

## **Weston Village Walk**

Starting at the Village Hall.

Fire damaged a cottage here in 1880, the land subsequently given in 1918-1921 for the siting of the first hall as a memorial to those who died in the First World War, a second hand wooden building on brick pillars. During WWII there was an air raid shelter behind the hall, the brick hump can still be seen. The old hall was used for Bristol packing Mamas during WWII and was twice used as an overflow schoolroom.

The new Hall was built in 1972 after a series of fund raising events in the village and is now also a memorial to those who died in the Second World War.

Leaving the Village Hall head up Church Road towards the B430 with the shop on the left.

The shop, the cottage to the left and the one behind were once all one building, dated 1617, the home of Haman Porter, JP, Deputy Lieutenant of Oxfordshire.

Opposite is the Dower House, never actually the home of a Dowager. Called The Cottage by the Berties at The Manor and used primarily as home of the maiden aunt and great aunt of the owner of The Manor. It then became the home of the Donald family, active in the village community around the time of WWII

The road towards Bletchington originally made a sharp left and then right, this was probably altered when the Church yard was enlarged in 1890.

Badgers Drift, like several places, named from old field names, some show usage, characteristics of land etc. This was once the estate timber yard.

Continuing on, The Old Forge on the left was the home of the blacksmith, his yard became Beecrofts and then the housing development, Blacksmiths Close. The red Horse Chestnut tree was planted to celebrate the Jubilee in 1935. There was a Bowling Green behind here at one time.

Further along, Rose cottage was once a small shop, as was later on what is now Hazel Cottage.

On the opposite side is Village Farm Court, built as infill on the old farmyard, there were 6 working farms in the 1950's, now none earning a living from farming alone!

There were 13 separate farms recorded in the DomesdayBook!

On the corner is Village Farm, an award winning conversion from agricultural to business use, now the home of the Axicon group.

There is a well on the green, one of many both shallow and deep wells in the village,  
The Stocks are 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Last used about 1850.

Turn right and head down the B430.

Manor Cottage was the village blacksmiths in the 19th Century, who undertook to teach young men in the evenings to read and write. This may have become the forerunner of the village club as it provided a meeting place.

It was converted from two cottages to one during the Second World War for the use of the owners while The Manor was used by the BBC.

The front view of The Manor is largely 19th Century, with the addition of the trained lime trees in the early 20th Century.

Originally belonging to Osney Abbey, the manor was the bailiff's house and the bread basket of the abbey, supplying huge quantities of meat, skins, grain etc. after the Reformation the whole parish was transferred into private hands until 1939.

The estate supplied income to the abbey, there is no evidence that monks or nuns lived there, although one ghost could be that of a nun who misbehaved (or a serving girl depending on the version) One is said to have been burned at a stake in the grounds, the other might have died falling down stairs. Either or both or neither may be Maud who is seen in Room 7. Another ghost is a cavalier, riding on horseback through the manor wall. A ghostly coach has been seen to run down a small boy in the courtyard (20<sup>th</sup> century gardener wouldn't cross the area) and another has been seen moving along the road outside the manor....

Siege of Weston (1589) the result of dispute over ownership. At the time the manor was occupied by the widower of the second wife of the first owner after the Reformation, who had been allowed to stay there 'for the rest of his life'.

Henry Clinton, the second Earl of Lincoln laid claim to the Manor through marriage but the courts in London upheld the ownership and Clinton finally went off to behave badly elsewhere, he died in 1616.

Norreys family held the manor, an ancestor of whom (a friend of Henry VIII, and referred to as 'Gentle Norris') refused to implicate Anne Boleyn and so was beheaded (1536). Elizabeth I, in recognition of this steadfast behaviour restored all confiscated property to the Norreys family.

During the Civil War (1640s) Prince Rupert is reputed to have escaped dressed as a maid, having spent the night hidden in a chimney while Parliamentary troops took over the building.

Rupert was the nephew of the king and the cottage to left of main building is called 'Rupert's Cottage'. It has been much altered and its present appearance belies the underlying 16<sup>th</sup> /17<sup>th</sup> century structure.

So many tales tell of men escaping in the guise of a maid, but we were in the centre of an area much fought over, troops were billeted here,

Bletchington was put under siege and surrendered to save the women living there and Islip Bridge was a well recorded battle.

During WWII the BBC used the manor as living accommodation for staff evacuated from London.

There has been a squash court at the manor for many years and it was once open to villagers, as was the swimming pool.

Swimming is also recorded in Mill Stream, in Gallos Brook and at Dangerous Corner – a deep area of the stream coinciding with a sharp corner in the old winding road between Kidlington and Bicester.

Continuing on, three cottages at FirTree Farm were lost to fire in the 19th Century, the barn conversion and a new house have again made this a group of dwellings.

Newby Cottage, which once had a direct access to Knowle Lane was a butchers shop in the early 20th Century and was also at one time a café serving soft drinks to cycling clubs from Oxford and Kidlington.

Continue past Knowle Lane to Cruck cottage, - having a cruck in end walls. A cruck was an A shaped wooden structure which supports the walls and roof timbers. Denotes a property probably dating from 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century and was the home of Boddington family, the village wheelwright, who made wagons, furniture, coffins and the bier and wooden panelling in the Church. The tyre platform still exists where iron rims were heated and fitted to wooden wheels.

A WWI plane structure, bought when the airfield was closed after 1918, was used as the roof structure of one of the workshops. It was removed after the business closed and is now being restored to its former glory as a complete Bristol fighter in New Zealand!

Forge/tools from the business are now at the Museum Store at Standlake

Brooklyn Gardens was the site of a Dame school, predating the school in North Lane. Also, home of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century carrier who used a gig or cart to transport people and goods. A Garage in 20<sup>th</sup> century which also sold sweets, tobacco and paraffin and supplied a taxi service.

Permission to demolish house and garage and build 3 homes was granted as it was considered a more attractive alternative!

Mithian Cottage was originally a Bakery with baker's oven and there was a sweet shop farther along.

Continue on to The Chequers, the cobbled area in front was a turning space for wagons. It was the home of the village Carter, his wife being the landlady. Another publican combined the trade of pig killing and butcher with that of landlord and a third was also a shoemaker.

The building was originally a barn and a workshop for the shoemaker to the left and the house and licensed premises to the right.

When the two were joined In 1960 the doors were left off until the public footpath had been officially diverted round the building( now part of the Oxfordshire Way). Off sales were made through the small window opening onto the pavement.

There is a sundial on the front wall.

The Stonehouses opposite, known as the Police Houses, were once the home of Oxfordshire Police dog handlers.

Off the road up to the A34 flyover is Fir Tree Dairy, from where daily milk deliveries were made round the village.

Retrace your steps now to Knowle Lane, turning left into the Lane, once just a few cottages on the left, including a Shoemaker and Stonemason.

You need to take the small white gate near the end of the lane, just before Knowle Farm.

Knowle Farm, at the end, was once the home of the widow of General Gott who died in the Second World War and is reputedly haunted by Alice, who sits in the corner by the fire!

Mrs Gott thought her horses avoided part of one field because they sensed it had been used to bury horses in a Civil War skirmish.

Follow the footpath around the edge of Knowle Farm, ensuring all gates are closed behind you, then on entering a field continue along the field edge to the kissing gate ahead.

Go through the gate, cross the bridge and turn immediately right to follow the path initially along the field edge staying in a straight line past the open field on the right and continuing around the field edge.

Stop to admire The Star Gate at the back of The Manor, made by the local blacksmith early in the 20th Century. At the time, children played on the moat in a boat built by the wheelwright. Most of the visible planting dates from early 20th Century with some specimen trees being older. A tree was planted at midnight at the turn of the millennium by the previous owners.

Continue around the edge of the field, past the tennis court, once belonging to The Manor, Kay Maule who played at Wimbledon lived at the Manor before It became a hotel. The court now belongs to the Henman family who themselves have a long tradition of playing at Wimbledon.

To the right is Monks Walk, not actually a public footpath but would have been the shortest route from The Manor to the Church.

Continue out over the footbridge onto a tarmac track, turn right up towards Bletchington road.

The area on the right beyond the stream is Ladygrass, once used for village bonfires and was the site of a model chicken farm used by a vicar to give young men business experience.

The first house on the left corner is Lime Walk, another shop at one time, selling fruit, vegetables and tinned goods, also fish and chips and was the base for a travelling shop.

Behind here was at one time a hockey pitch and football pitch.

Continue carefully along the road past Lime Walk to the junction with Church Close, opposite which was the site of another cottage lost in a fire, as was one to the right, now replaced by a modern house.

The original mill is thought to have been close to this junction, culverts directing the stream into a boggy area behind the first houses on the right in Church Close, this area now occupied by a fairly recent development built by a housing association in conjunction with the Parish Council and the Duchy of Cornwall Estate, who owned some of the land.

Turning round and heading back towards the village, Jubilee Cottage on the left was one of two cottages built in Queen Victoria's Jubilee year, using the last stone to be quarried from the Stonepit Hills.

Further along on the left was Dinah Tuffrey's home, the village carrier who walked to town to buy and sell for villagers, she is said to have remembered the transactions with the aid of coloured wool tied to her fingers.

There are many stories about Dinah, she is said to have used wallpaper samples to decorate her walls like patchwork, paint everything all colours using whatever paint scraps she could get, she swept the road twice a day after the cows had passed on their way to milking. She walked to Birmingham to visit family, she would tell young girls if they had nothing to do to go and make a hole in their stockings to then mend it!

Other tradesmen living in Church Lane in the 19th Century included a woodman, hurdle maker, shepherd, Carter, farm labourers, manor servants, shop owners and lace makers.

Turn left through the gate into the Churchyard.

The lower part of the churchyard was originally the site of a farm and associated buildings which was destroyed by fire in 1850 and became part of the churchyard in 1890 when the bend in the road opposite the shop was straightened.

The chest tomb by the path is a 'listed building' and is the tomb of a local stonemason who dictated the type of stone to be used for his memorial.

Note the sundial to the left of the Church porch.

There is a benchmark on the corner of the church - ~250 ft above sea level (lower left hand corner, just by the path) Benchmarks were often put on substantial building like churches as they were unlikely to change or move.

The Original chancel extended 11.7m from the East wall, the same width as the marking that can be seen on the wall. The main body of the church was rebuilt in 1743. The previous building was reported to be in bad repair. When repair work has been carried out inside there has been no evidence of the pre-1743 building being on a different footprint. It is thought the base of the walls are the pre- 1743 building and the repair/rebuilding concerned the roof, windows and upper part of the walls.

There is an 11<sup>th</sup> century doorway in the tower. Most of the tower is much older than the body of the church. There was a story that the original building was damaged by fire but there is no written evidence of this. The churchwardens just report in the early 1740s that 'our church, it is falling down'. However, recent work at the base of the tower wall, inside the vestry did reveal stonework that looked as if it had been damaged in a fire.....who knows?

Inside the church all the memorials (some dating from before the rebuilding in 1743) are to the Norreys Bertie (pronounced BARTY) family – the family crest includes hedgehogs?!!. (some stones in the floor appear to be defaced grave stones – there is one close to where the lectern stands.)

The cockleshell motif above the door is associated with St James of Santiago de Compostella and medieval pilgrims. A lead cockleshell badge was found in the village and is now in the Ashmolean. The motif has been repeated in the new window installed to mark the millennium.

The font is Saxon (possibly on an older plinth) and the large iron cross is thought to have been a masthead cross from the Spanish Armada. The panelling, pews, altar rails and bier are all the work of Mr Boddington, the village wheelwright, carpenter and undertaker and his workmen.

Continue through the Churchyard and left into Mill Lane

The Old Vicarage was described in the 17th Century as a "mean" building and has been altered and added to since, ceasing to be a vicarage in the late 1960's. Prior to that It had housed the first "Reading Room, the precursor to the Village Hall. One vicar also ran a night school for those men who wanted to learn the basics of reading, writing and maths!

At the bottom end of Mill Lane is the old mill, probably working from around 1700 to the first quarter of the 20th Century, originally 2 dwellings housing both a baker and a Miller, with the oven being used by villagers to cook their Sunday lunches!

Water in the millpond was used to drive the machinery and when the water ran low milling would be stopped for the day to allow the pond to fill again. The outlet was at the lowest point in front of the building and would have flowed between the Church and Mulberry Cottage. Now the flow is diverted to the far side of the house into modern ponds before joining Gallos Brook.

There was probably a windmill before this at the Clumps (or Mill Pound) opposite the airfield and a previous water mill behind Church Lane.

Return back up Mill Lane to a narrow footpath on the left go down here and into what is known as School Field.

The ridge and furrow effect showing evidence of a medieval field system. Close to this area medieval pottery (13th Century- some from Brill) and tiles have been found, going further back a Bronze Age spearhead, scraper and Roman coins also found elsewhere In the parish.

Continue through kissing gate to left of the houses, into North Lane.

On the left is the old school, one of only 2 thatched schools in Oxfordshire, probably used as a school since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The wall around the playground is much older than the barn itself. To the left was the teacher's accommodation originally.

The school room was often used for village activities before the Village Hall was built. – Club Day, Friendly Society, dramatic productions, political meetings...

There had also been a dame school south of the Manor, and night schools at the vicarage.

The School closed in 1984, due to lack of numbers, the School honours board is in Standlake museum store, the School bell is hanging in the Village Hall.

Turning up North Lane, the School House was also built with some of the last stone dug from Stonepit Hills to the same design as Jubilee Cottage in Church Lane.

The pond was one of several used for watering stock and keeping wheels damp in dry weather. A Mr Wheeler was found drowned on returning from market in 1825 – probably in the pond by the Oak Tree..

Further up on the right, now part of Prospect House, is the old Methodist Chapel built in 1838, on the only available piece of freehold land in the village, it closed in 1994.

Prospect House was built for and lived in by the Eaglestone family, a local builder whose wife was a Dew, a relative of the relieving officer who often visited the village and school re non-attendance and to give financial help to those in need.

The Dew diaries still survive and give an insight into local events.

The Oak Tree is probably between 300-400 years old. Legend is that a child is needed to be born each year to keep the tree growing – from records, there has been a birth in every year since first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century!

There was a Snack bar selling sweets etc in a shed with drop down front under the tree in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The pond behind the Oak Tree has a stone bottom so that wagons could be driven through to keep wheels damp.

Sometimes called Malt Pond and the cottage behind was Malt House Cottage. There were originally two cottages further out of the village, opposite Caerleon.

The Lambpits on the opposite side of the road, remembered as flooding across the road to join the pond by the oak tree. Used for skating when frozen and often home to nesting swans in 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Turning right out of North Lane, after Prospect House, The Row, now two cottages was originally four, included the home of the village thatcher. A plane crashed behind The Row in WWII.

Westlands Avenue on the right was developed in the 1960's when Westfield Farm ceased to be a farm, the farm buildings subsequently being converted into Shepherds Close.

The Ben Jonson is the only known pub of this name. It also has a sun dial on the front, and it was a licensed house noted (without a name) from late 17<sup>th</sup> century, recorded by name from early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Ben Jonson himself died in 1637 and there is no evidence that he visited Weston. The nearest we know him to have come was Woodstock. Originally, the building which is now part of Oxford Court was the brew house.

For a few days each year Weston had side shows and a donkey driven roundabout on the ground in front of the Ben Jonson when fair folk going to St Giles Fair stopped off here.

Oxford Court was the home of the Ancil family, well known for training racehorses in the 1920s, horses were exercised in the area behind what is now The Chalet and also on other side of the road.

Many villagers had a flutter, and lost when Carfax, one of their more well known horses, failed to win the Grand National.

The corner of Church Road was originally know as Mutton Corner, two cottages were destroyed by fire here in the early 20th Century.

Hazel Cottage on the corner was once a shop and was the home of William Goodson the constable in 1819-1849, a shoemaker who could read and write, who kept law and order.

The end room of Hazel Cottage, nearest the main road, was used by the Home Guard, strangers being identified by their inability to pronounce "Bicester"

In the small open area just past Hazel Cottage once stood a small shed for the postman to rest in before cycling back to Bicester.



On the opposite side of the B430 were cricket and football pitches, all fields over here being known as “The Green” which may have led to the name Weston on the Green.

From here return down Church Road to the Village Hall.