

## U3A HISTORICAL WALKS

## NETTLEBED

Start by Bus Shelter in Nettlebed (GR702868) just off A4130 road from Henley on Thames to Wallingford and Oxford. Adequate parking round The Green.

Distance, about 3 -4 miles, easy going.



By the bus stop note the board giving information about the Pudding Stones which are a geological feature. Then look behind at the restored late 17<sup>th</sup> century estate brick kiln, a reminder of the brick making industry that once flourished in Nettlebed. There is a very interesting information board. As you go through the village note the grey and silver bricks used everywhere; they are very

hard and the colour is due to the type of clay that covers the common.

*Nettlebed and its commons are a conservation area managed by the Nettlebed and District Commons Conservators.*

Still facing the kiln go right along the minor road behind The Green.

On reaching a grass triangle turn sharp R ignoring sign to Cookley Green and Magpies. Then left on to track called "Catslip". This was originally part of the Roman Road from Dorchester to London.

*You pass some attractive dwellings on the left in Arts and Crafts style. These were built for the workers at Joyce Grove. One of them is called Laundry Cottage and apparently was a Chinese laundry*

Ignore turnings off until coming to sign saying 31 - 36 Catslip. Turn left round past old cottages. At X roads take lane marked Catslip to left. ( There may be a flood at the low point in Cat lane). (Catslip - possibly, home of wild cats, slipe - Old English, muddy or slimy).

Go left at fork past old farm house called Pebbles that had, until recently, been the property of the same family for 300 years.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century grain store on staddle stones stands outside. Opposite is the house called Carpenters that was the local Inn, the Carpenters Arms, for many years.

*Many of the cottages here were involved in Pottery and brick making. Flemish refugees from the Low Countries came here in medieval times and there are records of Thomas Stonor (the Lord of the Manor) buying 200 000 "brakes" for his mansion at Stonor in 1416.*

Cross Crocker End Common (Crocker "crockery"?) to the red letter box. Turn left and then R at FP sign to Russells water. Cross meadow Note parkland trees.

*Look across at Soundess House. This was the most important house in Nettlebed for many years, in 1545 it was known as "Sounds"House. Soundess was in the ownership of Dorchester Abbey from 14<sup>th</sup> century up until the Dissolution. However before then there are records dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century of the Soundy family holding the freehold with John Soundy being the largest parish tax payer in 1306. In 1545 Richard Taverner bought the property from the Crown. A bower in the garden is named after Nell Gynne, Charles 11 mistress, who is reputed to have stayed there. Legend has it that she was seen driving her little carriage round the village. In 1665 Richard's grandson John is listed as being taxed on '12 hearths at Soundess'-for making silver trading tokens. The estate stays within this family until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Sambrooke Freeman of Fawley Court buys it in 1755. The property subsequently changed hands several times up into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The earlier farm house was replaced by a gentleman's residence in 1871 when the farm was sold off separately. Soundess house was rebuilt in 1928 by Arthur Dale and has had further changes in recent times.*

On leaving field go left along tree lined avenue ignoring any signs to R or L. At road junction keep right past sign to Crocker End retracing your steps for a short distance.

Turn right at track marked Chapel Lane, ahead on to muddy track, follow it round to L. Note the site of the old Congregational Chapel (1840) Names on the houses remind one of the brick making history of the place. The Malt House supplied malt for local brewing.

At T junction turn right uphill, this is Mill Road. Pass road to Mill House.

*At the top of the hill is the site of Nettlebed windmill, nearly 700 feet above sea level. A windmill stood on the hill for over 400 years. It accidentally burned down in 1912 and now behind the green railings is the Thames water reservoir (water pumped from River Thames at Goring)*

Turn left on to a bridleway across Nettlebed Common. Follow the white arrows painted on trees downhill across the common until you come to a tarmac road and turn left. All the way note the uneven ground with hollows and ponds where the Nettlebed clay was dug out for the brick making. Now a beautiful beech wood this was once a bare industrial landscape where tons of clay was extracted every day.

Just where the tarmac road comes to a T junction with a main road to Cookley Green turn left on to a well walked path across a beech glade leaving a dip on your left. Pass between 2 holly bushes and right past a storm damaged tree, across an open heather glade. Stop at the notice board giving fascinating details of the geology of the common. This is Priest Hill which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (an SSSI ).

*So called because of its connection with the Catholic Stonor family and the possibility that the Catholic priest Edmund Campion crossed the common escaping from justice.*

Follow the path left to emerge on the cricket ground. Cross diagonally to the far corner past "Hill Rise". Turn left when you reach the road Follow it round to reach the main A 4130. Turn right to go down High Street.

*Note house names;- Red Lion, Nags Head, Bull Inn, White Hart and Cross Keys, once inns, highlighting the importance of Nettlebed as a stop on the coaching routes to Wallingford and Oxford in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Nettlebed was a high point where the Oxford road crossed the ancient*

*trackway of the Ridgeway, ideal to rest and refresh the horses after a long pull up.*

*In Cary's New Itinerary of 1815 (which was the Bradshaw of its day) Nettlebed is mentioned on the major route from Hyde Park Corner to Oxford with regular coach services*

*"Light Post Coach to Oxford Daily ¾ bef. 8 morn, arr. at Angel Oxford 5 aft." And "Defiance dail 8 morn. Arr. Oxford 3 aft. Also Dep 10 morn arr. 5 aft."*

*3 out and 3 return coaches passing through Nettlebed daily must have generated much trade for the village. Not to speak of all the local spin off services. Plenty of customers for the inns!*

On the right is Nettlebed Village Club built in the Arts and Crafts style.

*Nettlebed Village Club, previously known as Nettlebed Working Men's Club was built in 1912. It was commissioned by Robert Fleming and designed by C E Mallows. The story goes that protests following the clearing away of the old cricket pitch to accommodate the gate way for his new Joyce Grove mansion led to Robert Fleming providing a new cricket ground and a Working Men's Club. In keeping with the ethos of the Arts & Crafts style, in which it is designed, the Club was built by local craftsmen with local materials and resembles a medieval hall with its high pitched roof. Pevsner comments that it is 'a design of some distinction'. It remains today a busy focus of village life hosting folk music events, dances, quizzes etc. and women are now allowed in the bar!*



Continue down street to the Church. The present church – St Bartholomews – was rebuilt in 1846 on the site of a 12C church.

*Norman windows can be seen on the west side of the tower and a Romanesque (Norman) font stands outside the main door. For most people the main attractions are the John Piper windows in memory of Dr Williamson and Col Peter Fleming, both of whom contributed a great deal to the village. There are several memorials that relate to places and people touched on in this walk, such as John Taverner, and Valentine and Michael Fleming of Joyce Grove. This church was known for its gypsy burials and their headstones in the churchyard.*

On leaving the church retrace your steps until you can turn in right through the wrought iron gates into Joyce Grove – currently the home of the Sue Ryder Care Hospice. Walk quietly past the mansion down the drive admiring the splendid grounds

*A Cornet George Joyce was born in 1618 in the village of Blackfordby and became a London tailor. When the Civil war broke out he joined the Parliamentary New Model Army. Despite his lowly rank of Cornet he became famous when, in 1647, he gathered 500 men and seized King Charles 1 from Parliamentary custody at Holdeby Hall and delivered him to General Fairfax at Taplow Heath. It seems possible that he bought the house in Nettlebed at this time and the Grove was named after him. Falling between the two Parliamentary factions meant that he soon fell from grace and was stripped of his commission and imprisoned for a time by Cromwell in 1653. However this may well have been due to his property dealings which are thought to have included Thomas Cromwell's son Richard. With the Restoration in 1660 Joyce was accused of being Charles's executioner by William Lilly. It is believed that he then fled to the Netherlands and was not heard of after 1670.*

*(However there is a story that he returned to his home village of Blackfordby in the disguise of a woman and lived as Jane Joyce. A Parish Record notes the murder of a Jane Joyce and it is possible that he was assassinated for his role in the king's execution!)*

*The original house was built in 1627 and was sold to James Thompson of Wallingford in 1637 and it must have been after 1647 that the house was named after Joyce. In 1903 Robert Fleming (1845-1933), founder of the Flemings Merchant Bank, demolished the eighteenth century house and commissioned the architect Charles Edward Mallows (1864-1915) to build the present house. (It is described as "Jacobethan style" - John Betjeman) Ian Fleming, the author of the James Bond books, was Robert's grandson. Ian's father, Valentine, was MP for Henley in 1910 but sadly died on the Western Front in 1917.*

*During the twentieth century in 1938 the house became a convalescent home for St Mary's Hospital, London and in 1979 became the Sue Ryder Care Home.*

*The house has regularly appeared in films and lately it doubled as Bletchley Park in the filming of 'The Imitation Game' starring Benedict Cumberbatch. It also featured in 'Arthur and George' starring Martin Clunes in Julian Barnes's Conan Doyle story.*

On exiting turn sharp L and make your way back across the open common, following the boundary railings, to where you began.

If in need of refreshment, food and drink can be obtained at the White Hart or the Field Kitchen (Not Sundays).

References. Nettlebed village web site, A history of Joyce Grove - Garth Blanchflower, A History of Nettlebed Village Club by Elizabeth Tate, The Henley Standard, The Victoria County History. For more history of Nettlebed go to [www.nettlebed.org/history](http://www.nettlebed.org/history).

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