**Polegate Circular, Sunday 2nd May 2010**

10 walkers, 22 miles – leader Clare Kirkbride

There were ten of us to start the walk at Polegate station, as well as someone else enquiring about joining the club, as she is moving to the area and keen on walking longer distances. In persistent drizzle, we walked up the High Street, along a residential avenue and joined the Cuckoo Trail straightaway. Usually shared with cyclists and dogwalkers, the path was strangely deserted along the disused railway, called the Cuckoo Line; now there are more dunnocks and blackbirds though a cuckoo was heard last week. We saw swifts too. Still raining, we walked through Abbot's Wood, admiring anenomes, bluebells and the earliest of the ransome. The going was skiddy underfoot but not sinky. Each of the many stiles was defective in an entirely individual way, unstable forwards, backwards, sideways, upwards, downwards, but all were negotiated without a slip; every farm gate was mastered and replaced as found. We emerged from Bramble Wood, and found a bridleway leading across the Norman site of Michelham Priory, and found ourselves in the village of Upper Dicker. Avoiding visiting both the pub and farm shop, we crossed fields in thickening rain along the Vanguard Way to emerge at the hamlet of Golden Cross, where the welcome was first class, "Don't worry, rain's only water!". We were well fed and watered, then moved on swiftly to keep warm. Briskly down the road past Farley Farm, home to the English Surrealists to Chiddingly through the picturesque churchyard and across more fields with high-spirited but friendly horses in one field, and a group of Shetlands complete with suckling foal in another. Past mouth-watering properties, moats, duck-houses, one rhododendron in full vibrant magenta bloom to Gun Hill. At last the weather relented as we began to turn southwards, with views of the South Downs. Past Hellingly's ancient church and towards Hailsham where we declined the bus. The rain stopped at four o'clock. Some sped down the Cuckoo Trail to catch the five o'clock train; others strode in the hope of tea, but the (salaried) staff had no intention of serving us at the Old Loom craft centre, so we made our way into Polegate and took refuge in "The Dinkum" pub. It was full, but tea was available, which was warm wet and welcome as well as £1 each but did not tempt us to a second cup. Tired and dry at last, we were ready for the next train, with more than one of us making the resolution to replace our waterproofs.