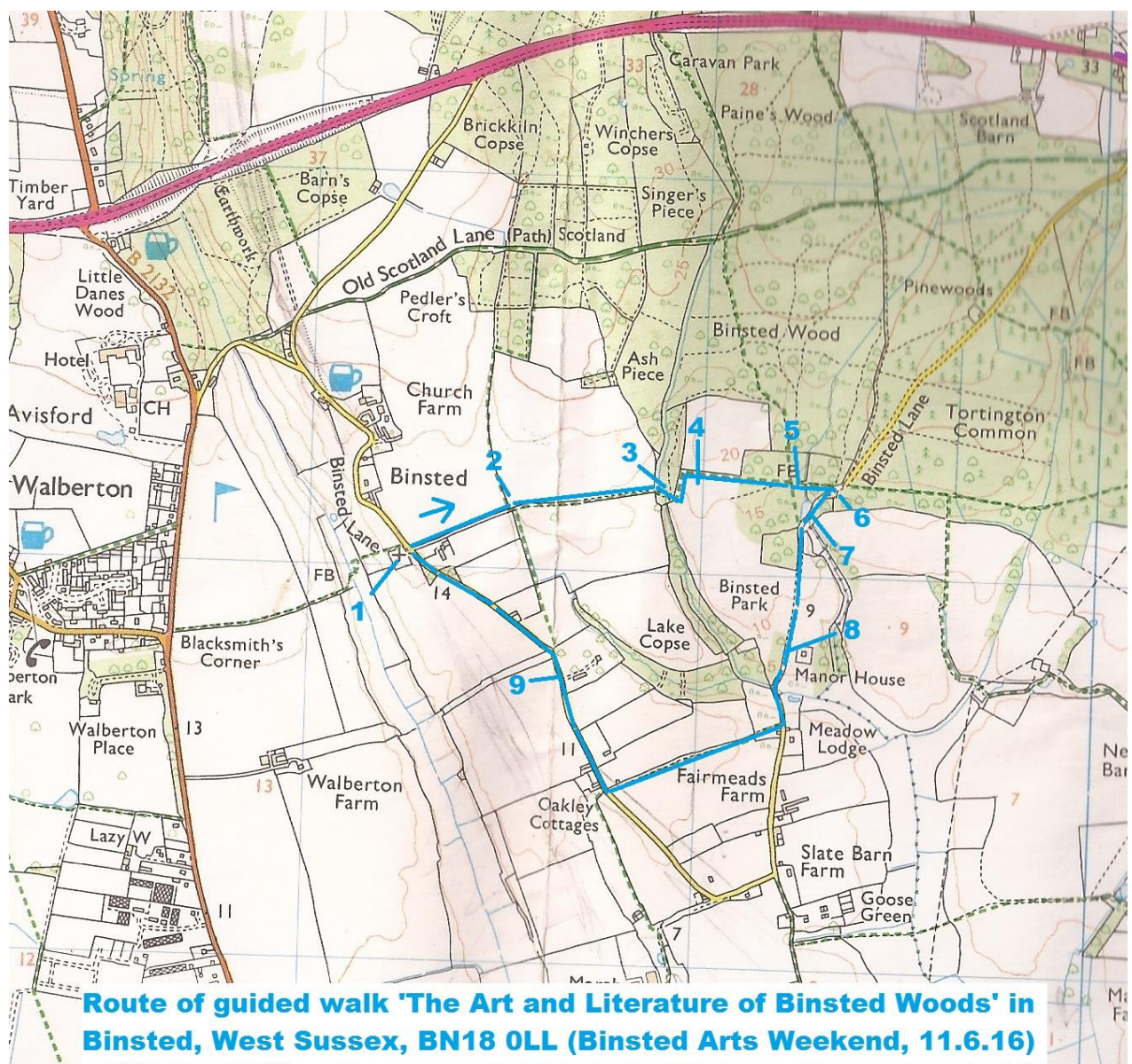


# Walk in Binsted and Binsted Woods titled 'The Art and Literature of Binsted Woods', part of the Binsted Arts Weekend, June 10-12 2016

Emma Tristram

*On the walk itself, small illustrated booklets were distributed to the 40 walkers while Mike and Emma Tristram performed the texts at the indicated stopping places.*

## The route of the walk



## 1. Stop 1: Gather by the church.

TEXT:

First part of reading from 'High Diver' by Michael Wishart, 1978. He lived from 1928 to 1996.

The time is, perhaps, 1945. 'As far back as I can remember, certainly before I could speak, I loved to draw and paint, in all their seasonal change, our fields, our parks, our hedges; brooks; barns; trees; and our skies. Of all places to spend these enchanted hours, I preferred our graveyard. It was hardly larger than a more temporary dormitory. I would seat myself against its southern wall, warm in the sunshine, where the corpses of old labourers some of whom I had known and loved, threw up an abundance of violets of both varieties, scattered rugs of purple and white.

The German [a young German airman who had survived baling out of his plane] found me here one afternoon and sat beside me, watching me paint. Our privacy, his boredom and loneliness, broke down all vestiges of hostility. I knew that he would follow wherever I led. From the church, and off the main lane which is all our village offers, there runs a muddy path, through fields, across a bridge in a small, sunken copse, into what was then parkland: a grand, broad, upward slope of green, dotted with ancient trees.

**Binsted Park epitomised the vanishing England of my youth.'**

We will follow the path Michael describes towards Binsted Park. Before we go I'll introduce a couple of our artists.

First Michael Wishart himself.

**Picture 1** is a painting by Michael Wishart.



I'm still adding to my archive of his paintings – this is one called 'Moths on a Blue Path' which recalls to me the excitement of seeing Purple Emperor butterflies in Binsted Woods last summer.

**Picture 2** is one I recently discovered of sun seen through birches.



**On the way to our next stop we will pass the subjects of some drawings by W.S.Rogers.**



**Picture 3** is a drawing by W.S.Rogers of part of the wall of the Old Rectory – now the side wall of Stable Cottage. He was an amateur artist whose identity is uncertain, but there are over 120 drawings by him in the Record Office. The archivist there suggests he was William Smith Rogers, who lived in Arundel, a solicitor's clerk, probably born in 1883 and died in 1953. He seems to have gone out drawing in the evenings and would sometimes make his drawings very small, postcard size, and offer them for sale for 1/6 – he would draw you a copy. He particularly loved drawing Binsted.

**Picture 4** is Rogers's drawing of the Old Rectory seen from the back.



**Pictures 5 and 6** are two of his few drawings with figures in them – he usually drew woods and trees. One shows a scene of ploughing at Binsted, seen through a gap in a hedge. It could be these fields with Binsted Woods in the background. Another is of making a hayrick.





We'll pass the subjects of these first few pictures by Rogers as we set out along Muddy Lane towards the woods.

### **Stop 2: by bench at east end Muddy Lane.**

At this point I have to diverge from my subject and point out that the Binsted option for the Arundel bypass is at present among the routes being studied by Highways England. It crosses our path here with an overbridge to carry this track to the woods. We would be on that overbridge now.

There are other options being studied – the old 'Preferred Route' across Tortington Common, nearer to Arundel, and a mostly-online route.

The National Park boundary is the hedge going north and south from here. The new Binsted route is trying to avoid the National Park and its woodland. As a result it goes through Tortington village, enters Binsted to the south

where most of its 38 houses are, comes north to here, very close to houses, passes between the church and woods, and enters the National Park at Scotland Lane, just north of here, connecting to a large roundabout beside the junction of Binsted Lane and the A27.

Highways England have issued no maps of the routes they are studying, but they have issued 'schematic' maps. These make it clear that the Binsted route is the one from a report of 2006, recently discovered by a Freedom of Information request.

An alternative 'north end' to it is also being studied, according to the March 2015 reports of the A27 Feasibility Study. This would cross the Binsted valley either north or south of the church and end in a flyover junction where Yapton Lane meets the A27. For more info see [www.arundelbypass.co.uk](http://www.arundelbypass.co.uk).

### **Stop 3: in dip of Spinningwheel Copse.**

We are now about to enter Binsted Park. Here we have the second part of the reading from Michael Wishart's memoir.

TEXT:

'Hares sliced bluish traces through the green-gold grass. I led my prisoner past the white shell of a manor whose ghostly façade appeared to tremble in the breeze, past a black pool with green waterlilies, far into our dense woodland. In a clearing stood a wooden hut where, long ago, lunch had been brought to my grandfather's shooting parties. Long abandoned, no-one came here now, but I loved its desolation, and the little fruit trees which struggled to blossom amid the undergrowth.'

For weeks the German had indicated, with a certain gaze, our only language until now, that he would comply, and now it came about. It was a thrilling, bewildering, frightening, rather beautiful experience. ...That German boy was barely older than myself. It had been his mission to destroy me, but we made a private truce without waiting for the general armistice to be declared, for which I feel towards him nothing but gratitude.'

**Stop 4: UP the slope into Binsted Park and stop again by the huge tree.**

Binsted Park was created in about 1800 as the pseudo-mediaeval parkland of Binsted House. The owners, the Read family, removed some woodland and a track, keeping big trees, and created the curving 'parkland'. Most of the big trees have gone, but one huge oak remains. They built a ha-ha and made ponds, and created a path called 'lover's walk'. Binsted House became derelict in the 1940s.

**Picture 7 shows how the house looked when painted by Ralph Ellis, in 1946.**





The house has been rebuilt as a large modern house but the parkland is still there, and still has its mediaeval atmosphere.

Before leaving Binsted Park we will see some of W.S.Rogers's many drawings of it. He came back here again and again.

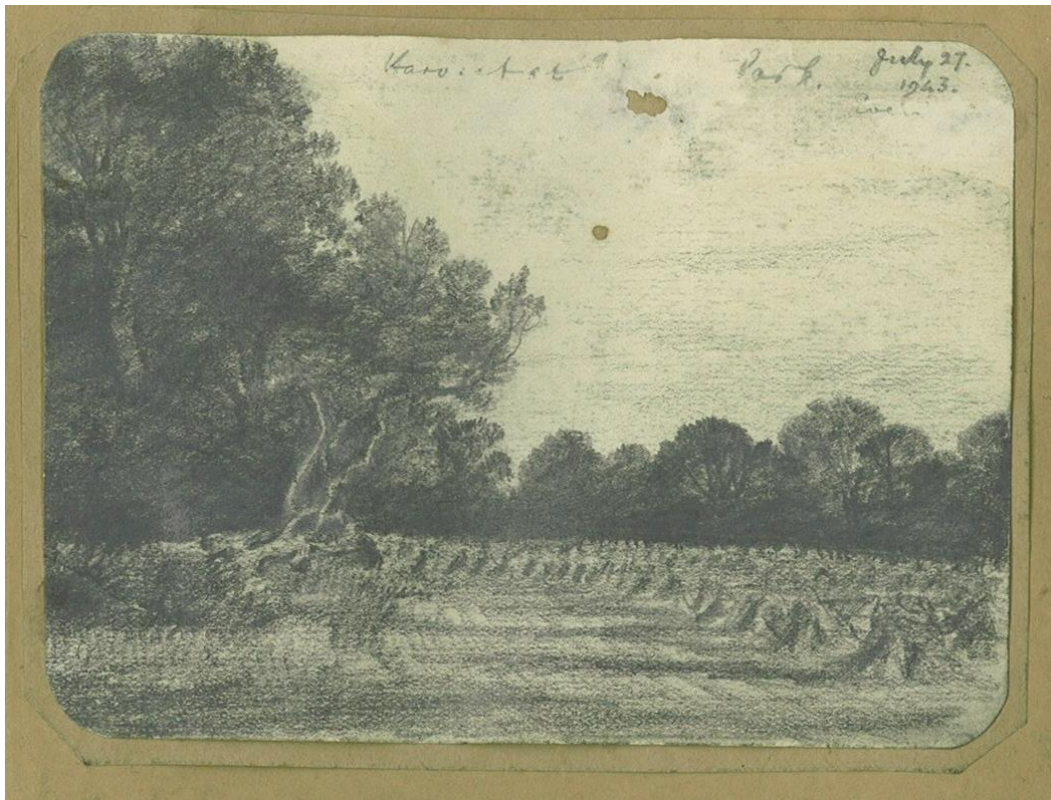


**Picture 8: the big oak at Spinningwheel Copse, where we are standing.**



**Picture 9: Sunset in Binsted Park, looking west from a little further south.**

**Picture 10: Corn stooks in Binsted Park, 1943 – part of the war effort.**



**Picture 11:** This is the right place to look at Michael Wishart's 'Field and Trees', which reminds me of the field behind us – known as Broad Green.



It is a field entirely enclosed in woodland and probably a mediaeval 'assart' taken out of the woodland when it was part of Arundel Forest. The whole of Binsted was in Arundel Forest. (That doesn't mean the whole of Binsted was covered in trees – but that the whole of Binsted came under the forest laws.)

**Picture 12: Before entering Binsted Woods let's look at Lorna Wishart's beautiful picture.**



Lorna Wishart was Michael's mother, more famous for her relationships with the poet Laurie Lee and the painter Lucien Freud than for her own art – but this picture encapsulates this whole area – it IS Binsted. It shows

- Arundel Castle as a sort of fairy-tale castle;
- Trees on Tortington Common between Arundel and Binsted;
- Lorna herself on her horse;
- The gnarled old trees of Binsted Woods;
- A pool, perhaps the Madonna pond, with a religious vision of a deer with a crucifix between its horns.

As well as her son Michael, Lorna had another child who was an artist: Yasmin David, her daughter with Laurie Lee, who lived in Devon for 50 years and painted magical, mystical landscapes. Michael, too, had a child who was an artist – his son Francis Wishart, who paints monoprints of trees. They all seem to have Binsted Woods in their bones.

**Picture 13: untitled painting by Yasmin David.**



**Picture 14: 'Leaves' by Francis Wishart, 2010.**



**Picture 15: 'Reflections' by Francis Wishart, 2011.**



## **Stop 5: in Binsted Woods at the footpath crossroads**

Next a bit of newly created literature – the winning poem in the Binsted Arts poetry competition 2016. The author, Rose Bray, asked if it could be read ‘in a clearing’.

TEXT

‘If her father had not fancied mushrooms for breakfast  
she would not have gone into the woods at Binsted  
to forage for the pink gilled treats  
between the fallen trees.

If the early sun had not been shining  
on the clearing where she knelt,  
the archer may not have seen  
her simple grace  
and sought her hand in marriage  
and she would not have borne his son.

If he had not been middle aged  
he may not have been so patient with the child,  
making a small bow for his play

as soon as he could walk,  
bending, shaping each yew branch  
as he outgrew the other.

If the boy had not grown so tall  
and become a master bowman,  
he would not have been a chosen one  
to serve on Henry's flagship.

His mother would not have stood on Portsmouth's Hard  
waving off her firstborn son  
as the Mary Rose sailed on the morning tide.

She could not have guessed,  
amongst the nit combs, the wooden bowls  
beside his scattered arrows,  
her son would lie  
five hundred years  
rocked gently on his bed of sand.'

**On through the woods along path to Binsted Lane East.**

## **Stop 6: north of the Madonna Pond, where 'Duke's gate' comes out onto Binsted Lane East.**

Now back to wartime. The poet Laurie Lee wrote this entry in his diary about Sunday 18 August 1940. He was very much in love with Lorna and his affair with her had started before the war. She lived with him for a time in London, but went back to her husband in Binsted, while carrying on the affair. He sometimes came there to see her although she more often visited him, in the caravan near Storrington where he was living. This diary entry seems to have been written a time when he was staying with her at Glebe Cottage in Binsted, then rented by one of his friends and patrons, Wilma Gregory.

### **TEXT**

'Sunday Aug 19 [for 18, 1940]

In the middle of the white moonlit night I heard a distant air alarm, but I lay in bed not caring. The mooing of heifers in Wilma's garden awoke me in the morning. It was a golden morning, a balloon miles high, like a little white ball drifted to sea. [A barrage balloon.] L[orna] came down in her scarlet frock. The sky was a continual drone of planes. We all walked back up the lane towards Arundel. As we did so the all clear sounded. Wilma left us to return to her cottage and we lay in the wood happy but distant. The drone of planes was continuous. About one o'clock it grew louder, more threatening, like a swarm drawing near.

Suddenly the warning went again and almost immediately the ground shook beneath our bodies and the dull thump of bombs sounded in the distance. We walked out of the wood and presently we saw English fighters flying back to their aerodrome in threes and singly.

'The raid is over' said L[orna]. Soon the sky settled and the 'all clear' sounded. We walked slowly down the road and entered a different part of the wood. It was hot and green and dusty. Under the leaves with a bottle of beer we lay and forgot everything but the smell of the trees....



The sky was buzzing with anger again but we actually succeeded in ignoring it, we were as detached, as otherwise intent as insects there among the broken sticks, the trailing thorn. Time passed, the roaring in the sky never eased, it was like a blanket which we accepted and forgot.

But presently, in spite of our detachment, we became aware of its sharper fury, centred above us like a ball of tempest. It was as if all the strands of conflict were drawn together in a tight vicious knot above our heads. And we lay together looking into one another's eyes acting our own war and peace, while our bodies listened uneasily. As we kissed there was a burst of machine gun fire, loud, in the sky. It rattled across the hills like an oath.

With our faces together we waited for the next, our lips were warm against each other, the machine gun cracked again and with our lips still touching we stared into the sky in each other's pupils, incredulous but without any surprise. Then all around the ground shook, the dry leaves crackled with repeated bombs, machine guns bred and multiplied, planes tore their harsh parabolas across the sky and the siren split them all with its tragic wail. The sky was full, cut, slashed, and shattered with noise. The ground heaved with the throb of bombs.

We were still kissing. 'I must see this' I said so we crept through the undergrowth and I ran from tree to tree to the edge of the wood. I lay in a ditch and watched. The sky heaved and boiled. I saw planes whirling round each other like little wooden crosses tossed up by a juggler. The noise was indescribable. I lay there for some moments my heart throbbing. Then I ran back to L[orna] crouching under a tree.

We remained there waiting, helpless and fascinated. The bombs continued to fall with horrible deliberation, so irrevocable. Everything seemed to be directly above us, everything seemed to be aimed at us, we heard the vicious tearing whines of crashing planes coming down straight to us. We were uncovered, our backs tingled as we lay.

Presently the sound of battle shifted. We walked down to the road again and looked once more down into the sky. Little white planes were darting about through vast black clouds, dense clouds of smoke that were towering into the

air and drifted across the Downs obscuring everything. The aerodrome was blazing. 'O Lord, Lord, what have they done to you?' cried L[orna].

We sat by the roadside and the battle receded into the distance. The heavy smoke remained covering half the sky, silent and terrible. We found we were sitting by the gate of the cottage hospital, and very soon the ambulances began to arrive. We walked down into the town as the 'all clear' sounded. Flames shot into the air from the burning drome. We had tea, whilst boys on bicycles hurried past to view the damage.

Later we returned to the wood and L[orna], drinking beer from an uncorked bottle swallowed a wasp. This filled us with considerably more dread than the bombardment. She had to go and be sick, then we felt better.'

This day led to one of his poems which seems particularly applicable to Binsted.

Song in August (1940)

by Laurie Lee

'Pondering your scented skull

I seek its antique song of peace:

Desires uncovered by your tide

Are trembling reeds with sea-blue voices.

I wind my hands around your head

And blow the hollow flutes of love,

But anger sprouts among the leaves

And fields grow sharp with war.

Wheat bleeds upon a wind of steel

And ivy splits the poisoned sky,

While wasps that cannot fertilise  
Dive at the open flowers of men.

Your lips are turreted with guns,  
And bullets crack across your kiss,  
And death slides down upon a string  
To rape the heart of our horizon.'

Laurie Lee was also an artist – and some of his paintings seem inspired by the beauty of Lorna Wishart.



**Picture 16, 'Nude with green hair'**, may be connected with Lorna. It includes an animal with horns slightly reminiscent of the vision of the deer in Lorna's painting.

### **Stop 7: at the Madonna Pond.**

There are so many stories about the Madonna Pond – mainly about it being haunted. According to her son Luke the Madonna was put here by Lorna shortly after the war in memory of her mother – though other stories say she put it there to be a good influence because the pond was haunted.

First another poem from the Binsted Arts poetry competition. This is light-hearted, and seen from a child's point of view. I like the way it defines Binsted as distinct from Walberton, and sees the Madonna as a guide to Binsted Woods.

TEXT: Binsted Woods by Tina Cockett

'Let's go home the woods' way

Would be the cry

As my mother turned the wheel

From Arundel.

Past the wild wind flowers and hazel groves

Deeper into the darkening wood,

Where the Madonna winked

And frog spawn lurked in the pond.

Past cottage, church and pub

Standing like illustrations from a story book

In my post-war childhood.

Let's go home the woods' way

Was a bumpy road.

Full of anticipation and laughter,

A world exciting and inviting

Not for villagers prim and proper

Of Walberton across Yapton Road.

Binsted, a little gem held in the past

With Queen Bess's old London track,

Tales of smugglers and artists.

And how I prayed to the Madonna

To step down and take my hand

Through Binsted Woods.'

Here we have an excerpt from that great memoir of angling, 'Blood Knots', by Luke Jennings. He lived at Avisford and as a boy spent a lot of time trying to catch fish in Binsted's ponds. He started in what he called the 'Weed pond' up near the A27. But when he was working as a teenager for Ernest Wishart, Lorna's husband, helping on the farm, he asked him if he could try fishing at the Madonna pond. He suspected there were fish there. 'I had seen the signs...The fading to invisibility of a water-lily stem as a dark flank passed in front of it. Displacements of water so subtle you wondered whether you'd imagined them.' Ernest gave his permission.

'I cycled up there on the last morning of the summer holidays...Near to the pond was an old flint-walled manor house that had burnt down before the war. Now it was almost invisible, submerged in dark-green ivy. The only possible fishing place was directly beneath the statue. In front of me, a corridor of black water, perhaps two feet across, led between the lily pads and fallen branches. Putting up the Milbro rod, I squeezed bread paste round a no. 8 hook, unspooled a dozen yards of line from my centre-pin reel and cast out into the channel in front of me. Slowly, the bait sank through the water halfway across the pond and came to rest. I could just see it, a pale spot against the mud and dead leaves.'

He waits, haunted by midges, unmoving, his midge bites burning. '....And then, after perhaps three hours, something moved on the far side of the pond. A lily pad, with the faintest of tremors, as if something had glided past its stalk. Stillness again, leaving me wondering whether I had imagined it. Five minutes later, another leaf shivered, this time closer, and I tightened my grip on the cork of the rod handle, praying that my line wasn't transmitting the thud of my heartbeat. Nothing for ten minutes. Fifteen. And then, like the slow

emergence of a memory, a blue-grey shadow materialized in the black corridor of water.

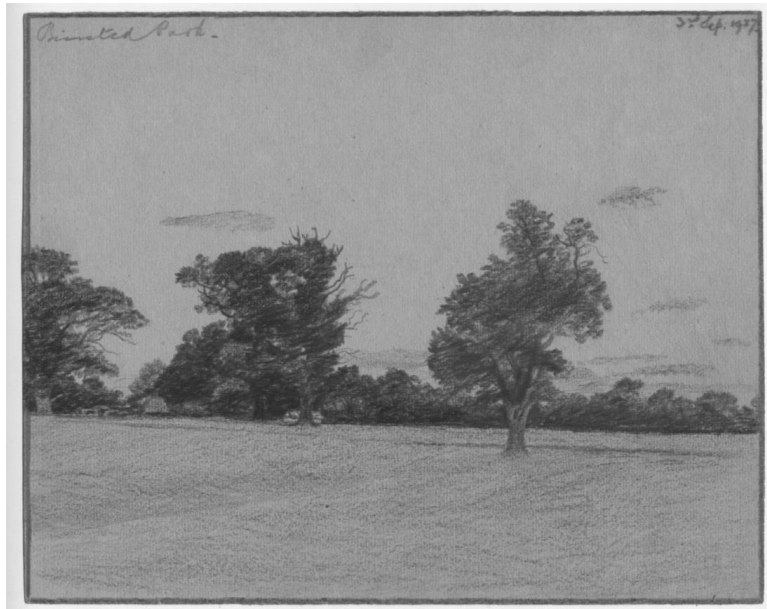
‘A carp, broad-backed and deep-shouldered, perhaps eight or nine pounds in weight. In the shadowy light its flanks had the purplish bloom of Muscat grapes. Inch by inch it drift, infinitely wary. I could see the cautious working of the gills, the glimmer of the scales, the liquid ripple of the dorsal fin. Forcing myself to breathe, I allowed my free hand to creep towards the reel, and still the great fish came on. Inches from bait, it stopped, pectorals fanning suspiciously. It tilted downwards, the blue-back tail waving beneath the surface, and blew at the pellet of bread so that it danced for a moment on the mud. Then, almost casually, it sucked it in.’

In a long, beautiful description, the carp rolls, turns and zigzags, while Luke prays to the sad-eyed Madonna ‘just let me land it’. But the line breaks. ‘For one last moment the rod-tip plunged forwards after the carp, then the fibreglass sprung straight and the hook whistled past my ear. I stared after the fish, aghast, as it bored into the lily stems and vanished. My legs were shaking so violently that I had to lean back against the tree. My hands, I noticed vaguely, were shaking too, with long white line-burns on the thumbs and index fingers. I stayed there for several minutes, limp and sick with disappointment. ...Four decades later I can remember every detail of that fish, and no catch will ever make up for the loss of it. But that’s the way with angling. For every fisherman there’s a ghost fish that, along with the memory of the knot that slipped, the line that snapped, or the hook-hold that gave, will haunt his dreams forever.’

**Stop 8. At the south end of Binsted Park in the lane.**



Here we look at **picture 17, W.S.Rogers' drawing of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century stable block of Binsted House – as it was before the house was demolished.**



**And Picture 18 – Rogers's drawing of the south end of the Park, with the old cottage and hovel where Kent's Cottage now is.**



**Pictures 19 and 20** are two of many old photographs of the Read family enjoying their Park, with the old Binsted House in the distance. The first is about 1870, the second about 1930. Bill Pethers, from whose collection the photos come, is a descendant not only of the Read family but also of the Lewis family who built the Old Rectory, and the Pethers family who kept the Black Horse Pub in the 1960s.



We'll go back via the southern part of Binsted. We've no time to see Marsh Farm, where Lorna and her husband Ernest Wishart lived, a grade 2 listed Elizabethan house.

**Picture 21** is another painting by Lorna Wishart of her horse at Marsh Farm.



**Stop 9. By Mill Ball in Binsted Lane.**

**My final picture (22)** is the sculpture of wolves carved in the woodland of Mill Ball, Binsted, a healing centre with a fruitful orchard and rare breeds of animal.

We can't see this from the lane but we can just see their totem pole in the garden, carved from a tree.

Both are by Paul Sivell.



Back to the church!