

Walking to work

Steve Davison is a freelance writer and photographer, living in Reading, who has just published a book of walks in the beautiful Thames Valley

Describe your favourite way to spend a day off

A crisp, clear, autumn day exploring the region, whether it's meandering along the Thames Path or wandering over the rippling Downs. The sun, low down near the horizon, casting long shadows, enhancing otherwise unseen detail in the landscape.

What, outside your work, do you feel most passionately about?

The countryside around us and the wildlife that inhabits it – to enjoy both is a great pleasure and we still have so much to learn from nature.

What sort of music do you like to listen to?

It may sound whimsical, but nature is hard to beat – from the dawn chorus to the wind whispering through the trees or rustling across fields of ripening wheat, to the haunting calls of a buzzard soaring high above.

Can you recommend a restaurant near you?

Living in Reading offers a reasonable selection of restaurants – the choice would be between the London Street Brasserie or Forbury's Wine Bar.

And a pub?

Again, it's a choice between the Crooked Billet at Stoke Row, for some great food and The Bell Inn at Aldworth, with a range of cask ales, many from local breweries. Plus, after visiting the latter, you can pop along the lane to St Mary's Church to see the Aldworth Giants – nine larger than life effigies of the De La Beche family dating from the 14th



century. Or head for Thurle Down for a great view across to the Chilterns.

Can you recommend any walks near you?

Where to start is the problem, for a great selection of walks in the area look no further than the new guide book: *Walking in the Thames Valley*, published by Cicerone. To choose a favourite is difficult – but a day wandering through the Chilterns with their characteristic beech woods, either bathed in the golden hues of autumn or the fresh vivid greens of spring, is hard to beat. Head for Christmas Common to the north of Henley-on-Thames and meander down to St Bartholomew's Church in Fingest, with its rare twin-gabbled tower, then

Above: Glorious beeches and Whistler's wonderful window in Hannington.

across to Turville – setting for BBC comedy *The Vicar of Dibley*, with a windmill seen in the classic film: *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, then off to Stonor Park, home to the Stonor family for over 800 years before arriving back at Christmas Common.

What's the area's best kept secret when it comes to attractions?

The engraved glass window in St James the Greater Church, Eastbury, by Sir Laurence Whistler. The window commemorates the life of the poet Edward Thomas, who was killed in action in World War I. The more you look at the window the more you can see. You can see more of Whistler's windows in All Saints Church, Hannington.

Walking in the Thames Valley is published by Cicerone, price £12.