me – and who was I to refuse such a request?

Mother Teresa answered the door of a non-descript house in Tottenham and led the way to tea in the lounge. By that time, I had rung the housing minister and he soon arrived with a buzzing swarm of anxious civil servants. The nun stared unblinkingly at George.

**“My umbrella began to grow green shoots.”**

“I need a million pounds... I should tell you the French were generous, the Germans gave me twice what I requested and the Italians gave me a row

of houses in Milan. Now, in the name of God, I appeal to you for a million pounds!”

George muttered something about times being tough and there being no money available. He would need to consult.





With a laser look, the nun knelt down and announced she would pray. Meanwhile, George “consulted” with his team.

### *The Power of Prayer*

After 10 minutes of busy praying, Mother Teresa gazed at George expectantly. He muttered something about only being able to find half the million. She decided to pray for the other half.

Then the photographer from the *Sun* newspaper arrived. A short time later, George declared he had found the additional funds in a contingency reserve – game, set and match to Mother T! George’s misery was now complete. Meanwhile, the nun gave thanks.

“Allelujah! Praise the Lord – the power of prayer be praised!”

After George left, Mother Teresa prayed for me and my family, and presented me with several medals of the Blessed Virgin Mary. My umbrella began to grow green shoots.

Some years later, I heard that HMG’s offer of a million quid was never taken up because there were too many conditions. Instead, Mother Teresa managed to persuade some allegedly corrupt Irish builder to stump up the money.

Mother Teresa never minded too much if donations to her causes came from dubious sources. She claimed good works would sanctify the money – and I’m sure they did.

I should add that I have photos of my meeting with Mother T. Beat that for name dropping!

# Woke World

6 September – Day 7: Shillingford to Streatley

**Napoleon said that you should never disturb your enemy when he's making a gross mistake.**

**Why do our enemies, such as Jihadists, Putin and the man in North Korea with the funny haircut, bother to bomb or poison us in the UK when we are making such a good job of destroying ourselves?**

Our “gross mistake” is to allow an absurd and destructive ideology to sweep our land unchecked. Unless

we face it down, it will eviscerate the few scraps of what's left of our moral fibre. The champions of this nonsense describe themselves as “social justice warriors”. This is “WOKE!” – it's pernicious rubbish and it's intensely damaging.

Hearken to this. More than half of those born after 1996 believe that “systemic racism” is endemic in our society; 64 per cent think that rioting and looting are justified to some degree; 41 per cent support censorship of so-called “hate

Run... Social Justice Warriors!!



We want our money back... the comedian wouldn't tell a single joke!



speech”; and 23 per cent would support violence to prevent people being offended.

### *Cancel Culture*

“Woke” nonsense is at its height. Careers are being destroyed or “cancelled” by wicked people on what is politely called social media. The police record of detecting the perpetrators of fraud or theft is poor, in part because the cops are concentrating on rooting out so-called “hate crime”.

Authors – google the alarming story of what happened to writer Kate Clanchy – are frightened to describe how women look in their novels in case they are censored by weak publishers who cannot see a parapet without ducking beneath it. Comedians are struck dumb with fear. Scientific biological certainties are avoided – is a man a man and a woman a woman? – for sheer terror of giving offence to the ranting blob trawling the net.

While our enemies are threatening Ukraine and Taiwan with rockets, bombs and tanks, and while the spooks in Teheran are well on the way to perfecting a nuclear bomb to destroy Israel – and anyone else while they’re in the mood – we in the West are obsessing about pronouns, rewriting history and planning to “decolonise” mathematics.

**“You couldn’t write this plot line in a novel.”**

Then, as a treat, we spend time arguing whether men dressed as women should be allowed to use women’s loos.

You couldn’t write this plot line in a novel. Well, if you did, it would probably be censored.

***Tom’s National Treasures***

Judi Dench

Maggie Smith

Matthew Parris

The Duchess of Cornwall

Michael Heseltine

Nigel Farage

Diane Abbott

Billy Connolly

Gordon Brown

Elton John

Ed Balls

Nigel Biggar

Ian McKellan

Charles and Angela Ford

Lord Hastings (Mike)

Tony Husband

***Pleased to never hear of again...***

Alex Salmond

Nicola Sturgeon

Meghan and Mr Markle

Prince Andrew

Many serving Anglican bishops

Donald Trump

Vladimir Putin

Uncommunicative banks

# The Limits of Forgiveness

7 September – Day 8: Rest Day

**How can we offer forgiveness on behalf of people we don't know or have never even met? The famous Holocaust survivor and Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal illustrated this with a story that began on 10 October 1944. At the time, he was a young architect incarcerated in Janowska Concentration Camp, just outside Lviv, in Ukraine.**

One day, Wiesenthal was summoned by guards to the bedside of a young Waffen-SS officer, Karl Seidl, who wanted to “speak to a Jew”. Mortally injured with burns, the dying Seidl whispered to Wiesenthal that some months previously, the SS had herded dozens of men, women and

children into a house, set it alight and shot all those who tried to escape the flames. Seidl admitted his involvement and claimed he was tormented by his conscience – he needed to confess his sin to a Jew and begged for forgiveness.



Wiesenthal listened to this tale of horror, pondered for a minute – and said nothing. Then he walked out of the room.

For years, Wiesenthal was plagued by the memory. Had he done the right thing? Should he have offered the dying Nazi his forgiveness?

However, when he told his story to Jewish friends and rabbis, they agreed that he had been right not to offer forgiveness. How could he do so on behalf of victims he had never met? They believed he was right to walk away.

By the same token, the alleged “sins” of our ancestors should not be visited on subsequent generations.

### *Thou Shalt Not Eat Meat*

I thought I’d seen it all. However, I now see that the Liberal /Green / Labour majority of Oxfordshire County Council is imposing veganism by diktat. Meat is banned at the council’s official events and only plant-based food will be on the menu. This is on the grounds that it will do us all the power of good and benefit future generations. I am all for vegans eating whatever they want, but this is daft gesture politics, a tedious lesson in how not to promote a cause to voters.

Oxfordshire is crowded with farms crammed full of cattle. Such suffocating moral certainties arise from the tyranny of a tiny







minority. When did consuming dairy products and steak imply that you are not a good person, or that you don't want to leave the planet a better place for future generations? Politicians of all stripes need to keep their noses out of other people's food choices.

### *Left-Wing Social*

Author Robert Conquest has a famous law of politics. If you add the word "social" to any noun, it both demeans the word and at the same time politicises it in a "left-wing" way.

We all revere justice – but what about "social justice", a lefty degenerate that usually leads to the exact opposite of true justice?

If you remove the word "social", you get a far more honest (and less left-wing) noun. Try removing "social" from "social market", "social enterprise", "social policy", "social care", "social housing", "social media", and so on.

See what I mean?

# Notes From a Proud Island

8 September – Day 9: Streatley to Reading

**The Scots call it “drookit”, and that’s good enough for me. We were drenched in a proper downpour, going from drought to Noah’s Ark in a single hour! Neither Jane nor I mind walking in the rain. We were brought up in the Scottish Borders and Edinburgh – and that is just what one does there. I already mentioned the Princess Royal’s views on bad weather – there’s no such thing!** (Incidentally, I can’t help wondering what that sensible woman thinks of Meghan?)

As we made our way along the Thames Path, several coppers passed us, all racing towards an “incident”. I immediately wondered if we were part of a filmset...

## *Rewriting History*

Many years ago, George Orwell warned us that the “most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history”. We should not be surprised, then, that destroyers in our midst are promoting a false narrative. These critics claim that Western history is a litany of cruelty, greed, patriarchal oppression, sexism, racism, transphobia, theft, snobbery, and much more. They praise all other cultures (provided they aren’t Western), and then wonder why anyone should wish to live here in the UK when so much bigotry, racism and hatred is baked into our DNA?

Why these individuals behave thus is a mystery. Perhaps it’s because

they hail from countries that have contributed little to the overarching wellbeing of mankind and, knowing that the West has contributed so much, are consumed with envy and bitterness? I am reminded of that old, cynical saying, “Why do you dislike me so much? What favours did I ever do for you?”

## *Honour and Majesty*

Here, under the Crown, human life is regarded as sacred, people are endowed with dignity and wrongs are addressed in honest courts. Just consider the eternal beauty of Oxford and Cambridge, or of Salisbury and Ely Cathedrals. Think about Shakespeare and our rich cultural and artistic achievements. Then imagine what life would be like without our social services, freedom of speech and religious freedoms, and democracy and the rule of law. Has this bounty been exceeded anywhere on Earth, in all recorded history?



Oh, to live in the UK, where  
you can speak freely



Our critics fail to express gratitude for these blessings, instead expressing resentment and bitterness at all the things they lack. The countries from where many of them come are places where lives are brutish and short, where corruption is endemic, where the young have no chance to make a difference to the way things are run, and where thinkers and critics rot in jail. And they are often places where racism flourishes – but it's black on white, so no one bothers to comment.

Under our monarchy, citizens experience a form of liberal government and access to justice for which they ought to feel profound gratitude. Its many blessings were summed up by the chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis:

“Her crown is honour and majesty; her sceptre, law and morality. Her concern has been for welfare, freedom and unity, and in the lands of her dominion, she has sustained justice and liberty for all races, tongues and creeds.”

Of course, our Western freedoms and ways of doing things aren't perfect, but they are better, by far, than any of the alternatives on offer elsewhere.

The West is under relentless pressure to accept growing numbers of immigrants struggling to get to the UK. In terms of newcomers, we apparently add a city the size of Newcastle to our small and crowded island each year.

I can't help but note the lack of immigrants desperately risking their lives to settle in Russia, Africa, India or China. Funny that!

### *Pure Poetry*

I recently visited a vicar friend dying of cancer in Oxford's John Radcliffe hospital.

"Please will you read a psalm?" she asked.

I read the best-known psalm of all, "The Lord is my Shepherd".

A nurse nearby listened with great care. "That was lovely," she said. "Did you write it?"

"Oh yes," I replied, "I knocked it up in the lift on the way up."

**"I knocked it up  
in the lift on the  
way up."**

OK let me think... erm... the  
Lord is my... erm... er... Shepherd?  
Yes, quite like that



# Long Live the King

9 September – Day 10: Reading to Henley

**Queen Elizabeth has died – Long Live King Charles III.  
It's a sad moment and a great loss of a magnificent woman.**

The only time I met Her Majesty was unfortunate. As a Scots Guards officer, I was asked to go to Holyrood to dance with Edinburgh maidens. Highland reels are a sort of war, not a dance.

I found to my astonishment that I was dancing with the queen. Then, to my horror, I kicked her sharply and she was forced to hobble off the floor.

Years later, I mustered the courage to write and apologise. I received a delightful reply saying that I had long since been forgiven!

**“The only time  
I met Her  
Majesty was  
unfortunate.”**

## *Who Packed my Parachute?*

Charles Plumb was a US navy fighter pilot and Vietnam veteran. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy territory. Captured, he spent six years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived and went on to lecture on the lessons he had learned from that experience.

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table approached him.

“You’re Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*. You were shot down!”

“How on earth did you know about that?” asked Plumb.

“I packed your parachute,” the man replied.

Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man vigorously shook his hand and said, “I guess it worked!”

Assuring him it had, Plumb reflected, “If the chute hadn’t worked, I wouldn’t be sitting here today!”

## *Unsung Heroes*

That night, Plumb couldn’t sleep. “I kept wondering what the sailor looked like in a navy uniform: a white hat, a bib at the back and bell-bottom trousers. I wondered how many times I must have seen him, but never bothered to say, “Hello,

Excuse me... I didn't  
say thank you



how are you?" or anything, because I was a self-important fighter pilot, and he was just a lowly sailor."

He thought of the hours the man must have spent in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silk of every shute. Each time, he held in his hands the fate of someone he didn't even know.

Plumb went on to give many inspirational lessons to people. He would point out that he had needed many different kinds of parachute when he had been shot down in enemy territory: his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute and his spiritual parachute. He had called on all those

supports before reaching safety.

Having read about Plumb, I ask myself how often do I fail to appreciate the help I am given? How often do I fail to say hello or thank you, to congratulate someone when something wonderful has happened to them, to pay a compliment to someone, or just do something kind for no reason at all? How many crucial jobs by kind workers go unnoticed by me? Or what about the people who work so hard behind the scenes, yet get so little reward for their efforts?

I look back at my childhood: my old teachers (one in particular), or an aunt who read to me when I was

unhappy and lonely. Fast forward to now – what about the people who have tolerated me, supported me and prayed for me?

There are a good number of people who have been packing my parachute. And, of course, there are the people who have been packing ZANE's parachute.

Many have worked hard for ZANE, both in the UK and in Zimbabwe, to

make this charity a success. It would be invidious to name names – they know who they are, and so thank you!

Our supporters must be thanked too, for without their great generosity and financial parachute packing, ZANE would have long since been in free fall.

The unsung kindness of so many is overwhelming.

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## A Family Affair

10 September – Day 11: Henley to Marlow

**We enjoyed a dry and beautiful walk as chains of pleasure boats gently chugged along the river. I wondered if I would be bored on a boat – I think I would be.**

I discovered recently that I was going blind. Seriously, I was unable to read, and it got worse quickly. Then a consultant in Oxford lasered my eyes – once I was blind, and now I

can see. It was a miracle. We are so fortunate to live in 2022 – and we are inclined to take it all for granted. So, thank you to those who invented this procedure.

## *The Pursuit of Love*

When I started my campaign to wed Jane in the late 1960s – in those days, marriage was the only way I could possibly get her into bed! – I was obliged to ring her home and say, “Hello, this is Tom – can I please speak to Jane?”

Jane’s parents were delightful and would never have tried to stop the relationship (unless, perhaps, if I’d worn a pigtail and walked a dog on a rope). The point is that because of my repeated calls, they knew I was after their beloved daughter Jane!

In time, after endless calls, the relationship hotted up and Jane’s parents held a dinner party to meet

me. Later, there was another party so her vast family could meet me too, and do what families usually do (i.e., pass judgement and say, “Surely she could have done a lot better than that?”) In time, there was an engagement and a wedding,

both accompanied by more parties. Then, when the four children emerged, there were yet more celebrations.

To cut to the chase, mobile phones today mean that the young

can start a relationship without their parents or families knowing a thing about it. No parties – and indeed, no family involvement of any kind until long after the event.

I think that is immensely sad.

**“The young can start a relationship without their parents knowing a thing about it...”**





### *His Finest Hour*

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is the hero of the hour. I wish him well, and I really mean that. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

The world desperately needs a hero who can lead, and Zelenskyy is that man today.

However, I have learned in a long life that when someone is praised to the skies, the hype is rarely justified. And, in turn, when someone attracts the hiss of the world, I only half believe anything I hear or read. We are all a mix of virtues and faults,

**“Volodymyr  
Zelenskyy is the  
hero of the hour.”**

and most of us have done things we would rather not read in a banner headline. When the media builds someone up and praises them as if they can do no wrong, it's usually

only a matter of time before they find a reason to tear them down again. Cracks are detected, and faults and mistakes gleefully paraded.

I hope that when Zelenskyy's enemies have a go at him – and they will – his descent from hero to ordinary man does not destroy him or Ukraine.



# Trust No One

11 September – Day 12: Marlow to Eton

**Our route today took us past a post office, and it got me thinking about a remarkable book I recently read – *The Great Post Office Scandal* by Nick Wallis.**

The Post Office, that core member of the establishment – slightly dull, yet a deeply respected British institution – prosecuted around 900 sub-postmasters for theft, false accounting and fraud. After a vast court case, it was found that 99 per cent of them were wholly innocent and that many had been maliciously prosecuted.

The prosecutions were based on evidence drawn from the Post Office's software system, Horizon. The PO had proclaimed the system to be infallible when in fact it was as full of holes as a rotten Swiss cheese. But it gets worse – the accountants, the solicitors and the managers all went on prosecuting even after the directors had been reliably informed that the system was flawed. The lives of those ensnared in this misery were destroyed – they ended up bankrupt, divorced, disgraced and suicidal. Then, during the trial, the Post Office managers used taxpayer money to try and run the sub-postmasters'

action group out of funds by playing legal games. Of course, none of those responsible for this carnage have been prosecuted. Most are still sitting on their plump arses to this day drawing their wages and seemingly couldn't care less.

As far as the prosecuted sub-postmasters are concerned, the empirical evidence suggests that those from a minority ethnic background received harsher sentences than their European counterparts.

I did apologise! It must have got lost in the post





And, oh yes, I nearly forgot. The Post Office CEO was an Anglican priest. She says she's "sorry".

You wouldn't believe this ghastly story if you had read it in a novel.

### *Russian Roulette*

I've been here before. Years ago, against acute establishment resistance, I founded the Association of Lloyd's Members (ALM) to represent the investors against the owners of the enterprises that were meant to make them money. It was, I imagine, rather like starting the first trade union for horny-handed mill workers. The mill owners were pissed off.

I was amongst the first to expose the scandal where half the investor market (made up of the posh boys) was dishonestly shafting the other half (the common twits) with the losses.

Led by me, the common twits sued and we won all the cases. I had to fight two defamation cases personally – thank God I settled both before trial.

But my experience tells me that I'd be better off chancing my luck on the Las Vegas roulette tables than relying on justice in the UK courts. At least in Vegas, they lay on drink and entertainment, more than they do in the High Court – and the odds are better in Vegas.

Those fighting the Post Office mafia found – as we did all those years ago at Lloyd's – that the first implacable barrier that had to be overcome was the iron curtain of certainty of innocence that prevailed. Both Lloyd's and the Post Office were at the heart of the establishment and

virtually synonymous with "respectability". Allegations by the plaintiffs alleging greed, corruption, deception, institutional ignorance, ingrained superiority, gross dishonesty and

venality on the part of the posh boys seemed simply impossible.

So dear ZANE supporters, I've two things to ask of you.

One: Please read the Post Office scandal book and thank God you weren't a sub-postmaster under that cruel and wicked regime.

Two: Imagine you are in the office of an institution that's been around for a generation. You are led through a marble hall into a meeting room with expensive paintings and a crested Latin motto on a wall plaque. The suits are smart, the smiles reassuring, and the overall ambience is one of deep respectability, honesty and integrity. Before you write the cheque, just remember a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons."

**"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons."**

# Hocus Pocus

12 September – Day 13: Eton to Runnymede

**We spent our penultimate day with delightful ZANE supporters. As always, a range of subjects were discussed, including Brexit and the current political turmoil.**

We ended up in Runnymede, where the Magna Carta was signed. I wonder if the young – when they are able to drag themselves away from their screens – appreciate the importance of this vital key to history, which set the foundation not only for our legal system, but for that of the US and much of the free world? Do they know that people have died to win freedom of speech, the right to freedom under the law and the right to vote? Do they care?

## *Toil and Trouble*

When I was chairman of the Milton Keynes Health Authority – many moons ago – the incidence of drug abuse there was higher than anywhere else in the UK. The town (now a city, of course) wasn't then regarded as an attractive place to live, as it has now certainly become.

In the final months of my term, we were required to recruit someone to head up the drug abuse department. As chairman, I was part of the selection committee.

After “due process” – whatever that means – we were obliged to select someone from, as I recall, a very thin list. In the interviews, we were given a list of questions we were permitted to ask about any candidate's private life. Undaunted, I asked one dreary-

looking candidate with pale blue eyes and a small ginger moustache what he did in his spare time? It seemed a harmless enough question to me. I suspected pigeon fancying or perhaps square dancing?

Then an extraordinary thing – the air was sucked from the room and the temperature dropped. “I'm a witch,” he replied.

Silence. He had to be joking?

“Broomsticks and all the trimmings?” I innocently enquired. (Reader, what would you have said?)

The chief executive clicked his teeth disapprovingly.

The man said nothing. It transpired he was being totally sincere, and I had offended

him deeply. Apparently, there is a flourishing coven somewhere near

**“I am a witch.”**



Milton Keynes and the whole thing is a deadly serious business!

I forget most things, but this event and the man's face and name are tattooed on my memory. It transpired he was a leader of the coven, no less.

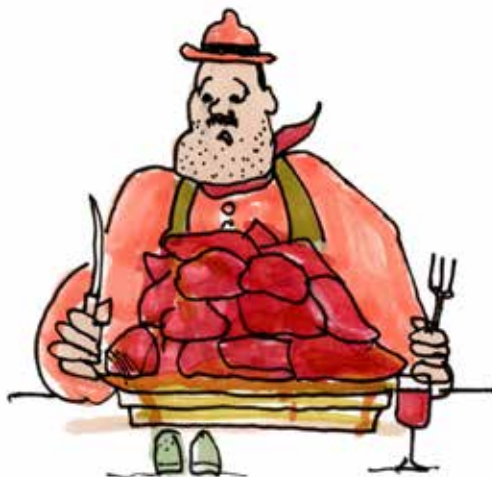
I couldn't think of a darn thing to say, so I bowed out of the meeting and let them get on with it. Soon afterwards, I left the authority to become director of another one, but not before I was told by my chief executive that being a practising witch doesn't preclude you from holding a public post in the UK. Sure enough, the witch subsequently took

up his new day job in the drug abuse department. I can't help wondering if he had declared his Christianity instead, would he have been appointed? I doubt it.

Anyway, if you are driving along in Milton Keynes one dark night and a man suddenly flashes by on a broomstick... please remember I left before this curious appointment was confirmed!

From the perspective of years, I can make silly jokes about it now – it makes a good story. But it wasn't funny at the time, and, if truth be told, it still bothers me.

Sigh...  
Kidneys and liver again...  
Where's my cow pie?!!



### *Boys Will Be Boys*

More than half a lifetime ago, Jane and I were almost content with the birth of our two daughters, Clare and Camilla. But we both hoped to complement the family with a boy. How to go about it?

One evening, an aged maiden aunt silenced a supper party with the advice that if we wanted a son, steps would have to be taken – by me! I was curious enough to ask what on earth she thought I should do about it.

“I was told by old Aunt Hetty that you should eat a vast quantity of kidneys and liver. Then each night,

drink a glass of port with a raw egg switched in it!”

“Ho ho,” we laughed. What a farce. What did Aunt Hetty know about anything? I forgot the episode.

Sometime later, I wondered why we were eating so much liver and kidneys – always followed by a glass of port and orders to drink up. In fact, Jane would stand over me until I had drained the glass. Afterwards, I wanted to be sick!

Ten months later, our baby son was christened “Thomas”.

I promise this is true!

# No Sex Please, We're British

13 September – Day 14: Runnymede to Walton-on-Thames

**We are coming to the end of our walk. It's been a happy experience, with memories of swans – and we saw a black one – and endlessly throwing sticks into the river for Moses to catch. Our excellent and kindly driver had a double function, to encourage us and keep us on track – and he did both with attentive skill.**

## TV Turn-Off

When did you last see a full-frontal sex scene on the telly, flopping bosoms and pasty bums pumping up and down, or worse? Last night or the night before? I'll bet you were

surely Tom, you've heard of the 'one foot on the floor' position?



either bored or embarrassed, or perhaps a mix of both?

It seems to me that if we want that sort of thing, we can join the sweaty throngs of spotty teenagers peering at Pornhub. Why do we need to see a sex act laced with the “F” and the “C” words in an ordinary movie?

I am not advocating censorship with the Lord Chamberlain's clerk redacting lines and cutting scenes. In times past, there was an absurd rule for Hollywood filmmakers. When two actors were in a bedroom, there had to be twin beds and the woman always had to have one foot on the floor. (Incidentally, when one of my extended family heard this, she exclaimed, “You can do a lot with one foot on the floor!”)

What I want, though, is a modicum of restraint. And so do the actors, for the sex scenes have become relentless. We read that actor Clare Foy – she played the queen in *The Crown* – has announced that she hates the way films are “sexed up”. She talks of how she's expected to



take off her kit, then simulate an explicit sexual encounter with an actor she met barely 20 minutes before. No wonder she has a clause in her contract stating which bits she's prepared to parade, and those she's not.

### *Self-Help Manual*

But why do we need to see these explicit sex acts at all? Most of us have been there and done that just as inventively – perhaps better! – than the scenes we see on screen. And we can imagine it all pretty well, thank you for asking, even if we are reduced to fading trips down memory lane. But some of today's telly scenes are so explicit, they nearly bring my house down.

Perhaps the directors think we need an instruction manual? One

of my friends told me he has done everything in his time except incest and Morris dancing. He was wondering just what new techniques he is expected to learn?

Yesterday's filmmakers knew their trade. I recently revisited that wonderful David Lean movie *Doctor Zhivago*. There's a chilling scene where Rod Steiger "rapes" Julie Christie. Then, later, there is a delicate encounter between Julie and Omar Sharif. In both scenes, viewers only see a couple on a bed; we are left to imagine the rest – and we do.

Of course, this is better by far. Our imaginations can conjure up scenes far more effectively than the explicit rumpy pumpu shoved relentlessly down our throats on screen!



# The Mystery of Faith

14 September – The Day After

**Jane and I have at last completed the walk. It's been tiring, for it's one thing to walk 11 miles in a day, but quite another to walk that distance for 13 days on the trot (with one rest day in the middle). We've been driven, of course, by the need to support the thousands of old and impoverished people who have nowhere else to turn but ZANE.**

We thank our kind hosts and those who have walked alongside us. We also thank those who have generously sponsored the walk (it is not too late to do so!), and those who have donated to ZANE for many years.

I have been asked if there will be a walk next year? Prudence makes me cautious...

## *Winning Souls*

Alec Douglas-Home, prime minister from 1963 to 1964 and a devout member of the CoE reticent, was once cornered in a lift by a woman who roared at him, "Have you been saved?"

A nervous Douglas-Home said thanks for asking and that he thought he had.

"Then why aren't you leaping up and down and waving your hands above your head with pure joy?"

The PM anxiously replied, "I thought it was such a close-run thing, I had much better keep quiet about it!"

Many attempts to evangelise can seem insensitive and impertinent. Alastair Campbell famously said, "We don't do God!" and I sympathise with his sentiments because the harsh and cynical world of politics, particularly political media management, and "God" are not an easy mix. Christian sentiments can all too easily be mistaken for virtue signalling and are a short ride to mockery.

I think it's patronising and profitless to badger people we hardly know about God. I was recently asked by a friend how she could persuade her son to take an interest in Jesus? I was astounded by the question, for to my mind, it's wholly fruitless to even try. Attempts at religious coercion are not something Jane or I would ever have tried on our children. In our (long) experience, children pretty much bring themselves up and the best thing that parents can do is pray (if they are so inclined), try and live decent lives, teach children the basics and otherwise keep out of their way. Persuading the young to slouch out



of bed before 11am is hard enough, but hectoring them to go to church, read the Bible or take even a vague interest in “religion” is highly likely to be counterproductive.

More young people have been put off “God” for life by insensitive parents frog-marching them unwillingly to church and banging on about the Bible than any other factor. Calvin had a point: either we have the religious “gene”, or we don’t; either we are “ripe”, or we aren’t. If parents draw a blank, they should just accept that their child’s time has not yet come – and indeed, may never come in their lifetime.

Whether people come to faith or not is a mystery, and it’s vanity to think family agency has much to do with it. We have known “churchy”

children from ostensibly orderly and devout families, only to watch them slide off the rails into promiscuity or drugs – one even ended up in the slammer. And we have seen parents whose lifestyles were far from ideal

(as far as we could tell, for how can one ever judge the integrity of other people’s lives?) produce “model” children, who ended up as hand-waving

believers.

### *Vanishing Act*

There’s a story about a woman who longed for her son to become a Christian. She prayed that whatever was blocking him from accepting Jesus into his life would be removed. Her prayers were answered and she vanished!

I told my friend this anecdote and she looked rather thoughtful. Perhaps I was a bit unkind?

**“Her prayers were answered and she vanished.”**

Lord, please remove whatever prevents my son reaching you...



# My Side of the Story

by Jane Benyon

*As was the case last year, I once again kept an account of our various walks – and so here is my version of events. This is a straightforward account of the routes we followed, the people we met, and the things we saw along the way (no wandering off topic!), and so I hope it serves to complement Tom's more colourful musings!*

## Day 1

### Cricklade

Well, here we are again! It's been exactly a year since our last walk from Cheltenham to Oxford, via Stratford, Northampton and Aylesbury. This year, we decided to jettison the often totally overgrown footpaths, the dubious B-roads that turn into highly dangerous "rat runs" and the endless ploughed fields that are difficult to walk on. Instead, we're taking the easier option of walking the Thames Path – though a bit of me will rather miss the adventure of getting lost, facing difficult obstacles and arguing over routes with our fellow walkers. I feel this route is going to be a bit too easy, but I know in my heart it's the right decision. Tom turned 80 this month and neither of us is a spring chicken... At least it will be difficult to get lost if the river is flowing towards London!

Starting off in Cricklade, we were joined by our daughter Milly and her lovely dog, Koru, who is best friends with Moses. Our good friend Charles, who accompanied us many

times during our last two walks, also joined us. Sure enough, the route is extremely well marked with the acorn sign of the Thames Path. We were about 10 miles from the real source of the Thames and at this stage the river is narrow, lined with reeds and giant knotweed. It's very low due to the lack of rain, and we saw a disconsolate swan standing in the middle of the river with not enough water to swim in. The brown and parched-looking countryside made me wonder how the poor farmers are managing to feed their livestock. Autumn is definitely coming early this year, with many leaves already turning brown and dropping from the trees – of course, in that way they conserve water.

We passed through the pretty village of Castle Eaton, which was holding a scarecrow competition with a difference. As well as having 28 beautifully crafted scarecrows standing outside various houses, there was also a competition for children to name them individually. We encountered a Polish mother with three little girls deeply involved

Tom... keep moving... they'll think  
You're one



with the task – and were able to help them identify some of our best-loved nursery rhymes unknown in their Polish culture. We particularly liked a brilliant “Stick Man”, the queen having tea with Paddington Bear and the Iron Lady.

We stopped for lunch at The George in Kempford, where we were joined by our good friend Anthony, and then it was on to our end point at Inglesham. There, we enjoyed looking round the very old church – it has retained its box pews, with those nearest the altar more enclosed than those at the back. I presume

these were particularly used by the smarter and richer members of the community, so as not to be seen by the peasantry behind them.

## Day 2

### Lechlade

We returned to Inglesham where we were joined by Angus, a trustee of ZANE, and his beautifully trained golden Labrador, Holly. The Thames is considerably wider here and looks deeper, despite being very low. The dogs were very frustrated at being

unable to swim due to the steepness of the drop into the water.

As we walked through the bone-dry floodplains, it was strange to think of how they are probably covered with water for much of the winter. We passed through several herds of cows, who seemed totally unfazed by the dogs. I suppose they are used to walkers like us.

We were intrigued that we didn't see any boats out on the river, although there were plenty tied up along the bank. Perhaps the water really is too shallow for boating at the moment. At one point, we came across the

wonderful sight of a swimmer towing a canoe behind her – inside sat two elderly Labradors, wearing life jackets! We wished her well and took some photos. Further along, we crossed the river and had a very cheery conversation with three swimming women – I think it's now called “wild” swimming. Two were soldiers and one was married to a brigadier, all serving in Highland regiments and based nearby. Angus is a retired Royal Scots general, so we had a rather surreal conversation about army life, with us hanging over the bridge and them treading water below us.



Passing by the village of Kelmscott, we glimpsed the manor home of textile designer William Morris – who was part of the mid-nineteenth-century Art and Crafts movement. The house is open to the public. At Radcot, we stopped for lunch at the Swan Inn overlooking the river. Just as we arrived, we saw an enormous articulated lorry trying to cross the very narrow thirteenth-century bridge, which is built at a slight angle to the road. The very flustered driver – who admitted he'd been following Google maps – made numerous attempts as traffic piled up behind him. Eventually, he gave up and had to back half a mile through the village, causing complete mayhem. According to the publican, this is a regular occurrence!

After a pleasant, sunny lunch, we set off again, though we felt some trepidation at the sight of dark clouds brewing in the distance. Sure enough, the clouds opened, and the rain came down heavily. Tom and I had stupidly left our raincoats in the car and were soon soaked to the skin! We knew we should be rejoicing at the sight of a downpour, but after an hour we were feeling pretty miserable and dreaming of a hot bath at home. Even Moses was not amused. Seeing Richard and the car at the end of the walk was most welcome. I stripped off to my bra at the side of a very busy road to put on something dry – I really didn't care!

### Day 3

#### Buckland Marsh

This morning saw us heading back to Tadpole Bridge where we ended up last night in a sodden mess. I had to turn on the central heating when we got home, just to dry out our shoes, backpacks and clothes. Annoyingly, it hadn't rained much in Bladon, which made me doubly cross. At least this morning it was dry and how different it all looked.

We were again joined by Charles, this time with his wife, Angela. We reckoned the next stretch would be easy since the route closely followed the river, with no deviations. This turned out to be accurate and we arrived at our lunch stop at Newbridge an hour earlier than estimated. We saw some boats on the river, but still surprisingly few considering what a beautiful stretch it is, twisting and turning through wide floodplains. There were lots of swan families and herons about, but we didn't see any of the kingfishers or bullfinches highlighted on the nature information boards along the way.

Approximately every half a mile or so, there was a well-preserved concrete look-out post dating from the Second World War. We debated whether anyone really thought the Germans could travel this far up the Thames without being spotted? What a boring job it must have been for those manning the posts!



You know, Son, I feel I could go on  
for years



On a particularly wide and tranquil stretch of the river, I spotted two or three large properties on the opposite side with gardens sweeping down to the water. But perhaps more interestingly, I also saw two quite small and ordinary 1950/60s inhabited bungalows, again with gardens leading down to the riverbank. I bet they are owned by

elderly people whose relatives are just waiting for them to die so they can sell the sites at a huge profit!

Back on the path after lunch, we completed the 9.6 miles to Bablock Hythe caravan park in record time, arriving at 3.30 pm.



#### Day 4

#### Bablock Hythe

Today our elder daughter, Clare, accompanied us along with her friend Alannah and dog, Layla. The dog is another of Moses's best friends, so there was much excitement and noise. Apart from a slight detour away from the Thames at the start, we followed the river again, passing through wide fields full of both cattle and sheep. I imagine these fields can't be farmed for crops due to potential flooding. Clare and I watched amused as Tom

and Alannah, deep in conversation and completely oblivious to their surroundings, headed straight towards a massive recumbent bull at the centre of a herd of cows. With some shouting, we managed to catch their attention and get them to change their direction of travel!

Today's walking got me wondering who it was that created the 184 miles of public footpath that runs along the entire route of the Thames. There must have been someone who had the inspiration and drive to see the project through. Having consulted



Google, I found I was right – David Sharp, a leading volunteer at the Ramblers' Association, attended a 1973 meeting with The River Thames Society and produced a sketch of a possible walk from the river's source in the Cotswolds to the sea. For the next 23 years, volunteers from both the Ramblers' Association and the River Thames Society, along with other campaign groups, worked with landowners, local authorities and politicians along the proposed route to create what we now know as the Thames Path National Trail. It mainly follows the old eighteenth-century towpaths, which were constructed when the river was an important trade route, prior to the arrival of the railways. Many of these had fallen into disrepair or had been washed away by floods. The route was officially opened in July 1996, with a guide book written by David Sharp. He died in 2015, aged 89, and there's a memorial bench to him and his wife, Margaret, beside the Thames Path in Barnes. God bless him for leaving this wonderful legacy.

By 12pm, Tom and I were beginning to feel quite tired, but our lunch stop seemed a long way off. It was not until we arrived at the Jacobs Inn at Wolvercote that we realised we'd walked seven miles without a break – and only had the short walk across Port Meadow left to complete. Having said goodbye to Clare and Alannah, we enjoyed an easy stroll across the meadows to our car. There we had a welcome ice cream from

a cheery New Zealander and his Spanish girlfriend. They told us they were converting an old ambulance into a camper van with the intention of driving it across Europe and Asia and eventually back to Christchurch, New Zealand. What an adventure, I hope they make it!

## Day 5

### Port Meadow

Back at Port Meadow, we set off in good time, once again accompanied by Charles and Angela. At Osney Island, we met up with David, who had travelled down by train from London. David has kindly joined our walks on a number of occasions.

Our route today, along the river through Oxford, was an interesting one. The first part I know well, and we enjoyed the views of numerous university colleges set back in beautiful parkland –slightly spoiled by being so brown and lifeless – and of the college boat houses. Although term has not yet started, we saw some rowing eights on the river with their coaches on bikes shouting instructions. It's always a thrilling sight to me.

In contrast to the mainly deserted pathways of the past four days, today's route was busy with Sunday runners and cyclists – who were forced to negotiate around Moses, no respecter of either! Once under the Donnington Road, I was in new territory and was intrigued by the



number of inlets, once used to offload barges into warehouses. Most of these are now redundant, I think.

Before long, we found ourselves in the very attractive village of Iffley. Charles pointed out a charming house sitting right on the river that belongs to one of his friends – it must have one of the best views in Oxford! Once we'd passed under the bypass and the main railway line, we were back in peaceful countryside

again. The going wasn't so easy here as the narrow path was deeply rutted by bicycles, which made walking a bit tricky. However, it was a pleasant walk to Radley College Boat House, where we arrived ready for our lunch. Poor Richard had struggled to find a pub or restaurant to take our booking – having tried eight places, he eventually settled on a place in the centre of Abingdon, where we had an excellent lunch.

We decided that rather than taking two car journeys back to resume our walk from Radley, we'd walk there along the path from our intended end point – which was just across the road. The tranquility of the walk was marred by the noise of motorbikes roaring in the distance – it turned out a motor cross rally was taking place on the other side of the river. We enjoyed watching 30 or 40 bikes roaring around a complex course with impressive jumps and hill descents. It was obviously a local event, with only a small crowd of spectators, although it appeared to be highly professional. I once had a friend whose son took up motor cross rallying at the age of ten, and who is now a young professional. I remember the days when I was terrified watching my children compete at horse events, but watching a child do this must be even worse!

Leaving the noise behind us, we soon found ourselves back at Radley Boat House.

## Day 6

### Abingdon

David decided to stay with us for the night so he could join us again today. Having returned to the bridge at Abingdon, we passed through a pleasant park by the river that took us out of town and into the countryside. It was a perfect day for walking, warm and slightly overcast.

Arriving at Culham Lock, we found an information board that told us how the once thriving community of Culham was wiped out by the Black Death and a series of poor harvests in the seventeenth century. Nearby is the village of Sutton Courtney, where former prime minister HH Asquith is buried, as is George Orwell. Tom was sad not to visit their graves, but, with a long day of walking ahead of us, we didn't have the luxury of time.

The river was looking particularly beautiful today, gently flowing through wide floodplains with many channels disappearing in different directions – it was difficult sometimes to identify the main channel. At Clifton Hamden, we met up with Richard, who brought us a picnic – many of the pubs are closed on a Monday and it was a pleasant day to have one. After sharing a snack with him, we took the rest to eat later as it was a bit too early for lunch. The path took us across the river, and we soon saw why. On the other side were several large properties – obviously, a footpath running along the bottom of their gardens would not be popular!

An hour or so later, we stopped for lunch on the riverbank. We were watched keenly by five swans who hissed fiercely each time Moses came near. They were obviously expecting bread, but we were cautious about throwing them any in case Moses jumped in after it and they went for him instead. Eventually, they gave

up, leaving a lone female eider duck to receive our scraps instead.

At Wittenham lock, we crossed back over the river. The lock keeper is obviously a passionate gardener and the whole area was ablaze with potted plants of every type and colour. After reaching our finishing point in good time, we said goodbye to David, who was heading back to London by train.

## Day 7

### Shillingford

Last night, we experienced a horrendous thunderstorm just before going to bed. The forecast for today was worse, with rain and thunder predicted from midday, so we decided to start early and get as much walking completed by lunchtime as possible.



Off we set, well prepared with raincoats, waterproof trousers and so on. We passed Shillingford Bridge Hotel, where we stayed two years ago. I remember thinking then what a beautifully situated hotel it was with huge potential, and yet what a dreary place it turned out to be. It does not appear to have improved in the past two years.

We soon arrived at Benson Lock, where numerous riverboats are moored. Some of them must have cost more than £100k. I wonder how often they are used by their rich owners? Wealthy or not, none of our party has any aspiration to own one! The river widens here and there is a complex weir crossing much of the river. We traversed to the other side on a pedestrian bridge that zigzags over the water.

The weather was much less muggy today, the air fresher after last night's storms. Luckily, the predicted rain showed no sign of appearing. Walking along this tranquil stretch of the river, with beautifully planted specimen trees gracing the opposite side, was most enjoyable. Our route took us through Wallingford, which apparently once boasted 16 churches – now reduced to six. The ancient bridge over the Thames is a favourite of mine. Three years ago, during our trek from Canterbury to Oxford, we walked towards it on a beautiful

summer's evening, and then again last year when we were doing circular walks during the Covid restrictions. This year, we approached the Thames Path on the town side, further down from the bridge. There is something wonderfully soothing about walking beside a slow-moving river and we particularly enjoyed the glimpses of large, opulent properties standing back from the water's edge. I imagine some of the owners are none too happy about their frontages being a public right of way, though.

We were bemused to see a load of rather good-looking apples bobbing about in the middle of the river. Whether they had fallen from a tree on the opposite bank or from a crate on a boat wasn't clear. Very bizarre!

With six and a half miles completed, we stopped at an excellent pub called the Beetle and Wedge in Moulsoford. We enjoyed its lovely river setting, and had a good, companionable lunch. Then there were just two and a half miles left before we reached Streatley, the end of our walk – and with no rain in sight. How lucky were we!

Tomorrow is our day off. Yippee!

## Day 8

– Rest Day

Phew



## Day 9

### Streatley

The forecast was poor for the afternoon so Tom and I set off with the intention of getting as far as we could before stopping. After crossing over the bridge into Goring, we were greeted by a very out-of-breath man on the Thames Path. Introducing himself as a ZANE supporter, he told us how he happened to be staying in a hotel on the bridge for a family reunion. He'd been eating his breakfast when he spotted us crossing the bridge with Moses and immediately rushed over to wish us luck – kind man! Moses is definitely famous among our supporters.

Making our way along the path, we had cheery chats with a number of boat owners. As we left Goring, we reminded ourselves how, just a week ago, we were lamenting the dullness of the brown and tired-looking countryside. After a few days of rain, the view has been transformed. The water meadows have now changed to lush green pasture, the trees seem fresher and it all looks more like the countryside we know and love.

Our walk now took us into a forest that reached down to the water's edge. Faced with the first real hill of this walk, we climbed steeply away from the river. The going was good though, with steps on the steepest parts – very different from



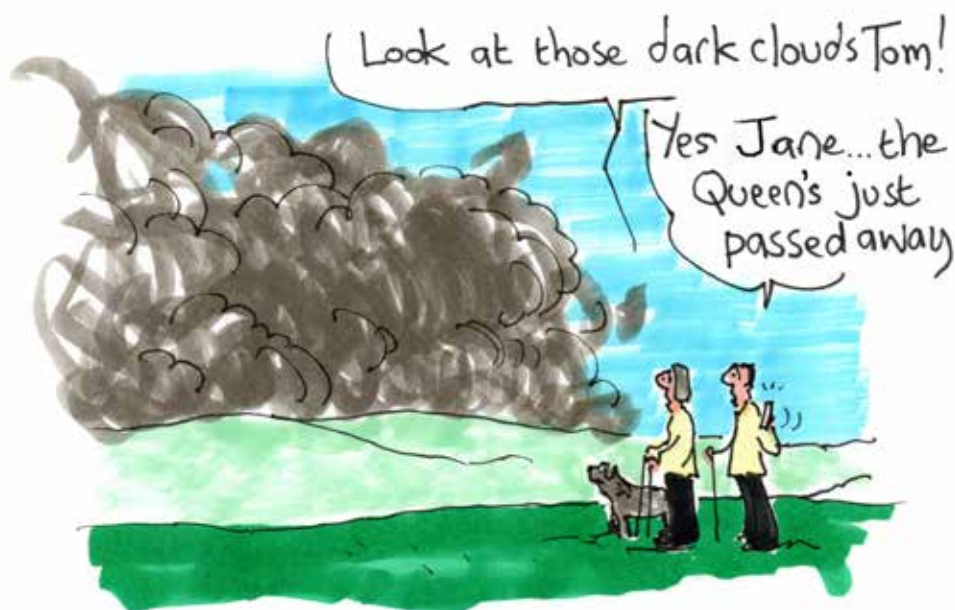
our previous walks! On arrival at Whitchurch-on-Thames, Richard told us that heavy thunder was forecast within the next hour, so we decided we'd press on rather than stop for lunch – and hopefully miss the worst of it. Further along, we came across a couple of policemen searching for someone who had asked for help. After 20 minutes, we left them behind still searching.

Walking between the railway line and the river, we saw ominous dark clouds and heard the distant rumble of thunder. We were puzzled by three vast multi-coloured tents that we glimpsed behind some buildings. We couldn't think what they were for – but have since discovered they were part of the Reading Festival held a week ago (and attended by our grandson!) Much of the surrounding

parkland was very worn down but there must have been a very successful clean-up job as there was no rubbish to be seen anywhere.

Unfortunately, the clouds opened about an hour before our end point, and we got soaked yet again – though this time we were rather better dressed than previously. We drove to Pangbourne for a late lunch where we were greeted by a charming waitress. She told us she had just left the navy and was hoping to go into the fire service. A very sodden Moses was provided with a dog bed and biscuits, and there was an excellent lunch for us.

Arriving at Caversham Bridge, in West Reading, we heard the very sad news of the death of our beloved queen – a sad way to end our day.





Your majesty might like to see  
this prayer we received from Annabelle



## Day 10

### Reading

Today we were joined by our son-in-law John, who arrived from Oxford by train. Just as we were preparing to set off, I received a WhatsApp message from one of my sons quoting a prayer his daughter made up last night. I think it sums up everything we are feeling:

*“Lord Jesus, we are so sad that the queen died today. As I speak to you right now, you are likely to be speaking to her as you welcome her into heaven. Please would you make her feel very welcome. Would you tell her what an incredible job she did and that everyone in the world is crying and missing her.”*

Amen to that!

The walk took us out of Reading – on not the best-kept of paths – along the river and out into the countryside. The river traffic has increased considerably during the past few days, with every shape and size of boat and barge. Some of the barges appeared bigger and wider here than further upriver, which must make the accommodation inside less like living permanently in a corridor.

We had fun watching a group of young people learning to manage a paddle board. Some were lying or sitting on their boards while others quickly mastered the ability to stand up. It was all accompanied by a lot of laughter and shouting. Another group in canoes were being hooted at by an elderly man in a barge as they were straying onto the wrong side of the river.

Leaving Reading behind, we relished the peaceful countryside, away from the usual sound of traffic, and enjoyed seeing a heron as well as egrets amongst a flock of sheep.

## Day 11

### Henley-on-Thames

Moses and I found ourselves alone this morning as Tom had an important appointment with an eye specialist in Oxford. We started off by passing the stretch at Henley where the Royal Regatta takes place every year. I have only been once – it was a long time ago and I can't say I remember much about the racing (except it was good!). It's a lovely

straight stretch of river and apart from the footpaths being strewn with swan droppings, it was a great start to the day. I think the swans must sleep there at night as there was no sign of mess further along.

Both sides of the river are immaculately kept, and the specimen trees are stunning. I have noticed that the weeping willows have been particularly fine over the past few days, it's so much their natural habitat by a river. The place was alive with rowers, some racing against each other. I was surprised to see a two-man boat streak past much faster than a boat of eight rowers – I wonder if this is due to the skill of those in the smaller boat or the weight of the larger boat? At the top of this straight stretch of river is an island which appears to be the start and end point for the rowers before it bends to the right. It has a large mock temple on it and is obviously used as an event venue as there was a large marquee behind it. Not surprisingly it's called Temple Island. It would make a great, romantic setting for a party!

At Aston, the path leaves the river and passes through the private grounds of the Culham Court estate. I imagine that when the Thames Path was opened in 1996 there must have been a lot of negotiations between the organisers and the landowner to make this possible. The footpath runs past a beautifully kept cricket pitch into a fine park with beautiful specimen trees and

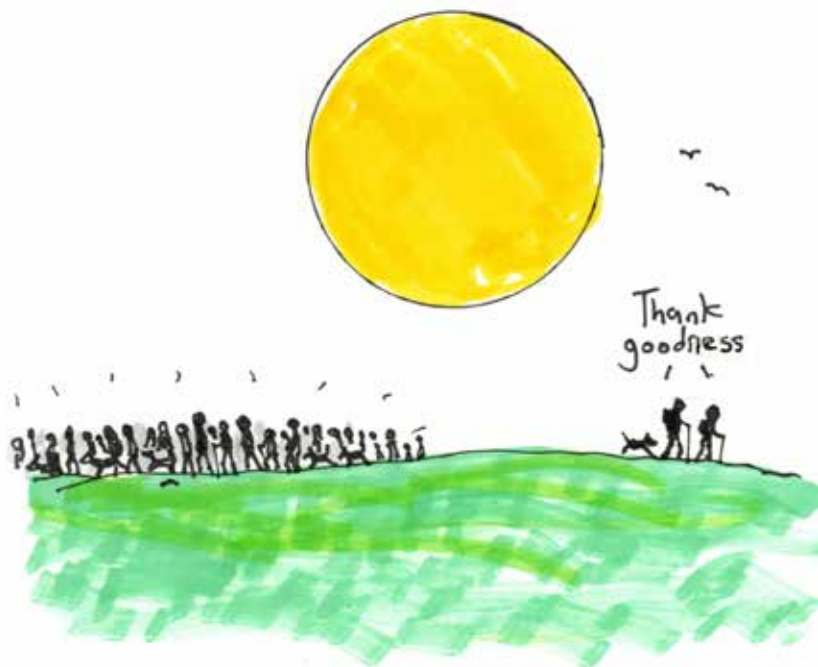
then past the front of a classic Queen Ann Mansion. In the park, I spied some intriguing modern sculptures on the hill as well as an interesting large building that looks like a museum or folly with a working clock tower. I asked various walkers what it was, but nobody seemed to know. Further on was the walled garden and gardener's cottage, but unfortunately, I couldn't see whether they're still in use. I hope so.

We returned to the river, where Moses enjoyed lots of swims. On the outskirts of Hurley, I spotted a

surprisingly large number of prefab homes, probably dating from the 1960/70s, all beautifully kept and sitting on a prime site overlooking the river – which must be worth millions! Walking into Hurley, I was amused to see a sign saying, "People using the picnic park are permanently banned from having picnics and barbecues". There was no explanation why, despite the fact there are numerous seats along the river and an open grassy space. Very odd, it sounds like a monumental parish council row to me...



The road less travelled... →



I stopped at the Old Bull pub to wait for Tom and Richard's return. Tom had a very successful appointment and was in good spirits for the final three miles to Marlow. Along the way, we spotted a rather stunning twelfth-century church on the opposite bank – All Saints, Bisham – built in an unusual light-coloured stone. According to the noticeboard, it's full of Tudor treasures with links to Henry VIII, the nobility of the time and Shakespeare.

On arrival in Marlow, we spent a few minutes in the fine Georgian Church by the river and lit a candle in memory of our queen.

## Day 12

### Marlow

We were joined again by Charles and Angela. It soon transpired that our walk today coincided with at least two major sponsored events, starting at Dorney where we were finishing. One was a triathlon, where the competitors completed the swimming section in the Dorney Lake – we met them as they ran towards Marlow. The other event was a charity walk, the participants all sporting their charity-of-choice T-shirts. We weren't sure how far they were going but there were a lot of them, many accompanied by

dogs. We were glad to be going in the opposite direction!

We passed under the famous Maidenhead Railway Bridge, built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Opened in 1839, it was the largest brick-built arch bridge in Europe of its time and was famously painted by Turner. It is indeed an impressive sight.

This stretch of the river must be one of the most opulent, with endless expensive houses and large riverboats parked at the bottom of their gardens. We had an excellent pub lunch in Cookham while Moses happily chewed on a lamb bone given to him by the manager.

We finished at the car park at Dorney Lake. Owned by Eton College, the lake is where the rowing events were held during the 2012 Olympic Games.

## Day 13

### Eton

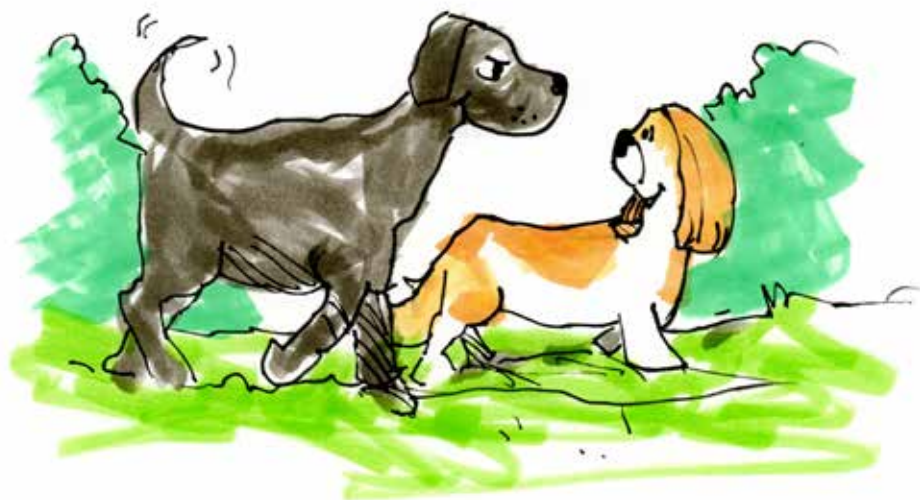
We said goodbye to Kathryn and Chris, our wonderful hosts for the past three days, who have looked after us so well in their beautiful home. Moses fell in love with their cute little seven-month-old King Charles Spaniel, called Mouse, who had recently been on heat. Moses is neutered but definitely felt he should be doing something about it, especially as she was an outrageous flirt.

This was the penultimate day of our walk, the time having flown by, and it was difficult to believe that we'd travelled 120 miles. However, Cricklade, where we started, seemed to be a long way away. We met Kit and Pom off the train in Maidenhead. They live in Scotland but are down staying in London, seeing their family.

Back in Dorney, we met up with Charles and Angela again. They had to make a very early start from Witney to reach us by 9am. It was another lovely day as we made our way towards Windsor. We had the path to ourselves, but there was a big increase in traffic noise and the sound of planes – not surprising, since we were now under the Heathrow flight path. Crossing the bridge that separates Eton from Windsor, we came around the corner to see Windsor Castle in all its glory. It was a poignant moment to be there, knowing that Her Majesty The Queen will be laid to rest in St George's Chapel in one week's time. Our hosts last night visited yesterday to leave flowers and found it a very moving experience. Charles and Angela are hoping to do the same this evening.

We stopped for a picnic lunch in sight of the castle, in a park that has recently been fenced off – probably for the press corps covering the interment of the queen. Our walk ended at Runnymede, famous for the signing of the Magna Carta.

Hey, wanna come back to  
my place babe?



#### Day 14

#### Runnymede

Charles joined us again today as we headed for Walton-on-Thames, the end of our journey. There are rather more tarmac than country lanes along this section of the Thames Path. Instead of large opulent houses, we walked beside large and modern flat complexes, all with river-view balconies.

Although there was an increasing feel of urban London as we travelled under both the M25 and the M3, an information board told us about the long history of this part of the river,

stretching back to Neolithic, Roman and Saxon times. In the Middle Ages, it became an important thoroughfare for kings and the nobility. Staines is mentioned in the Domesday Book and the tax levied on it was £35. I mused on the river being affectionately called “Old Father Thames” and how it has always been an important trading highway in our history.

Moses had one of his many swims, chasing after sticks, but this time he came out very stressed, shaking and biting his back. Nothing could be found, and we eventually decided that he must have been bitten by





something, possibly a crayfish. He gradually recovered but refused to return to the river later in the day.

At Chertsey, we saw several large houseboats. It's difficult to believe they've ever moved from their moorings due to their height and general look of permanency. From there, the river meandered through many different channels, and we took a ferry – a route that has been

running for 500 years, according to the boatman – across to the other side.

After a picnic lunch, it was time for the final leg as we made our way to Walton-on-Thames. It's been another marathon trek, with 140 miles completed – fun and certainly less arduous than some of our previous walks.





**“** ZANE is a brilliant charity working in the failed state of Zimbabwe, caring for the old and lonely, providing medical treatment and supporting communities. You can choose where your money goes.

**Dame Prue Leith DBE DL**  
Cookery writer and restaurateur

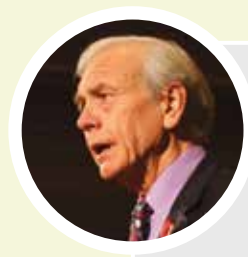
**”**



**“** I have supported ZANE for many years as they do excellent work amongst the vulnerable in Zimbabwe.

**HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO**

**”**



**“** ZANE is really in touch with the people it assists. ZANE's work is wonderfully moving . . .

**John Humphrys**  
Author, journalist, radio & TV presenter

**”**



“ ZANE does fantastic work looking after vulnerable people in Zimbabwe and showing servicemen and women that they are not forgotten. They are professional, passionate and scrupulous about how the money is spent.

**HMA Melanie Robinson CMG**

UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe  
Former Executive Director of the World Bank

”



“ I much admire ZANE's valuable work amongst the poorest of the poor in Zimbabwe, particularly amongst pensioners and for its Clubfoot programme.

**Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP**

Secretary of State for Overseas Development  
2010–2012

”



“ I am deeply impressed with the work of ZANE; one of those charities that make a little money go a long way.

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon**

Principal of Somerville College, Oxford  
Former Labour leader of the House of Lords

”

# This could be me: it could be you

**In a sadly familiar tale, Mary Mackenzie\* and her husband, Martin\*, were thrown off their farm in 2002. Without warning, invaders arrived and handcuffed the couple as if they were criminals before throwing them into the back of a lorry. Mary and Martin never saw their possessions again. Their farm is now derelict, the farm machinery long since stolen.**



Martin soon suffered a massive heart attack and then he sadly died. Mary believes he died of a broken heart at the loss of their farm and the destruction of his life's work. The couple had no children.

Mary found a small flat, but sadly she was too old and ill to work. Then inflation ripped her savings to shreds. After suffering a stroke, she found she was unable to afford medication.

When ZANE found Mary, she had no food, medicine or money. She was seriously malnourished and destitute.

ZANE now supplies Mary with a regular food parcel, covers her medication costs and pays her rent.

Mary says: *"The kindness of ZANE donors is a wonderful blessing. Please thank them all from the bottom of my heart."*

*\* Names and image have been changed on grounds of security.*

## Reasons to support ZANE

1. ZANE provides aid, comfort and support to 2,090 impoverished pensioners with nowhere else to turn. Only those genuinely in need of assistance receive it.
2. Donors can choose which area of ZANE's work they wish to support.
3. ZANE was the Telegraph Group Overseas Charity of the year.
4. ZANE is looking after around 560 aged and frail veterans and their widows. These people fought for the Crown in WW2, Malaya, Korea and Aden. Without ZANE, they would be living with insufficient food and no healthcare.
5. ZANE runs education programmes in the high-density areas assisting women and children living in extreme poverty.
6. ZANE funded the first clubfoot correction programme in Zimbabwe. Thirteen treatment centres have been established and over 4,500 children have received treatment to date.
7. ZANE funds the provision of prosthetic limbs for victims of landmine explosions and treatment for people with hearing loss.
8. ZANE's funds are subject to rigorous audit and ZANE is proud that since its foundation, it has never lost money to collapsed banks, middlemen or corruption.
9. An independent consultancy reviewed ZANE and the report stated:  
*"The charity thrives on its responsiveness, flexibility and lack of bureaucracy. Operationally, ZANE is frugal, focused and effective in delivering aid to the needy."*

If you want to save a life, then please support ZANE



“ZANE's work in Zimbabwe provides an essential lifeline of support for those who cannot help themselves. It is a wonderful charity and the money goes where it's needed.

**Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE**

Chairman, ZANE Council of Reference  
Vice-President of Unicef

”



**Zimbabwe A National Emergency**

You can make a donation by phone or online  
**020 7060 6643** [www.zane.uk.com](http://www.zane.uk.com)

Reg Charity No 1112949

# DONATION FORM

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**Zimbabwe A National Emergency** Registered Charity No 1112949You can make a donation by phone **020 7060 6643** or online **www.zane.uk.com**

Title Initials Surname

Address

Postcode

Tel Email

Please tick if you are happy for ZANE to send you updates by email ☐Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR****Please complete this form and send it to: ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY**Preferred use of gift: Trustees' Discretion ☐, Pensioner Work ☐, Impoverished Communities ☐

If a specified project is fully funded, donations will be used where most needed.

*giftaid it*

Please tick the box below and make this gift and any donations made in the future, or made in the past 4 years, worth 25% more with Gift Aid. Gift Aid is reclaimed by ZANE from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

☐ I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or Capital Gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all of my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Date Signature

Please notify ZANE if you

- Want to cancel this declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

Please consider leaving a gift to ZANE in your will. Tick here for further information ☐

## DONATE BY CHEQUE

I enclose a cheque for £ payable to "ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency"

## DONATE BY CARD

or please debit my Debit/Credit Card for £

Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ CAF ☐ Debit ☐

Name on Card

Card no

Start date Expiry date

☐ I would like to make a new regular gift via Direct Debit of:

OR

☐ Please increase my existing Direct Debit to:

£  every month OR

£  quarterly OR £  annually.

Please debit the above amount from my account on or around the (tick as appropriate)

1st ☐ or 15th ☐ of (month)

### Instruction to your bank/building society to pay by Direct Debit

#### ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Please fill in the form and send to: ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY.



Direct Debits can only be set up if you provide a postal address. **Please fill in your postal address overleaf.**  
Under Direct Debit regulations, we are not able to set up any direct debits without an address being provided.

#### Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To the Manager	bank/building society
Address	
Postcode	

#### Name(s) of account holder(s)

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#### Bank/building society account number

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

#### Branch sort code

--	--	--	--	--	--

Please pay ZANE Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with ZANE and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

#### Reference (for office use only)

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#### Service user number

8	3	9	9	7	5
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#### Signature

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#### Date

--	--	--	--	--	--

#### Please ensure your name and address are completed overleaf

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

DD15

### RESPECTING YOUR DATA

Like any charity, we could not do our important work without being able to communicate with valued supporters like you. ZANE will never sell your data to any third party. You can find more information about how we use and look after your data and your rights, including what to do if you want to hear from us less or stop hearing from us, in our Privacy Policy. You can obtain a copy of this on our website ([www.zane-zimbabweanationalemergency.com/policies.asp](http://www.zane-zimbabweanationalemergency.com/policies.asp)) or by:

a. calling 020 7060 6643 b. emailing [info@zane.uk.com](mailto:info@zane.uk.com) c. writing to us at ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY.