

St Mary's.....the Parish Church of Selly Oak

FOREST OF ARDEN AND GRAND UNION COUNTRY

BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY, 30TH MAY 2005

This Spring Ramble is a variation on an old theme, but such is the delightful countryside around Baddesley Clinton and Rowington in Warwickshire, it is worth another visit after eleven years.

We have a new starting place, Hay Wood, 200 acres of woodland once part of the Baddesley Clinton estate and now managed by the Forestry Commission. It is a fragment of the ancient Forest of Arden, with some oak, rowan, birch and holly, although now mostly planted with conifers. Shakespeare, it is believed, meditated on "As You Like It" in Hay Wood before writing his play at Shakespeare Hall, the drive to which you pass in Rowington Green.

The church in the trees we come to is St Michael's, Baddesley Clinton, whose churchyard, in season, is full of primroses, daffodils, violets and bluebells. Twenty-six years ago we were shown round this little church by a former vicar of St Mary's, the Rev Michael Webster, who by then was Rector of Lapworth. Nicholas Brome, who inherited the manor in 1468, built the tower as a penance for killing a priest who he thought was having an affair with his wife. As a further penance for killing his father's murderer he was buried inside the south doorway so that anyone entering walks across his grave.

Baddesley Clinton Hall, which we reach via a tree-lined avenue, is a lovely medieval moated manor house which was in the hands of the Roman Catholic Ferrers family for over 400 years. Now cared for by the National Trust it is well worth a visit on another occasion, noted for its ingeniously concealed priest holes, very necessary for a pious Roman Catholic family in the late sixteenth century, and a creeper-clad Queen Anne brick bridge which spans the beautiful moat. We get good views as we turn across fields on the Heart of England Way en route to Kingswood (Lapworth) for lunch.

Afterwards we take to the towpath of the Grand Union Canal. Note the plaques on the walls and signboards which pose questions such as "Which came first: the pubs with names like The Boat and The Navigation, or the canals?" We are soon at Kingswood Junction where we cross the link section between the Grand Union and Stratford Canals, here 250 metres apart. The Grand Union was formed in 1929 by an amalgamation of several waterways, and this section, completed in 1800 runs for 137 miles from Birmingham to the Thames. It features wider locks, long tunnels, deep cuttings, one of which we walk through, and huge embankments, an example of which we see at Rowington.

Leaving the canal we pass through the churchyard of St Lawrence, Rowington, which stands in a beautiful setting on a hilltop. The church has a squat 14th century tower, a 15th century pulpit, a restored chancel and a Perpendicular west window. The rector is now in charge of the five parishes of the North Fencumbe Group to which Rowington belongs. Rowington stone, from a local quarry, was used, not only for the parish church, but also for St Philip's Cathedral and Baddesley Clinton Hall.

Field paths and a country lane take us back to the fringes of Hay Wood.

Make it a Bank Holiday Monday with a difference.

COME WALKING AND ENJOY THE COUNTRYSIDE!

ST MARY'S RAMBLE
BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY, 30TH MAY 2005
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- MEETING TIME:** 10.45 am for start at 11.00 am
- PLACE:** HAY WOOD CAR PARK, near ROWINGTON, WARWICKSHIRE
(Grid Reference 206707)
- LENGTH OF RAMBLE:** 5.5 miles of woodland and field paths, canal towpath and country lane, with stiles and gates but only one short hill.
- MAP:** O.S. Landranger Sheet 139
- HOW TO GET THERE:** Via Redditch Road (A441) to Hopwood, OR Alcester Road (A435) to Portway, bearing left on to M42, signposted "The North & Solihull". On approaching Junction 3A, keep to centre lane and join M40, signposted "Warwick & London".
- Leave M40 at Junction 16 (NEXT EXIT), signposted "A3400 Henley", and at top of slip road turn left, signposted "A3400 Hockley Heath". In Hockley Heath turn sharp right by a Jaguar dealership on to B4439 Old Warwick Road.
- Pass through Lapworth, and 0.7 miles beyond the Navigation Inn turn left at cross-roads, signposted "Chadwick End", into Rowington Green.
- At T-junction turn left, signposted "Chadwick End & Hay Wood". After 0.25 miles, entrance to car park is on your right.
- DISTANCE:** About 20 miles. Allow 40 minutes from Selly Oak.
- LUNCH:** Will be provided at the Navigation Inn, Lapworth (on the B4439 on the above route).

The inn serves a selection of thick sandwiches, all with salad and chips, but no ploughman's lunches I am sorry to say. They must have catered for navvies and not ploughmen around here. Please consult the list in the church porch or circulated to St Gabriel's and St Michael's; it gives details and prices. Please enter your order fully and clearly.

The list will be taken down after Evensong on **SUNDAY, 22nd MAY**, but please **DO NOT** leave it until the last minute.

Peter Washbourne (476 2406) must know by then how many are coming, what you all want to eat, and whether you need a lift there and back.