

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

THE GENTLE HEIGHTS OF THE ALNE HILLS

BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY, 7TH MAY 2007

The names Alne and Aston Cantlow may sound familiar to recent Parish Ramblers, for five years ago we were in the same area, but this time we are walking westwards in the Alne Valley, then over the gentle heights of the Alne Hills. The Alne was known as the "Alwine", meaning "clear and bright" to the Britons who lived hereabouts.

We have been given permission to park behind the Village Hall, which was the medieval Guild Hall, believed to have been the home of the Guild of St Mary, a religious guild which provided priests for the church services, and contained the village gaol.

The village name is derived from the Norman, Cantelupe, the name of the baron who built a castle between the village and the River Alne in 1205, but only a few ridges in a field remain.

We start past the church of St John the Baptist which has two claims to fame. The first is that it is only the second parish in England to have had an incumbent who became a saint. A former vicar, Thomas de Cantelupe, became Bishop of Hereford in 1275 and Chancellor of England during the reign of Henry III and following his death in 1282 was canonised. The second is that William Shakespeare's parents, John from nearby Snitterfield, and Mary Arden from Wilmcote, were married here in 1557, and Will was baptised here in 1558.

Where our path meets Mill Lane and crosses the river there was a water powered mill where they produced paper in 1748, needles in the 1800s and then ball bearings for bicycles until 1960. We soon cross the line of the old Alcester Railway, opened in 1876 from a junction with the North Warwickshire line at Bearley to connect Stratford-upon-Avon with Alcester and known as the Coffee Pot line because of the unusual funnel on the engine. It was closed after the First World War and opened again for the Second World War until nationalization.

We enter Great Alne, as it were, by the back door, and also the churchyard. The church of St Mary Magdalene has an unusual rendered bell turret, and lies hidden from the road. Lunch awaits us at the Mother Huff Cap Inn, a name believed to be unique in the country, and referring to the froth head on a glass of ale. We last visited this inn thirty years ago.

Afterwards we leave by another rear door up a "No Through Lane", passing a sign that proclaims "No footpath beyond this point". Strangely, we find a public footpath signed to our left leading over the flat-topped Alne Hills with extensive vistas to the east, and skirting fields used by racehorses. The owner's large house, called Alne Park, lies over to the right and has brick gate pillars topped by stone horses heads.

We join the Monarch's Way, the long-distance path being roughly Charles II's escape route from the Battle of Worcester in 1651, and the Arden Way, a somewhat shorter route.

Finally we re-cross the Alne and the railway on our return to Aston Cantlow, which in 1227 was granted a weekly market and annual fair. The latter's successor, the Village Fete, takes place on May Day, somewhere to pop in after the ramble.

ST MARY'S RAMBLE

BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY, 7TH MAY 2007

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

MEETING TIME: 10.45 am for start at 11.00 am

PLACE: VILLAGE HALL CAR PARK, ASTON CANTLOW
(Grid Reference 139598)

LENGTH OF RAMBLE: 5.25 miles of field and woodland paths and country roads, with two short uphill sections.

MAP: O.S. Landranger Sheets 150 & 151

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 roundabout turn right, following A3400 through Henley-in-Arden.

On the sweeping bend by the church in Wootton Wawen turn right, signposted "Aston Cantlow", and in a quarter of a mile turn left along B4089 Alcester road. After 1.5 miles follow road to the left and at next bend bear left, signposted "Aston Cantlow".

Cross river bridge and take next turning right. In Aston Cantlow village, opposite the King's Head Inn, turn left under "Village Hall" sign up driveway leading to car park and park on far right hand side.

DISTANCE: About 22 miles. Allow 40-45 minutes from Selly Oak.

REFRESHMENTS: Will be provided at The Mother Huff Cap Inn, Great Alne (on B4089).

A selection of sandwiches and ploughman's lunches is available to order. Please consult the list in the church porch or circulated to 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, 29TH APRIL, but please DO NOT leave it until the last minute.

June Sutton (472 4248) must know by then how many are coming, what you all want to eat, and whether you need a lift there and back.

Enquiries about the ramble to Peter Washbourne (476 2406).