

Day 16 Biking to Brizzle

When I finally arrived at Cassington last night, after what seemed an eternity in the saddle, cousin Annie was out in front of her house talking to her neighbour. I was quickly ushered in and given a pint of Fursty Ferret to improve my humour. We are first cousins and know each other well so there was no standing on ceremony. I had a shower and changed, and my clothes went into the washing machine before an excellent supper of broccoli and blue cheese soup, cottage pie and veg and fruit and ice cream. We chatted whilst I did the blog and didn't get to bed until after 11. I had a decent sleep and Annie cooked me an excellent FEB with her winnings from the meat draw that is run in aid of the Sports and Social Club – particularly good sausages from the local butcher.

The morning was bright and sunny, but there was a chill in the air which had me in my wind jacket until after lunch. I set off at about ten past nine, heading for the A40, main road from Oxford to Cheltenham. I had to follow this for about 5 miles to Witney: there is a reasonable cycle path that keeps you away from the traffic but it was nice to turn off and enjoy a bit of peace and quiet before I cycled through the centre of town. On the way to the centre there is a shared pedestrian and cycle path that takes you across the water meadows. There were a lot of people walking in the sunshine and dropping children at school.

I crossed back over the A40 on the way to Brize Norton, its RAF base now the centre for repatriation of British military personnel since the closure of RAF Lyneham. Mercifully there have been few casualties in recent times.

The route was essentially flat with small fields surrounded by high hedges and the cycling was easy. I passed through Fairford, its large 15th century church



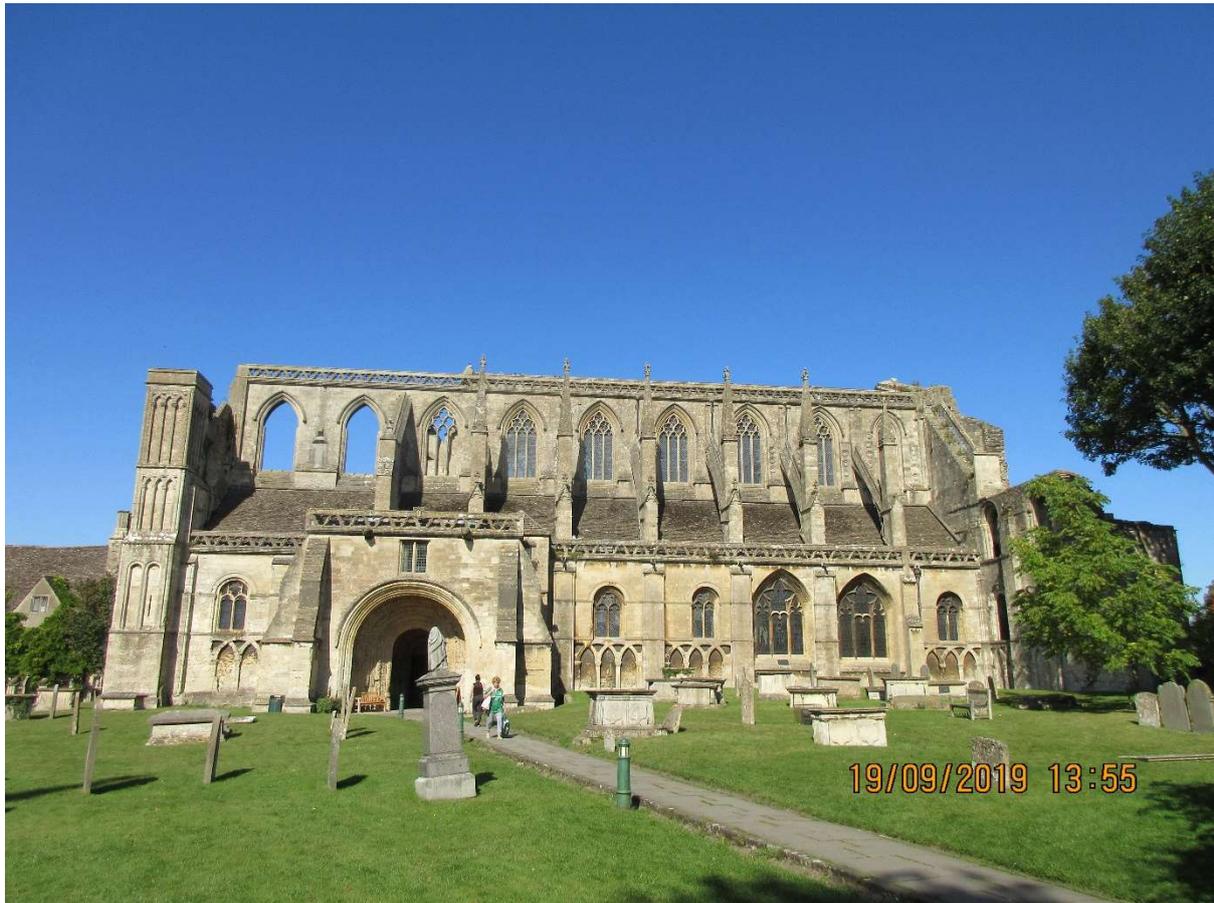
built on profits from the wool trade that was, for many years, the main money earner in the Cotswolds. The nearby RAF base was used by the USAF bombers in the Iraq war and prior to that in the early 1970s Brian Trubshaw flew Concorde 002 from there during its testing.

On through Down Ampney, widely known as the name for the music of the Hymn "Come down O love divine", composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams who was born in the village.

I was now entering the Cotswold Water Park an area with about 150 lakes formed after the extraction of gravel for the building industry. Gravel mining largely ceased in the 1970s and the lakes now form habitat for birds, plants and reptiles as well as some that are set aside for water sports: indeed when at college at Cirencester in the early 1970s we used one of them for rowing.

38 miles into the journey I joined the busy A429 close to Malmesbury where I stopped for lunch and a break at the Malmesbury Garden Centre. My route took me through the centre of the town where I stopped to take a picture of

the Abbey, much smaller following the collapse of the spire and tower in about 1500, but still an impressive structure.



Little change in topography but the roads started climbing imperceptibly. I joined the arrow straight Fosse way for three miles and shortly before

Grittleton was taken down a dirt track that soon deteriorated to grass



I kept one foot unclipped for the mile or so before I emerged at Littleton Drew where I crossed over the M4. The ground now started to go up until I was climbing 3-4% slopes for about 5 miles. It was enjoyable in the sunshine and I was feeling much better than of late. At Tormarton the Cotswold Way crosses the A46 which was nose to tail traffic in both directions. I had to wait for a good five minutes by the Crown pub until a motorist took pity on me and allowed me to scuttle across.

The general trend was now downhill with a few sharp rises around Pucklechurch, shortly after which I joined the Bath to Bristol railway path which is one of the jewels in the crown of Sustrans used by millions of people for cycling and walking. This kept me off public roads until I was close to the centre when I joined cycle paths all the way to my son Tom's house close to Victotia Park. I was staggered by the number of cyclists using the railway path: admittedly it was towards the end of the working day but I have never

