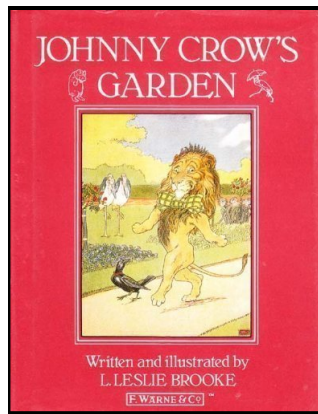


a path to the left of a thatched cottage at the far side of the field, Hurscote, another Clough Williams-Ellis house, is to your left. This was the home of Leonard Leslie Brooke, author of *Johnny Crow's Garden* (1903), *Ring O' Roses*, *The Golden Goose Book*, *Johnny Crow's Party* (1907), *Johnny Crow's New Garden* (1935), *The Nursery Rhyme Book*, and *Oranges and Lemons*, and illustrator of works by several other authors.



Passing to the left of the thatched cottage a tree-shaded lane leads past a white cottage (repaired, according to a date in the wall, in 1727) (7). Resist the temptation to turn left to explore the Physick Well, the field that grew a huge cowslip in 1674 (recorded in the diaries of Anthony à Wood (1666-1674)), and Bablockhythe (mentioned in Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gipsy* and in other works of literature) and bear right up Leys Road, passing Leys Farm on your right and later, on your left, a thatched cottage (originally run by a charity), a block of cottages from about 1860, the United Reformed Church, and the Village Hall (built in 1927 on the site of the 19th century Red Lion alehouse) (8). Sybil Brooke helped to establish the Women's Institute in Cumnor, and she and Leslie were involved in collecting money to build the village hall.

Turn right along High Street, passing Burnt House Farm (named after the next-door farm which burnt down in 1784) on the right, and College Farm (commemorating its ownership by St John's College Oxford) on the left (9). Crossing the end of Appleton Road by the mini-roundabout, houses on the right stand where old cottages (including one lived in by Leslie Brooke when he first moved to Cumnor) used to be. The War Memorial, with the converted tithe barn behind it, is on the site of the village pond.

We are back at the Old School. Just up the road on the left is a late Victorian brick-built house, where the original Vine public house stood at the corner of High Street and Gurney's (now Denman's) Lane. It was renamed The Black Bear after the publication of *Kenilworth* to catch tourist trade (some sources suggest it was renamed The Jolly Black Bear, others The Bear and Ragged Staff, but the inn in the novel was The Black Bear). A little further along the High Street is a butcher's shop mentioned in Veronica Stallwood's crime novel *Oxford Exit* (1994).

Somewhere along this route you will have passed the residence of Sir Philip Pullman, most famous for his trilogies *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) and *The Book of Dust* (2017-).

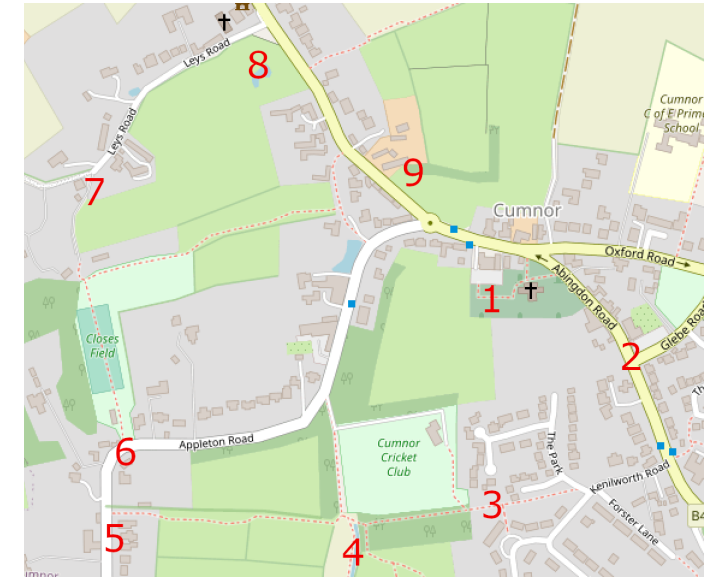
For some of the historical information in this leaflet the author is indebted to John Hanson's 2002 *Village History Trail*.

Tony Harker, May 2023.

Cumnor in Literature

A short walk round the centre of Cumnor, with references to places of interest in literature or in the Arts more generally.

Please respect the privacy of the occupants of any properties on the route.



The walk starts from the car park behind the Old School, **point 1** on the map. This 1860 building replaced a charity school on the same site. Phillotson in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1894) was the schoolmaster in Lumsdon, allegedly Cumnor. There is a description of the School Inspector in *Part Second AT CHRISTMINSTER Chapter V*:

Her Majesty's school-inspector was at that time paying "surprise-visits" in this neighbourhood to test the teaching unawares; and two days later, in the middle of the morning lessons, the latch of the door was softly lifted, and in walked my gentleman, the king of terrors – to pupil-teachers.

able assistance of Arthur Rubinstein, but his greatest passion was composition. His bequest of his skull to the Royal Shakespeare Company for use in productions of *Hamlet* led to an interesting story, which you should read about elsewhere.

The cricket field which you pass on your right has improved considerably since Leslie Brooke's time: his son Henry (Lord Brooke of Cumnor) wrote in *Leslie Brooke and Johnny Crow* (1982) that

Saturday afternoons in summer would find him joining the spectators at the cricket field...It was a pleasant though rough ground, and the ball was liable to be hit into a deterrent clump of nettles, if not into the muddy patch which originally had formed one of the fishponds. There was a small boy who used to earn sixpence for rescuing the ball from the fishpond; the talk was that he was always so grubby that it made little difference to him whether he had been into the mud or not.

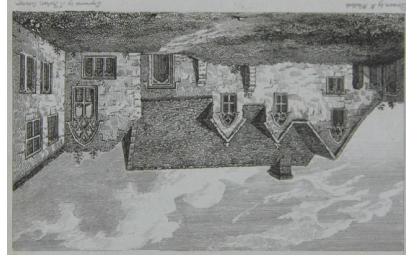
When the footpath emerges into open (frequently muddy) ground(4), keep straight on, following a path first with a cultivated field to your left, then a grassy ridge-and-turrow field, emerging on Appleton Road (5). On the opposite side of the road is Curtis End House, supposedly designed in 1911 by Clough Williams-Ellis for the Canadian author Lily Douglas and her companion, Sophie Earl (in the archives is one design for Miss Douglas and another for Miss Earp). Lily Douglas became the centre of a group that was dedicated to thought and conversation, similar in its views to that of her first essay, *Pro Christo et Ecclesia* (1900). Her novels typically featured strong, independent women.

Turn right along the pavement, and just around the right-hand bend cross (carefully) to the kissing gate (6) which leads to The Closes (in earlier times enclosures for grazing sheep, now home to Cumnor Minors football club). As you cross towards

The grave of the first head teacher of the "Old School", Samuel Turner, is under the yew tree near the church tower, and in the chancel of the church is the tomb of Anthony Forster who owned Cumnor Place until his death in 1572.

Take the path past the church (on your right) towards steps down to the road (or take the slope down from the porch with Church House, used before the Refectation for brewing Church Ales and later as an almshouse), cross the road carefully, and turn right up Abingdon Road. The former vicarage is on your left, the rather plain exterior of New Cumnor Place (a greatly extended 17th century farmstead) across the road on the right, and on the corner is a brick building which used to be the smithy belonging to the first landlord of the Vine public house (2).

Continue straight on, passing a thatched cottage on your left, before turning right to cross the road to Kenilworth Road, which leads to Robsart Place (further memories of the Village's main place in history). Rather than turning right into The Park or bearing left into Robsart Place, carry straight on down a footpath, passing close to The Park (3), where the composer André Tchaikowsky lived until his death on June 26 1982. Born Robert Andrzej Krauthammer in Warsaw on November 1 1935, he was smuggled out of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 with forged identity papers that renamed him Andrzej Czajkowski. He studied music in Brussels under the Polish pianist Stefan Askenase. He built a worldwide reputation as a pianist with the consider-



To Mr. Phillotson the surprise was not great; like the lady in the story, he had been played that trick too many times to be unprepared. But Sue's class was at the further end of the room, and her back was towards the entrance; the inspector therefore came and stood behind her and watched her teaching some half-minute before she became aware of his presence. She turned, and realized that an dreaded moment had come. The effect upon her timidity was such that she uttered a cry of fright. Phillotson, with a strange instinct of solicitude quite beyond his control, was at her side just in time to prevent her falling from faintness.

From the rear of the car park pass through the burial ground towards St Michael's Church. In the bank are a few stones that are all that remain of Cumnor Place, scene of the mysterious death in 1560 of Army Robsart, wife of Robert Dudley (later Earl of Leicester). The first written account of rumours of Amy's murder, *The Secret Memoirs of Robert Dudley*, published on the Continent, accused Dudley of poisoning not only her but also his second wife's first husband. John Aubrey in *Brief Lives* and Anthony a Wood in *Athenae Oxoniensis* (1691-2) drew on the *Memoirs*, and Elias Ashmole told the story in *Antiquities of Berkshire*, where some say Sir Walter Scott saw it, and used it as the basis of *Kenilworth* (1821). The introduction to Scott's novel, however, quotes part of *Cumnor Hall* by William Julius Mickle from "volume iv, page 130 of *Ancient Ballads*". *Kenilworth's* publication prompted a flurry of pamphlets, plays (including one by Victor Hugo) and operas (one of them by Donizetti) and a ballet about Amy Robsart – a story which continues to inspire artists to this day. There is even a rose named after her. In 1810 the remains of Cumnor Place looked like this.