

MY FAVOURITE WALK – THE AVENING FIGURE OF EIGHT

By Roger Lindley

One of the most delightful aspects of living in the village of Avening is the option of taking a number of walks without the need to get into your car. We are also fortunate that these walks are accessible at any time of year, and indeed the same walk can offer infinite variety throughout the four seasons. My favourite walk does not stray too far from Avening because the village itself enhances many of the views from the various hillsides straddling it, particularly the picturesque Cotswold stone cottages. And whatever the season and whatever the weather, I always return from this walk with a feeling of well being from being at one with nature, privileged to be able to reside in this beautiful part of the country.

I put on my hiking boots, or Wellingtons if it is likely to be really muddy, collect up my camera and head down from my house in the High Street to the Bell Inn, an attractive pub with a welcoming outlook that serves Avening proud. It's certainly an ideal place to start a walk.



The Bell Inn in winter

I pass the Memorial Hall and Primary school, and cannot help but check the flow of the stream, the site of the Duck Race at the annual Church Fete, when my neighbour Ron and I spend the afternoon trudging up and down the stream collecting up the yellow plastic ducks. It would be tedious but for the fact that there are spectators of all ages cheering on their respective ducks to

win. And what a success story the Fete is, bringing the villagers together once a year for some unsophisticated fun combined with fundraising in aid of the Church.

I walk through the churchyard, following the right hand fork, and take in the view of the church from the top gate. When we moved into our house I was removing several ancient layers of wallpaper when I found the name *Joseph Rowland* had been written on the bare wall at some time early in the 19th century; I came across his gravestone in the churchyard, the poor chap only lived until he was 32. Three military headstones usually catch my eye, possibly because they are spread out and I sense that they should have been aligned, especially as the two killed in the First World War were probably brothers.



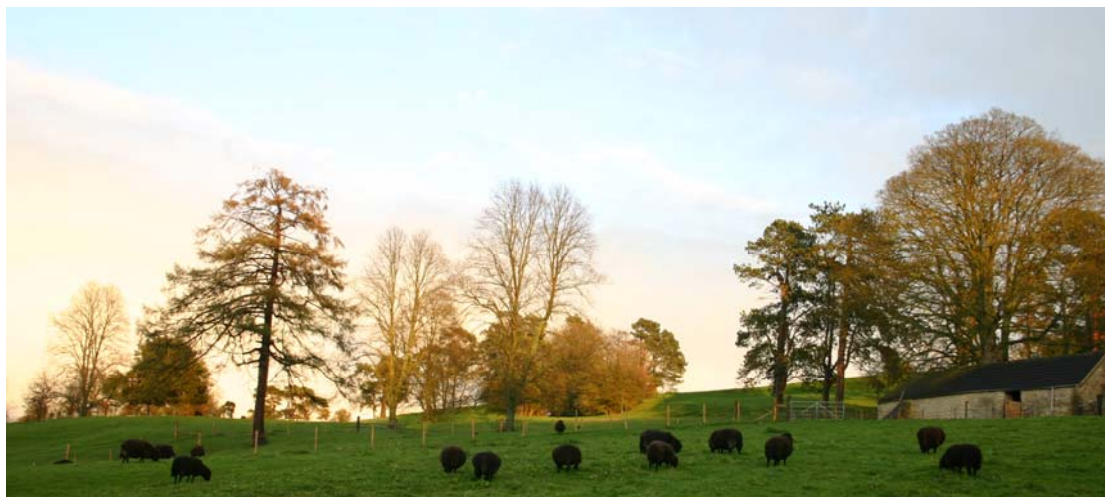
Avening Church in mid-summer

Even from this position, where I've hardly got into my stride, there are some attractive views of the outskirts of the village to be had, particularly looking down on the stream below, frequented by kingfishers. That flash of blue as they streak down the stream is a wonderful sight, and not least because it says everything about the pure quality of the water in the stream. Every year I thin out the undergrowth along my stretch of the stream just so I might get the very occasional siting of a kingfisher, and once one perches on a branch I consider the effort is well worthwhile.



The West End village outskirts - winter

From the church I work my way across the two fields, parallel with the stream, crossing a couple of stiles, to meet up at Heron's Mead with the West End road. Turning right and walking down the road past Quietways, I take in the trees and livestock in Reverend Celia's Avening Park as I go. I might just check on the state of the tennis court as I pass by: when I first arrived in the village, I cheekily asked her how often I would need to go to church to qualify for use of her court, the only one in the village, and somehow I found myself in charge of the tennis club! It's not the best tennis court in the world, but there are few with sights and sounds to match it, so it's always a delight to play up there.



Avening Park in the spring

My walk then takes me further along the road, past Orchard House on my left and Vale farm on my right, until after about another 400 yards there's a sign for a public footpath leading up the hill to my right. A steep brambly climb brings me to a stile which leads into a field that offers views firstly of the gently

rolling hills edging Avening's West End, and then a vista encompassing Minchinhampton, its impressive church an obvious landmark.



Avening's West End in early spring



Minchinhampton – late summer

Heading right in the direction of Avening I cross a stile at the edge of the field and follow the footpath gently dropping downhill. From here there are excellent views of Princess Anne's fine residence at Gatcombe Park, and the vibrant colours of the woods surrounding her property are to be marvelled at; how fortunate we are that she permits us to use the footpath through her estate, it makes for another attractive walk, leading to Minchinhampton. And how reassuring it is that she is Avening's next door neighbour: with her concern for the environment there is little chance of a housing estate or supermarket springing and despoiling the area.

As I descend further down the footpath, one of the most attractive views of Avening comes into focus, a vista of Cotswold stone properties nestling in the valley.



Avening in early spring

The footpath brings me out by the water pump in Woodstock lane, a reminder of bygone days. Life must have been hard for the villagers then – imagine having to collect your water by hand every day. Of course, water was the lifeblood of the village in those days, with the emphasis on the weaving industry, and in these parts the streams used to run red from the dye used in producing military uniforms.



The water pump in Woodstock lane

Continuing downhill, I pass the Social Club where the ladies of the Women's Institute have repeatedly shown me up at skittles during their Open evenings and I reach the main road. I cross over and head up Rectory lane, past children playing football on the Sunground, a very beneficial amenity for Avening's youngsters. Heaven knows what they would get up to if they didn't have the advantage of these playing fields.



Rectory lane in winter

I turn right and head down to the main road at the end of the lane, always amused by the sign, about 50 years old, which threatens us with a £50 if we wash our sanitary utensils in the stream.



In order to take in the wildlife on the lake adjacent to Avening Lodge, I cross over the main road and get a view from the gate over the top of the stream.



The lake at Avening Lodge in late autumn

I then work my way along Mays lane, admiring the attractive Fern and Field cottages as I pass by, and head up to the beautifully tended gardens of Highwayman's cottage. I can't see all that I would like – I shall have to wait for Reverend Celia to organise another Open Gardens to gain access to Avening Court for that – but even though I'm coming to the end of my walk, the view justifies the extra effort before backtracking up the hill, and taking the left fork up a track to link up with Star lane.



The gardens of Highwayman's cottage in late summer

After passing the World War II pillbox (a curious position if it was there to preserve the village from invasion) I arrive at some of the most majestic views that the village possesses, particularly in the autumn. The view of the trees are truly magnificent here and I recall a fascinating evening spent viewing them with specialist comment from Tony Russell; apparently 'hanging' Judge Jeffreys used to preside on occasion at Avening Court, where a mulberry tree was regularly put to use for his macabre purpose. And the tree is still there.



The view from Star lane in autumn

Star lane takes me to the Cross Inn, and from there it is a short walk down the High Street to return to our other public house.

That's my favourite walk then, a figure of eight revealing all that Avening has to offer. With time to take in the various views I have mentioned, it should take about an hour and a half to complete it, and if you wanted to visit the Bell Inn prior to the walk, and finish in the Cross Inn for some well deserved refreshment afterwards, you'll definitely have experienced all that Avening has to offer.

(Ends)