

THE MENDIP RING. Leg 2a

BUTLEIGH to KEINTON MANDEVILLE. 6 MILES.

- 1** With your back to the post office turn left and walk up the road to the church on the right (Church Path). Keep to the right following the path signed to Moorhouse, through the gate follow the well defined path across the field through the next gate then head to the right of the stand of trees to a stone stile and onto the road. Turn left and follow the road, cross Wallyers bridge then take the path on your right following the River Brue.
- 2** Follow the river until you come to Baltonsborough Flights, cross the weir, turn right over the stile and bridge then left to follow the hedge on your left. When you enter a narrow field cross the stile in the bottom left hand corner then turn right to reach the road at Tootle Bridge.
- 3** Go over the bridge and through the gate on your right, head straight across this field to a gate halfway along the hedge then through the next gate in the corner of the field. Turn right then left over the stile. Follow the hedge on your right to cross a double stile in the bottom corner, turn left to reach the river then left again, follow the track round to the right then left to reach the road at Lydford. Turn right then shortly left into the churchyard, pass the church on your right and follow the path over the bridge, turn right then left onto a track, shortly turn right and follow this track until you reach a hedge in front of you, turn right then left through the farm gate, follow the fence on your left through another gate then at the end of the fence bare left over the tarmac bridge and out to the lane where you turn left.
- 4** Just before you reach the main road turn left up the byway (Cotton Lane), soon you reach a tarmac drive, follow this out to reach the B3153 at Keinton Mandeville this is the end of section 2A.

Points of Historical Interest

SECTION 1

St Leonard's Church, Butleigh. On the site of a Saxon church dedicated to St Benedict, it was renamed after the Reformation. Rebuilt in the 14th century, its present appearance is mainly from the 19th century. The door jambs on the porch and the two scratch dials on the outer side, believed to be part of a sundial, are from the Saxon building. The south porch and the old gable cross on top are 14th century. The window near the porch is by Pugin. The 19th century alterations reflect the restoring zeal of the Victorian clergy. Much of the work was originated by George Neville-Grenville, Squire of the Manor and formerly Dean of Windsor. There is a guide to the church in the church.

Butleigh Court, which is private property, is the building with the Tudor style chimneys immediately behind the church.

The house is on the site of the ancient curia or court at which tenants came before their Lord. A small manor house existed here in the 14th century. By 1811 it was greatly enlarged and by 1829 it had four ranges around a courtyard with stables, a bowling green, a grape house, greenhouse, icehouse, and pleasure grounds. Damaged by fire in the 1830's, a new mansion called Butleigh Court was built to a design by J.C. Buckler. The rebuilding took a piece of ground from the old churchyard and local legend said that the house was cursed because bones had been disturbed. Certainly the next Squire to inherit the Court immediately gave a piece of land back to the church in recompense.

Following the death of the last Squire, Robert Neville-Grenville in 1947, the Court stood empty and decaying for 30 years until 1975 when it was sold and developed into four apartments.

Across Moormead, the field behind the church is Moorhouse at a junction of three roads. (ST526345) In 1324 there was mention of a water mill at Butleigh and almost certainly it stood here, where the River Brue ran through the lowest part of the valley until it was straightened and moved further east in the later medieval period.

The road from Moorhouse to Wallyer's bridge has variously been known as Wallyeate Drove and Horseys Lane. The field on the left was called Horsis in 1289 and today it is still called Horseys. As the Rev Synge says in his book on the history of Butleigh 'one is reminded of Ecclesiastes 1:4 "One generation goeth and another generation cometh and the earth abideth forever" '.

Wallyer's Bridge. At a time when bridges were few and far between, the cost of their constant upkeep reflects their importance. In 1675, before the Turnpike Trusts, the Butleigh churchwardens' accounts list repairs to Bollyters and Wallyeate bridges. Bollyters may be Bolters Bridge near Hornblotton later in this Leg of the walk. Wallyeate is described as the skew bridge on the Baltonsborough Road and as a horse bridge, too narrow for wagons. In the accounts for 1800 the churchwardens record a rebuilding in stone at a cost of

£43.14s 2d. The present stone, concrete and iron road bridge was built in 1972.

There is a Bench Mark on the SE face of the bridge. Made by Ordnance Survey these marks provide a reference frame for heights above mean sea level in mainland Great Britain. If the exact height of one BM is known then the exact height of the next can be found by measuring the difference between them. With little maintenance in the last 30 years the levelling values in some areas have become unreliable and the overall numbers have been reduced by road and property building.

A step aside moment

The name of the bridge indicates it was at a gate, eate, in the wall and the medieval gatehouse entrance to Baltonsborough is just around the corner from the walker's line of vision.

SECTION 2

Along the bank of the River Brue, the church tower visible on the horizon is All Saints at Kingweston on the ridge above Butleigh. In 1503 the Brue at this point was called the Pynneslake.

Where the millstream and the river divide at Baltonsborough Flights there were repairs during the 18th century followed by rebuilding in 1840.

Tootle Bridge, on the Barton St David and Ilchester road was known in 1315 as Todelemill. The central arch of the bridge, being in danger of collapse, was rebuilt in 1719.

On the left of the road going back towards Baltonsborough is St Dunstan's Dyke. Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury from 946 to 957 and later Archbishop of Canterbury, is said to have been born in Baltonsborough. He directed the rebuilding of the Abbey, some of the remains of which are those that we see today.

A step aside moment

The church at Barton St David is one of only a handful in the County with an octagonal tower. In the church is a memorial which includes the names of two American Presidents, the father and son John Adams and John Quincy Adams, whose ancestral home is in the village. The Barton Inn is a cider house.

SECTION 3

The walk now enters an area of cider apple orchards. The origins of cider making in Somerset are lost in time, but there are references in early ecclesiastical accounts. Its popularity increased as European wars restricted imports. A tax on cider in 1763 led to Excise Men being given the right to enter private premises to search for dutiable goods. William Pitt the younger, in successfully opposing this law in the House of Commons, originated the now famous phrase 'every man's house is his castle'.

By the late 19th century, the expanding market led the Squire of Butleigh, Robert Neville-Grenville, to research the bottling of this volatile product. The National Fruit and Cider Institute was founded in 1903. In 1912 it was formally linked to Bristol University and they have provided scientific advice ever since. The modern standardised trees have a high yield, which offsets the reduction in land given over to orchards.

There are many traditions associated with the apple trees and the mistletoe that grows on them, not least the Wassail ceremony held in January. Two superstitions relating to cider making are that the youngest person present should be the first to drink the new juice from the press and the first cider making of the season should never be on a Friday.

A step aside moment

The sound of rushing water is the weir at West Lydford. Over the footbridge into St Peter's churchyard and beyond the car park, is the 17th century Lydford Bridge over the river Brue. It is little altered from its original state, with its five arches and five smaller flood arches built into the parapet.

A Thomas Horsey - that name again - the rector of West Lydford from 1657, was accused of being 'a drunkard, a quarreller, a constant gamester, a prophaner of the Lord's Day and an abusive man in language with much more personal wickedness'. He was noted for his persecution of the Quakers in the area.

On the right at Combe Hill Farm is a 200 year old cider barn; the press and other equipment being on site until very recently.

SECTION 4

On the track by the junction with Cotton's Lane there is a WWII Anderson shelter, nearly covered in ivy, in the garden on the right hand side.

The B3153 was adopted by the Langport, Somerton and Castle Cary Turnpike Trust in 1753. From the 19th century it has been known as the Cary Road. Keinton Mandeville was Chintune at Doomsday. Mandeville, which was added later, was the name of the Norman French landowner. Until recently the main economic activity here was the quarrying of blue lias stone used for building and ornamental work throughout Somerset.

About eight houses up from the crossing point on the B3153, on the right hand side of the High Street, there is a plaque marking the home of Sir Henry Irving the actor and playwright, born here in 1838. The first actor to be knighted, his statue stands outside the National Portrait Gallery in London's West End. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. A long way from a small Mendip village!

There is a Post Office here and a shop which is open on Sundays.