

HAZELEY HEATH – HAVEN FOR HORSES AND BUTTERFLIES incorporating an update on the Millennium Orchard

Featured in the Hartley Row Journal, 1984, Autumn Issue

Distance – approximately 2¾ miles - Allow 1¼ hours

Hazeley Heath has survived being a gravel pit, a wartime training ground and a rubbish tip as well as a famous race course. A walk over it is still a pleasure in all seasons.

It is possible to park in front of the shops at the end of Hunts Common if the parking restrictions are not in force, otherwise park in Hares Lane or Hunts Common, with due consideration for the residents.



Go up footpath 45 to the left of Haywarden Place. This goes into the protected wood beyond where the trees are mainly oak, beech, laurel and holly with some firs on the right which were planted by the owner of 'The Elms' in the nineteenth century. At the top of the wood

footpath 48 goes off to the left along the top of the Northern Slopes which may afford views to the Cricket Green and St. John's Common. This path goes to the Reading Road near the water tower.

Continuing on the main path 45 you are now on the flat open common which formed Hartley Row racecourse from the middle of the 18th century to the end of the 19th. It is still much used by today's horse and pony riders and also dog walkers. It now has protected status as an SSSI.

The path runs straight ahead for half a mile with the water tower and the exotic trees of Hazeley House garden on the left and Warren Hill plantation and Bramshill House on the next hill to the right. When you reach the concrete road take a detour to the right to see the ramp and steep slide up which tanks were pulled during the war to test tank recovery techniques for use in the North African campaign, in Italy and after D-Day in Europe. Discarded tracks can be seen there.

Returning to the main path, turn right to continue the walk. This was a Hampshire County Council rubbish tip until about 40 years ago and was restored by the County and District Councils and anyone remembering earlier times would be agreeably surprised by the variety of fauna and flora which have replaced the flies.

Cross a farm road and follow the blue waymark arrow where there is an RSPB information board. The vegetation changes abruptly. The trees are closer with some 19th century firs marking the edge of the racecourse where no gravel working or rubbish dumping have disturbed them. Turn right at the next farm road. You are following part of the ancient Parish boundary with Mattingley. Until the 19th century the "bounds" would have been beaten here in Rogation Week, a ceremony dating back to the Ides of May 'terminalis' of our Roman occupation and the 'ganging days' of our Anglo-Saxon conquerors. Follow this road until it turns right and go down to Purdies Farm – if the track is very muddy you can walk a parallel path on the higher ground on your right. At Purdies Farm go right along the farm road until just after the road bears right you will see concrete tank obstacles on the right and a yellow waymark pointing left. Follow this through the trees and out on to the open common. Go right at the fork in the path and you will be back on the path you walked earlier. After passing the concrete road to the tank testing ramp there is a fingerpost. Follow the bridleway, which is footpath 46, and the high banks on each side are witness to its antiquity. This has been the path from the ford over the River Hart to the ford over the River Whitewater at least since Norman times, probably for centuries before.

Climb up the gnarled roots of the massive beech tree and look over the fields of Hare's Farm to the Whyte Lyon and Star Inn on the hill above. This is one of the earliest farms in the village, reclaimed from the wastelands after the Civil War.

Hartley Wintney Home Guard kept watch here for German paratroopers in 1940, after Dunkirk. The path develops into a farm road, with beech and holly on the right and lower hedge on the left, until it spills out into Hare's Lane by the 300-year old farm built by the Hare family. The walk to that point takes just over one hour.

To get back to the starting place, turn right and walk down the lane past the old gasworks next to 'Harriers', then past the terrace of gasworkers' cottages, and some old 17th century cottages. On the right is the earlier farmhouse, predating Hare's, once known as the 'Elms' and now as the 'Old Manor', although no manor was ever here. On the left is Hunt's Common where the annual cattle and poultry fair took place every 4th December until 1914. Facing it on the right are the houses which formerly supplied refreshment for the drovers and farmers - The Clarence, the King's Head and the Rose and Crown. If you look hard you can still make out their former identity.

Millennium Orchard – Extract from Hartley Wintney Community Orchard – A Brief History published by the Hartley Wintney Parish Council – Prepared by Patrick Vaughan, Parish Clerk – July 2007

Hunts Common, at the east end of Hartley Wintney, has no record of accommodating an orchard but historically it was a seasonal centre for community life, being the site of an annual sheep fair which culminated in a bonfire lit with tar barrels rolled through the High Street by the village 'bonfire boys'. The site is registered Common Land and owned by Hart District Council and this provided the next hurdle. The problem was resolved when, following its policy to pass non-revenue generating elements of its property to parish councils, Hart District Council offered Hunts Common to the Parish Council on a long term lease, an offer it accepted. This allowed the project to proceed, albeit with a resultant increase in the Parish Council grounds maintenance expenditure.

Planting began on 18/19th November 2000 when Cllr. Frank Fowler, Chairman of Hartley Wintney Parish Council, accepted an invitation to plant the Hampshire apple variety, 'Howgate Wonder', and he unveiled a commemorative plaque; a Hartley Wintney Millennium medallion was buried beneath the tree.