



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

with former BBC Radio Gloucestershire presenter **Mark Cummings**



PHOTOS: MARK CUMMINGS

Holst's statue in Cheltenham

Walking with legends in Gloucestershire

I've held on until March to share with you a joyful, life-enhancing physical challenge for 2024. It seems fitting, now the worst of the winter is behind us and spring is pulsating up through the soil, to plan some walks with a difference.

I was researching recently how the Cotswold countryside inspired the work of Gustav Holst when I discovered something irresistible: The Gustav Holst Way, from Cranham to Wyck Rissington via Cheltenham and Bourton-on-the-Water. It is a proper 35-mile adventure through the Cotswold countryside that influenced many of his great works. To explain the route, we need to dig

a little deeper into his local connections. He was born at 4 Clarence Street in Cheltenham, now a wonderful museum. After leaving Cheltenham Grammar School, he took up the temporary post of organist and choirmaster at Wyke Rissington while conducting the Choral Society at Bourton-on-the-Water. During this time, he would relax by hiking all over the Cotswolds Hills, which explains one of his earliest works, *Cotswolds Symphony*.

He lived for a time in Cranham and wrote a piece of music there that he entitled *Cranham*. This tune was later used for the Christmas carol *In the Bleak Midwinter*. Subsequently, the cottage he'd lived in became known as

Midwinter Cottage. I'll be downloading my favourite Holst pieces, strapping on my boots and taking a few days to enjoy this musical adventure. Other planned walks include The Laurie Lee Wildlife Way, a simple five-mile walk easily found online, with 10 strategically placed wooden 'poetry posts' that allow you to imbibe the spirit of this wonderful man. I will take Ivor Gurney's *Severn & Somme* poetry with me on a trip to the River Severn with a view of May Hill.

Finally, I'll walk from singer-songwriter Mike d'Abo's Rodborough home to The Black Horse at Amberley, not for any inspiration... simply because he owes me a pint.



'Dick Whittington' leaves Gloucester

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

I thought it would get easier, but it doesn't. She left me when she was 19 to spend three months in South America. She left me again when she was 21 to spend six months in Paris, then at 22 with another six months in Buenos Aires. Now, at 27 she's off for seven months to south-east Asia and the Antipodes. My eldest daughter, Kate, is sensible, well-travelled, and is sharing this adventure with an equally responsible partner. So, why does it feel just as bad as it did in 2016? I blame the parents who took them on far-flung adventures and road trips when they were growing up. My mum made the point that when I scarpered in 1991, all she got was an odd airmail letter and a phone call once a year. I hold onto the thought of the reunion at Heathrow in 214 days.

Walking with legends to London

On a recent trip to London we decided to walk everywhere. We simply bought a book of historic routes and ate up the miles from Soho to Primrose Hill, from Regent's Park to the South Bank. I'm sure it was Dick Whittington who gave me this strange predilection for traipsing instead of taking a taxi. My desire to walk in the footsteps of Gustav Holst, Ivor Gurney and Laurie Lee may also have been triggered by an unforgettable epic adventure involving Dick Whittington which is one I'm considering revisiting. Dick Whittington was real, he did walk to London and the fortune he made there is still being used today for good causes. In 2005, Gloucester was preparing to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first play about his life and I was duped

into walking from Pauntley Court, near Newent – Dick's place of birth – all the way to London. It was a back-breaking, blister-inducing trek, but we made it, and most importantly shared the story of a legacy we still see today. Six hundred years after his death, the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington pays out huge amounts for needy causes. In 1948, an amalgamation of several hospitals was established and named The Whittington Hospital. More recently, funds have been used to help and protect women who have been sex-trafficked. On a dreamy summer's day last year, I walked from Lechlade to Buscot and felt a powerful pang to keep walking. This was part of our route to London – should we, could we do it again?



Parting is such sweet sorrow: Mark saying goodbye to daughter, Kate



Cheltenham's Ivy League

When a lovely business contact offered to buy me breakfast at The Ivy in Cheltenham, I felt a pulse of excitement run straight through me. Firstly, I love a free meal, secondly, I'd never been to The Ivy before and I was intrigued at the prospect. This building was the original 'Montpellier Spa', the rotunda dome was added later serving as a concert and dance hall, and the last time I'd been in there it was a bank. When I walked into the inner sanctum it took my breath away. The

central circular bar, enriched in greenery and topped with two racehorses jumping the roof fence, was the perfect setting for a gossip, a deal and some Eggs Benedict.

I've been lucky to experience some of the other treasures Cheltenham has to offer, including behind the scenes at the other 'inner sanctum' down the road at GCHQ, hosting a Christmas concert from within Cheltenham Ladies' College in the Princess Hall, and backstage at the Town Hall. ●