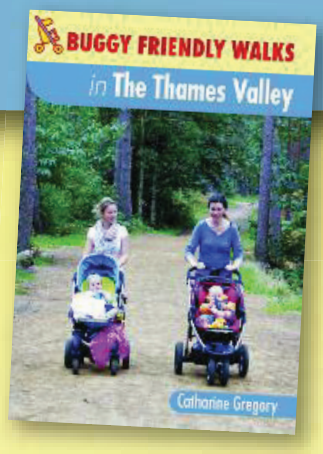

BUGGY FRIENDLY WALKS
in The Thames Valley
by Catharine Gregory

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5. Cookham

In the footsteps of Ratty and Mole

Home of Kenneth Grahame and therefore also the birthplace of all the *Wind in the Willows* characters, Cookham is a wonderful place to explore with small children. On this walk, you will head out to the well-heeled Cookham Dean, uphill past allotments to get some fabulous views, through a golf course and then either across the moor or down a bridleway back to the village shops

DISTANCE: 3¾ miles; short option: 2¾ miles.

TIME: 1¾ hours; short option: 1¼ hours.

TERRAIN: Lanes and footpaths. The long route goes across Cookham Moor and is suitable for summer only. The short route avoids the moor but does go across the golf course, so should be fine whenever the weather is suitable for golf.

START/PARKING: The free public car park next to Cookham station, by the shops, SL6 9BT. Alternative parking is available at Cookham Moor on the long route (see end of point 5). Head along the A4094 towards Cookham. When you reach Cookham village, turn off westwards along the High Street and through the village, then past Cookham Moor and into Cookham Rise, where you will find the car park on the left just before the station. OS map: Explorer 172 Chiltern Hills East; GR SU887850.

REFRESHMENTS: Station Hill Café at the start of the walk has highchairs and baby-changing facilities. Tel. 01628 522202. As well as the café, Cookham has numerous pubs, including the White Oak and the Old Swan Uppers towards the end of the walk.

SUGGESTED PICNIC SPOT: Cookham Moor.

Thatched Cromwell Cottage in Cookham Dean

THE WALK:

1. From the station, turn left along the road, go over the level crossing and continue past the post office, medical centre and Catholic church. Cross over Bradcutts Lane on your right and continue in this direction with fields on your right, eventually reaching the larger, more interesting houses of Cookham Dean.

Kenneth Grahame, beloved author of *The Wind in the Willows*, spent his childhood at The Mount (now Herries School) in Cookham Dean, so it seems a fair assumption that the characters and settings in the book were inspired by local people and places. Toad of Toad Hall is said to have been based on Colonel Ricardo, who drove a yellow Rolls Royce, the first car in the village.

2. At a small junction with a couple of half-timbered cottages and a bench, turn sharp right along Alleyns Lane. Head uphill, soon passing allotments on your left. At the top, turn left along Bradcutts Lane. At a give-way sign, bear right and then right again along Terrys Lane. Look out for a footpath on your left, just before September Grange.

3. Turn left along this path, immediately going through a gap in the barbed wire fence to walk along the easy grassy path to the left of the fence. At a waymark post, go through a gap in the wooden fence, following the Chiltern Way across the golf course. In good weather, you will have fabulous views here. Head gently downhill, following red footpath signs across the golf course. Eventually cross a bridge over the railway line.

4. **For the short route:** Turn right after the bridge, on the grassy path that takes you along the edge of the golf course, with views of Cookham Moor to your left. Eventually go through a gap in the fence and continue across a small car park to reach a lane where you turn left and then immediately turn right onto a gravel drive (Poundfield Lane). This takes you past some large houses and then downhill, passing a metal gate. Continue along a gravel footpath, which leads to a road where you turn right and skip to point 6.

For the longer route: Turn left after the bridge, along a gravelly path downhill, which soon flattens out into an easier grassy path. When you are near the corner of the golf course, skirt round the tee to reach a gravel path ahead (thereby avoiding steps at the end of the footpath). Turn left along the gravel path, go through a wooden gate and immediately turn right through a wooden kissing-gate (lift the metal bar to fold back the gate for your buggy to fit through).

5. Cross a brook and a concrete square and bear right along a path roughly following the line of telegraph poles. This well-worn grassy path eventually leads to the Moor car park. Go through the car park and cross the road. Head up the slope to turn right over the bridge and continue in this direction (heading towards the station).

The bridge you have just walked over is the Fleet Bridge, which was built in 1929 and was the subject of a Stanley Spencer painting in 1937. Stanley Spencer painted lots of Cookham scenes, many of which can be seen in the Stanley Spencer Gallery in Cookham High Street.

6.When you reach the White Oak pub, cross at the zebra crossing and continue along the right-hand pavement, which is narrow in places but just wide enough for a buggy. Pass the Old Swan Uppers pub and then Poundfield Lane (short route rejoins here). Continue in this direction to return to the station and your car.

Swan Upping is a medieval ceremony that takes place during the third week of July. The Queen's Swan marker and his team of Uppers head along the Thames from Sunbury to Abingdon, marking all the cygnets and taking a census of the swan population.

Cookham village

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