



In this edition John Bown writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC

During the past few weeks I have been fortunate to experience two most memorable events. The first was a flight at 6.00am in a hot-air balloon over the beautiful Kent countryside, courtesy of our children who thought (and rightly), that it would make a good Ruby Wedding Anniversary present for Merle and myself. The anniversary we celebrated last September but we saved the present 'til now.

The other memorable event occurred just 3 weeks prior to the balloon flight. It was the 'Pilgrims' Challenge' a sponsored walk from Rochester to Canterbury in aid of Christian Aid. This was both a challenge and an exciting experience as we walked the way of the medieval pilgrims, uphill and down dale through some of the most beautiful Kent countryside.

Twenty of us met late on a Friday afternoon at the Medway campus of the University of Greenwich. There we enjoyed a welcoming reception, a briefing by our Guide, socialising in the campus bar, and a good nights sleep. After breakfast the next morning we set out first to visit Rochester Cathedral and Castle, after which we walked up the Medway Valley to Kit's Coty, a prehistoric megalith. From there we walked through the remains of the old Wealdon Forest to the top of the North Downs ridge following both the North Downs Way and the Pilgrims' Way until we reached the ruins of Thurnham Castle. Near by the coach was waiting to take us back to Rochester for a welcome shower, dinner and another good night's sleep.

The next day the walk continued from the beautiful grounds of Leeds Castle from where we set out on the longest section of the challenge to Boughton Lees village green where the North Downs Way converges with the old Pilgrims' Way as it hugs the chalk ridge of the North Downs. This time

the coach that met us took us on to Kent University, Canterbury, where again we were well refreshed with showers, food and a comfortable bed.

The next morning we set out from Boughton Lees up the Stour valley, passing through Kings Wood and the grounds of Godmersham Park, where Jane Austin frequently stayed. The final stretch to Canterbury followed the North Downs Way, and ascended to the ancient iron-age hill fort of Bigbury, where Caesar fought the Belgae in 54 BC. We then passed through Hambledon, referred to in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales,' and on to the University.

This evening we had a special celebration dinner and a special guest to grace it – the Director of Christian Aid, Dr Daleep Mukarji. That day Dr. Muarji had been in Edinburgh briefing the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Make Poverty History campaign prior to the G8 Summit. He then flew down especially to be with us and to speak with us about the campaign.

The next morning we walked down to Canterbury Cathedral, had a guided tour of the Cathedral followed by a special Service of 'Welcome to Pilgrims' in the Jesus Chapel. After walking back to the University campus the coach took us back to Rochester where we said our farewells and continued our separate journey's home.

The whole event – the wonderful walk, wonderful countryside, wonderful people, and pretty good weather, made for a wonderful and memorable experience. Not only that, but the wonderful response by my sponsors, which raised £1238 plus approx. £100 through Gift Aid, really was the icing on the cake. Many thanks to each and every one of you.

The Lord be with you.

John Bown
Minister at Bromley Methodist