

Title: *Discovering England*

Subtitle: *From One Inch Above The Thames*

Author: Jim Payne

Published: 2012

Publisher: Lytton Publishing Company USA

Website: www.discovering-england.com

Contents: 162 pp (no photos or maps)

Cover: softcover

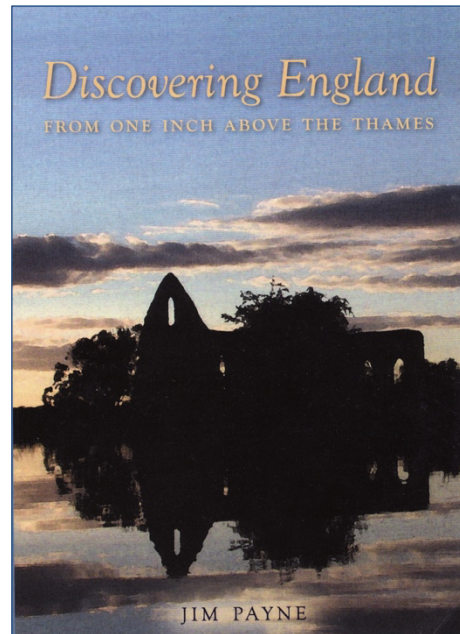
Size: 148 x 208 mm, portrait format

Price: US \$9.38 and a Kindle edition available

ISBN: 978 0 915728 00 8

Availability: www.amazon

Review: Alan Byde



When it is necessary to take one's wife yet again to the doctor to acquire more pills it is necessary to sit in the car and wait. I write this critique as a 'waiter', thanking Jim Payne, American, for his help in keeping me sane.

The Thames meanders from Cricklade to the Thames Barrier, tracing a time line through the history of England. On his way in a Klepper folding canoe, Jim examines people and places with a kindly eye and mind. Each night he seeks a B&B or lacking that, a piece of ground where he can spread a groundsheet and sleeping bag. Ledges under motorway bridges are not good, as the racket is incessant. Some mornings very early he wakes to find a questing dog nose to nose. Sleeping rough is usually a necessity forced on those on the streets of London in Cardboard City. Basic human needs in the early light require a tree to hide behind or to wedge one's back. Jim paddles on to find an inn or café where he buys a meal.

Where the Thames in Roman times was natural, now it runs between private banks and walls. Frequently Jim remarks on the difficulties he overcomes, 20 feet high stone walls, high tidal range, slippery stone steps worn by time and boots, locked gates at the top so he climbs fences and walls as he enters London. Mostly he finds the natives friendly, but in London they do not all speak English. Then he uses French, German, Arabic or sign language. His parents were deaf. It emerges that he is in his sixties, so climbing fences is an achievement. When he goes ashore, he tethers the Klepper with long lines to accommodate the tidal range from low to high water. Usually he finds a rowing club where he can leave the craft in safety. He also leaves it near an area notable for thievery, yet the Klepper is un plundered.

Jim's background is in religion. He has the ability to meet people and engage in conversations, which lead in serendipitous ways to interesting outcomes. He makes a detour on a branch canal to Guildford. Ashore he asks a woman for directions. She guides him to a place where welcoming people meet to talk. It is 'The Boiler Room' Worldwide, anywhere will do, it is free from magnificent priests, pomp, gold, wealth, mysteries to capture the credit of the credulous. He leaves after an enlightening time and goes on in to London where in Trafalgar Square he asks for directions from a passing lady, one among thousands. She helps him and they go and have coffee nearby. It turns out she goes to Boiler Room meetings and she knows very well the people Jim met in Guildford.

Co-incidence? 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Eighty four years tell me that is abundantly true. This kindly book is not much about paddling - it is about the Wheel of Fate.