

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

VIEWS FROM THE HEART LAND

SATURDAY, 8th OCTOBER 2005

The Heart of England Way, some lovely wooded countryside, part of the Forest of Arden, between the big cities of Birmingham and Coventry, and distant views of Birmingham and beyond I bet you have never seen before are the features of this year's Autumn Ramble. Surprisingly, by a quirk of the modern boundaries, it is entirely within the West Midlands County, although in the afternoon we walk the boundary with Warwickshire, which, even more remarkably, lies to the west between us and Birmingham.

In driving through Meriden notice on the village green the 15th century wayside cross, said to mark the centre of England, and the more modern memorial to cyclists who died in the two world wars. An oak tree was planted on a road island to mark the completion of the bypass in 1958 and celebrate the relief of Meriden from the wheeled juggernauts on the A45.

We start in a remote hamlet, Hollyberry End, north-east of Meriden, which lies on the Heart of England Way. This Way is a Regional Long Distance Path that runs almost 100 miles from the northern tip of Cannock Chase to Bourton-on-the-Water in the Cotswolds and links the Staffordshire Way, Warwickshire's Centenary Way, Cotswold Way, Oxfordshire Way and the Thames Path.

We are soon in woodland known as Meriden Shafts as a result of past surface mining in shallow pits, but none are visible from the right of way. Most of the trees are larch and Scots pine, but recent felling has created a light and airy wood, which will attract butterflies and wildflowers.

Emerging at the hamlet of Eaves Green, we pass under the A45 and are soon at the Queen's Head Inn, which stands on the lower old road to Coventry, now bypassed twice, firstly by the higher road atop the bank, and then by the modern trunk road.

The after lunch walk starts with a gradual uphill section to the Fillongley Road, and after re-crossing the A45, continues in like manner in a generally northern direction. After skirting a wood called Sparrow's Grove we suddenly happen upon a grand view westwards across Packington Park and the N.E.C. site to distant Birmingham, and if the day is clear, you should be able to pick out the Telecom tower, the Rotunda, and the Sentinel flats at Horsefair. Behind them the backdrop of hills ranges from the Lickeys through Clent and the Rowley Hills to Cannock Chase.

The 500 acre Packington Park belongs to the 11th Earl of Aylesford, but since a devastating fire at Packington Hall in 1979 the Earl and Countess have made the Old Hall their home and their heir Lord Guernsey and his family live at the Hall. The parkland is roamed by 400 rare black-backed fallow deer.

At Great Packington church, in the middle of the park, there was a peal of three bells in one of the cupolas, but in 1805 the inhabitants in their zealous excitement to celebrate Nelson's victory at Trafalgar brought them crashing to the ground. They were melted down to form one Great Bell suitably inscribed to recall the mishap. Approaching the 200th anniversary, St Mary's bells have to come down to be taken for repair, hopefully not for melting down.

We pass through more woodland on the Packington estate and finally return to the Heart of England Way for the last mile.

ST MARY'S RAMBLE

SATURDAY, 8TH OCTOBER 2005

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- MEETING TIME:** 10.45 am for start at 11.00 am
- PLACE:** OPPOSITE IVY HOUSE FARM, HARVEST HILL LANE, HOLLYBERRY END, NEAR MERIDEN (Grid Reference 268840). If you have an A-Z or similar that covers Meriden, it should be shown in that. PARKING IS LIMITED, so some drivers may be asked to travel with someone else. Please be sure to indicate how many passengers you can take.
- LENGTH OF RAMBLE:** 5.75 miles of woodland and field paths and country lane with a number of stiles.
- MAP:** O.S. Landranger Sheets 139/140
- HOW TO GET THERE:** ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO MERIDEN:
- ROUTE A: Either via Redditch Road (A441) to Hopwood, or Alcester Road (A435) to Portway, bearing left on to M42 signposted The North/Solihull. Follow M42, leaving it at Junction 6 (A45). Take 4th exit, S/P A45 Coventry, then take slip road to A452 at Stonebridge roundabout. Take 3rd exit (A452 Leamington). At next roundabout turn left along B4102(Hampton Lane) to Meriden, then see below. (About 26 miles)
- ROUTE B: Via Kings Heath, Robin Hood Island, Solihull, then B4102(Hampton Lane) via Hampton-in-Arden to Meriden, then see below.(About 17 miles)
- ROUTE C: Via Bristol Road, Middle Ring Road, A45 Small Heath Highway and Coventry Road to A452 at Stonebridge roundabout, then as Route A.(About 17 miles)
- ROUTE FROM MERIDEN ROUNDABOUT: Take 2nd exit (B4102 Fillongley Road) for 1.5 miles, then on a left hand bend turn right (S/P Allesley) into Shaft Lane. BEWARE, THIS IS A NARROW LANE. At end swing right then left into Harvest Hill Lane and follow this for 0.5 ml. Just past Ivy House Farn on the left, there is parking space on the right at a wide bend.
- TRAVELLING TIME:** For all routes allow 50-55 minutes from Selly Oak.
- REFRESHMENTS:** Will be provided at the Queen's Head Inn, Old Road, Meriden (From Meriden roundabout take 3rd exit (B4104) and after 0.75 ml bear left at foot of hill).
- A selection of sandwiches and ploughman's lunches is available to order. Please consult the list in the church porch; it gives details and prices. Please enter your order fully and clearly.
- The list will be taken down after Evensong on SUNDAY, 2ND OCTOBER, but please DO NOT leave it until the last minute.
- Anne Pycock (476 3117) must know by then how many are coming, what you all want to eat, and whether you need a lift there and back. Ramble Queries to Peter Washbourne (476 2406).