

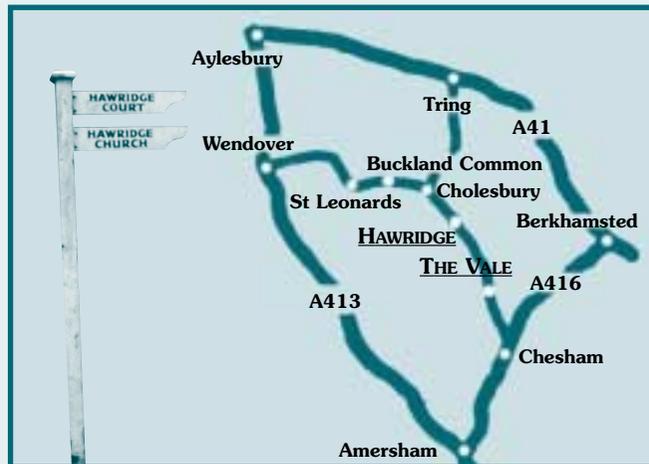
The Parish of Cholesbury-cum-St

Leonards in Buckinghamshire can be found to the north-west of Chesham. It stretches almost 4½ miles and at its highest point rises to over 230m within the Chiltern Hills, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There is evidence of prehistoric settlements and the area is mentioned in 8th century records. The four 'hilltop villages' that make up the present-day Parish (Buckland Common, Cholesbury, Hawridge and St Leonards) evolved during Saxon times from upland pastureland of so called 'strip-parishes' associated with villages downhill in the Aylesbury Vale, subsequently becoming detached hamlets and then villages. Together with the outlying areas of Braziers End, Heath End, Lanes End and The Vale they have constituted the civil parish since 1934.

Manors and Field Systems At the time of William I, the lowest level of administrative unit was the manor. Although these predated the Norman Conquest the effect of the Domesday Book was the reassignment via royal patronage of most manorial properties. During the medieval period the existence of open or common fields was typical in this part of the Chilterns. These were cultivated on a communal basis although tenants of the manor worked the Lord's land in addition to their own 'strips'. Fields not in manorial ownership were known as closes and they were usually enclosed by hedges. Woodland was valuable as it provided fuel and building material and could support swine.

Much of the land in The Vale was organised on the medieval open-field system with common fields and narrow strips farmed individually. The terraces seen towards the end of this walk, comprising steep banks with wide hedges, are remnants of this method of cultivation, once common in this area.

DIRECTIONS



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The support of the following is appreciated in the making of this leaflet:

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards:-

Local History Group

Millennium Committee

Parish Map Artists

The Walking Team and Field Name Advisers

The Landlord of The Black Horse Inn

Design - Roland Carlin - info@rcadesign.co.uk

Production - The Print Centre, Chesham

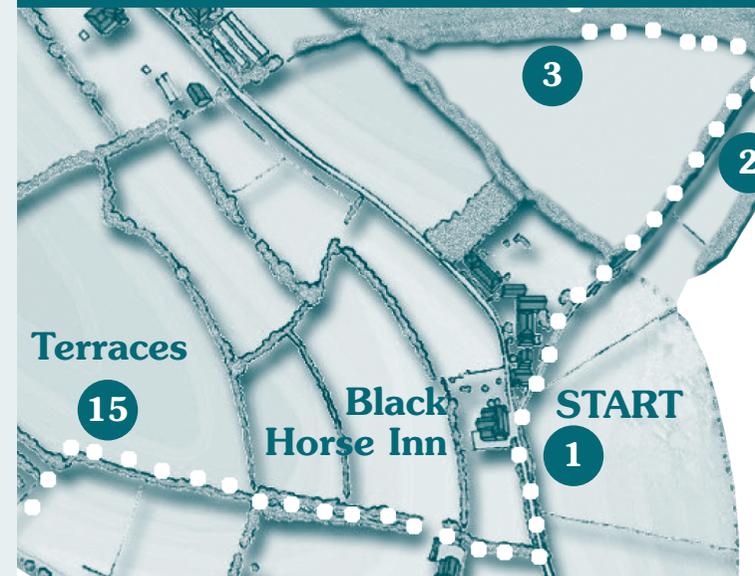


How to contact us - For further information about this walk and the Local History Group please contact us on 01494 758890 or visit our website at

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Jubilee Walks in the Hilltop Villages



4 THE VALE & HAWRIDGE MOUNTAIN



Time: 2½ to 3 hrs
Distance: 4 miles or 6 km

Jubilee Walks in the Hilltop Villages

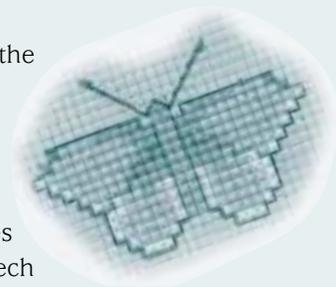
This is the fourth in a series of walks produced to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II in 2002 and the 40th Anniversary of the Local History Group. These walks aim to illustrate the local and natural history of the Parish. A particular feature of this walk is the continuity of ancient rights and customs in present day life in the parish.

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards

Local History Group was founded in 1962 to stimulate interest in the Hilltop Villages. There is a monthly programme of talks from October to May. The group also carries out research and maintains an archive of items of historical interest. New members and visitors are always welcome.

The Wildlife in this part of the Chilterns is typical of its rural character and the relatively large areas of woodland, heath and scrub habitats that survive.

Amongst the larger mammals foxes and muntjac deer abound. The beech woods support a large population of grey squirrels and there is much evidence of badger activity. Rabbits are everywhere and hares may be seen 'boxing' in open fields in Spring. The glis glis or edible dormouse, introduced by the Romans, finds its way into the roof space of many houses. At nightfall, bats leave their roost to feed on nocturnal insects. The red kite, re-introduced elsewhere in the Chilterns, is now seen overhead. At least one pair of barn owls patrols the field edges on early summer evenings. Typical Chiltern butterflies which benefit from unimproved meadows include Chalk Hill Blues and Marbled Whites. The clay-lined ponds provide a natural habitat for frogs, toads and newts.



Beating the Bounds is a custom that originated in Britain at least 2000 years ago evolving from the integration of distinct Pagan, Saxon and Christian traditions. Part of reinforcing Anglo Saxon charters involved perambulation of manorial or civil lands once a year on 'gangen days' (from the Norse 'to walk'). When literacy was not widespread, these annual inspections served to ensure boundaries were known by local people and land was not appropriated by neighbours. In the 9th century the Christian Liturgy incorporated these customs as part of Rogentide (from the Latin 'to intercede').

In the original ceremonies boundary marks were beaten with 'rods' or 'wands' made of birch or willow with the bark removed exposing the white wood beneath. The English folk-song "Stripping The Willow" is a reference to these practices. Until recently adolescent boys might also be 'switched', i.e. beaten with the willow wands or thrown over hedges or into ponds. Alternatively, as a painful reminder they might have been held upside down and have their heads 'bumped' on a marker stone. Hence the expression 'Beating the Bounds'.



The location where three or more parish boundaries met was particularly significant to Christians and the sign of the crucifix might be cut into the turf. It is thought that Nut Hazel Cross in this parish might signify one such local site.

The custom was revived in these villages in 1974, the 40th anniversary of the civil parish. It has occurred as a decennial celebration since then, with a special 'Beating' for the Silver Jubilee in 1977.

For a fuller account of Beating the Bounds visit the Local History Group Website.

The Black Horse Inn

is probably one of the oldest pubs in the parish, dating from the 1600s. Until 1952 the only lighting was provided by oil lamps. Today visitors have a choice between bumping into the low beam or the incumbent poltergeist!



Hawridge Court is enclosed within a circular earthwork which has been dated variously, either as Bronze Age or as a medieval construction. The original part of the Court was a 16th century timber framed Tudor cottage occupied periodically by the Lords of the Manors of Hawridge and Cholesbury. Additional buildings were constructed around 1700.

St Mary's Church was first recorded in 1227.



During the 17th century it fell into decay and was then fully restored in 1856 by William White, re-using the original flint-and-brick materials. It has retained its 13th century circular font. In 1644 Cromwell ordered that church organs be removed. Churches then relied on bands comprising local musicians to provide accompaniment until

organs were reintroduced in the 19th century. A bassoon made around 1800 and played in Hawridge church is now in Aylesbury Museum.

Vale Road which connects Hawridge to Chesham was constructed during the 19th century and follows the original course of a seasonal bourne and is notorious for its frequent flooding.

The pumping station at Nut Hazel Cross was built by Bucks Water Company on the site of an earlier waterworks.