

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

HOPPING DOWN TO THE TEME VALLEY

SATURDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2006

We are into the autumnal season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, but we hope that any early morning mist will have dispersed before we set foot in West Worcestershire to explore the countryside between Mable and the Teme Valley. Yes, Mable again, but only to use the same parking place as we did three years ago; we are walking in a different direction.

Canal, coal and fruit are the themes for this ramble, but the first two are not obvious. This is the area of the defunct West Worcestershire Coalfield and reminders are still evident in farm and pub names, a 1999 map still showing Hunt House Colliery, closed in 1972, only a quarter of a mile off our route, but countryside less evocative of a coalfield is hard to imagine. Some of the local collieries were owned by the Blount family, whose mausoleum is in Mable church.

Coal, of course, needs to be moved, so in 1791 an Act was passed for the construction of the Kington-Leominster-Stourport Canal to distribute the coal to rural areas of Herefordshire and provide an outlet to the industrial Midlands for the agricultural and horticultural produce of Herefordshire and the Teme Valley.

The project, however, was an extreme example of so-called "canal mania", proposing four tunnels - one over two miles long - three aqueducts and a large number of locks of which only sixteen were built, and in the event only 18.5 miles from Leominster to Southnet Wharf, near Mable, were opened, in 1796. This was because the Southnet Tunnel, over which we walk, collapsed soon after completion, never to be repaired. Rumour has it that two men and a boat were entombed.

We may be able to see the south portal but the reconnaissance team, not knowing of its whereabouts, missed it. Not having this tunnel cut off access to essential water from Dumbleton Brook further east, so the Stocking Pool, the dam of which we cross fairly soon, was built as a reservoir. There proved to be not enough trade and very little water to carry it, and the canal was sold to the Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway and closed in 1858.

So with the coalfield and canal behind us, we descend to the hop fields and orchards of the Teme Valley at Lindridge. Up to the early 1950s the Wyre Forest Railway brought hundreds of Black Country families on special hop-pickers' trains for working holidays in September each year. Mechanisation made the pickers redundant and later imports have greatly reduced the acreage of hop growing.

If the trend of the morning walk is downhill, after lunch it is gently uphill to Frith Common, a small village which has lost its pub and post office. We pass the entrance to the aforementioned Hunt House Colliery, now a timber company's yard, before crossing fields past the site of the now demolished Sodington Hall, a seat of the Blount family, to reach the road at Mable.

Do join us to enjoy this beautiful landscape!

ST MARY'S RAMBLE

SATURDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2006

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- MEETING TIME: 10.30am for start at 10.45am
- PLACE: LAY-BY OFF A456 AT MAMBLE, west of Bewdley (Grid Reference 686713)
- LENGTH OF RAMBLE: 5.33 miles of field paths, woodland paths and country lane with plenty of good stiles.
- MAP: O.S. Landranger Sheet 138
- HOW TO GET THERE: Make for Hagley Road West (A456) at Quinton, or join A456 on Halesowen By-Pass and follow it through Hagley and Blakedown to Kidderminster. On entering Kidderminster go straight on at traffic lights, and at first roundabout follow A456 to the right, go straight on at second roundabout and next traffic lights, then straight on at third roundabout, signposted A456 Bewdley and Leominster.

Follow A456 past Safari Park and at next roundabout take first exit, along Bewdley By-Pass. Keep on A456, taking second exit at next two roundabouts, pass through Callow Hill and Clows Top, and just after second turning to Mamble enter lay-by on the left, indicated by parking and picnic area sign.

DISTANCE: About 27 miles. Allow 50-55 minutes from Selly Oak.

REFRESHMENTS: Will be provided at the Nag's Head Inn, Lindridge (on A443 Worcester-Tenbury road, just beyond Eardiston). Approach via Droitwich By-Pass, Ombersley and Great Witley.

A selection of sandwiches, baguettes and ploughman's lunches is available to order. 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, and give phone no. in case of query.

The list will be taken down after Evensong on SUNDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 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. Your phone no. or address is essential for this.