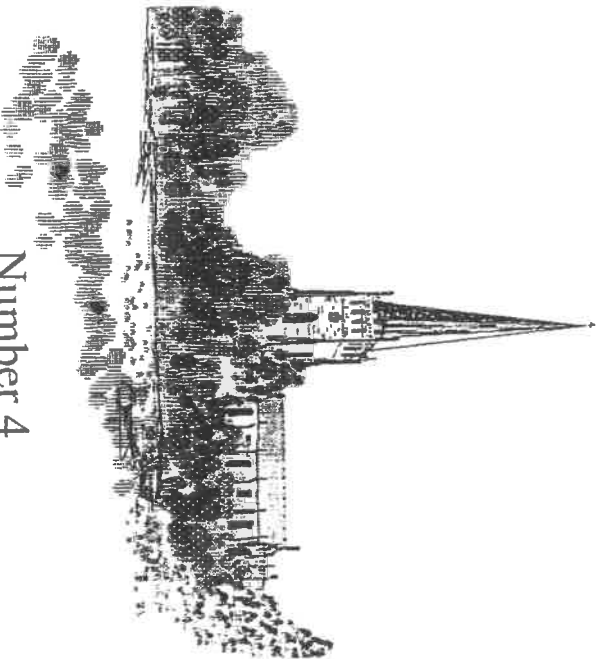


COLESHILL CIVIC SOCIETY

WALKS AROUND COLESHILL



Number 4
Shustoke Church, Reservoir,
Hill Farm, Dingle Lane.



Countryside Service

Countryside Service

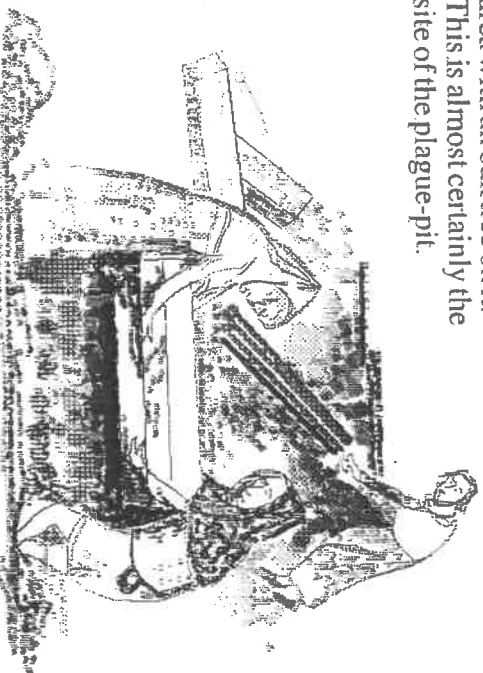
WALK 4. SHUSTOKE CHURCH, RESERVOIR,
HILLFARM DINGLELANE, BRIXHILL LANE.

Time taken: 1½ hours.

We begin at Shustoke Church and, if you have travelled by car, you may park in the former playground of Shustoke Free School, which used to be located at Church End. Before you go through the kissing gate in the corner of the churchyard wall, you may like to reflect on the curious fact that Shustoke village is some distance from its Church.

One statute mile to be precise - for that was the distance, laid down by law, for rebuilding a settlement devastated by the Plague. If you look opposite the gates of the Churchyard, you will see a small grassy area with an oak tree on it.

This is almost certainly the site of the plague-pit.



Although there is no documentary evidence of the pit's site (perhaps the only person able to write also died), there are plenty of other comparable sites. For example, each settlement buried its own dead, close to a churchyard gate, but in unconsecrated ground.

After that sombre introduction, let's get back to our walk. Go through the kissing gate in the churchyard wall into Church Field. You are now almost

almost certainly standing on the site of the former village. The road was an extension of the existing one that leads to the car park, and the path you must take is roughly the line of the old road. Follow the path to the kissing gate you can see beside the main road. Take care as you cross, turn left and walk a few yards up the hill, past the petrol depot.

Next to the depot you will see a stone building, in rather poor condition, but with a varied history. It began as the dwelling of the local blacksmith, and his workshop was the adjoining brick building. Until recently the Smithy sign was over the door, and the Smiths equipment still in place. Later it was used as a coffin shop by the publican of the Griffin Inn - he was also the local undertaker. A local farmer used it as a cattle shed, then a builder used the premises as a store, and finally a fencing manufacturer started business there.

Just past the brick building you will see a stile, which you cross over into an arable field. Walk down the headland, beside the fencing of the petrol depot, to a magnificent old oak tree at the bottom corner of the field. The path follows the headland round to the left, beside the hedge bordering the Nuneaton railway line. Your route meanders attractively, in and out of clumps of bushes, to a small stream and a two plank bridge.

Cross the stream into a very large field, rising steeply to a line of green painted storage tanks, partly hidden by a screen of trees. Follow the path over another two plank bridge, you will arrive at a large tunnel under the railway. Ignore the stile in the fence that will take you through the tunnel. Instead, carry on straight ahead. You are soon rewarded with a view of the River Bourne, emerging from between the lovely twin-arched bridge, carrying the railway over the river.

The path follows the river through some very attractive scenery and you may be tempted to pause here to admire the view.

The path leads you towards a small wood, on the left, with two fences in front of it. Cross over the stile in the first fence and turn left. You are now walking between the fences, and no doubt hearing the sound of water cascading over the weir, behind the second fence. There was once a mill at this site and the weir formed part of the millrace. Walk beside the fence and millrace to a stile and waymarker; turn right and cross the stile, on to a bridge over the race. You may like to note that this is where one of the return paths leads.

You will see that the water runs over a second weir and turns right into a large concrete pipe. Follow the path a little further and you see the pipe emerging in the middle of the wood. This is the site of the old millpond, now replaced by a large concrete basin that guides the water into the top reservoir. Many years ago this place had a magical quality. It was possible to see the old mill wheels in the water and traces of the mill's foundations. Sadly nothing remains.

Pass through the wood, back to the riverside. Do not cross the stile on your left (This is another point where the return path joins). You will notice the tree planting that has taken place on the far side of the river. This area will be quite attractive in years to come. Pass quickly by the unsightly tanks on the left, and the path leads on past an electric pump and water sluiceway, both used for water extraction into the reservoir. Continue past the water company house on your left, and follow the path round to the right. It passes over a brick bridge and runs beside a pine wood to the railway line.

Our route does not cross the line, but turns left, through a small gate, on to a path between the railway and the wood. The top reservoir and the river are visible on the left, through the trees, and on the right, over the railway, the fields rise to the houses on the Tamworth Road in Whittacre. You will come to a metal stile on the right. Cross over the stile and descend the steps into a small tunnel.

If you have children with you, be prepared if they discover the echo! At the other side of the tunnel cross over the stile into a small, new plantation. You will see a second stile which you must cross into a large pasture that normally has horses in it, grazing peacefully. The path is quite steep and leads slightly diagonally to the left, aiming just to the left of Hill House Farm. At the top of the field you will find a stile beside a drinking trough. The ground could be muddy here so you may prefer to use the gate, about 20 yards to the left. Whichever route you take, it will bring you out into the lane where you turn left.

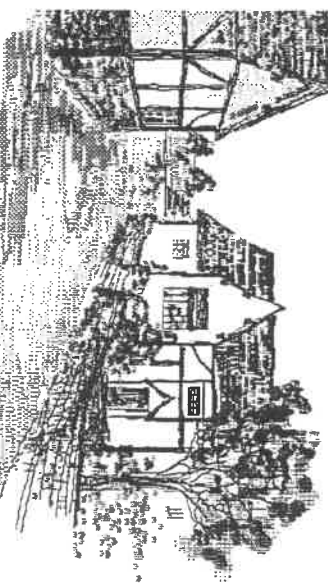
Walk a few yards down the lane and cross the stile on the right hand side of the road. Cross over the stile into a small field. A finger-post indicates a sharp left turn, but walk diagonally across to a second stile in the fence on your left. You will be in a very large pasture, which may have horses in it. Follow the path slightly to the left, and you will arrive at the stile in the far hedge, about 50 yards from the corner.

Cross the stile and follow the headland for its full length, with the well-kept hedge on your left. The field swings round to the left, but your route is straight on, to a stile that give access to Dingle lane.

Turn left in Dingle Lane and walk down to the cross-roads. You will see College Farm on your right - not a working farm now, but beautifully kept, with stables instead of cowsheds. Dingle Lane is a typical, quiet Warwickshire byway. As you walk along you will catch glimpses of a timber-framed building, a few hundred yards away on your right.

You may think that you are looking at a magnificent medieval building, but take another look. Curiously, it is very modern, with traditionally constructed oak timber frames, infilled with brick. Dingle lane takes you to the junction with Bakehouse Lane, where you turn right, but first take a look at Betteridge Farm on your left.

Betteridge Farm is a beautifully restored building. It is the work of the owner, John Brown, a builder, who is also responsible for many other fine restorations and new buildings in the district.



A few yards down Bakehouse Lane, you will find some steps and a waymark in the hedge on your left. Climb the steps, and the stile in front of you, and follow the fence of the Dingle. This is a farm that has had its outbuildings converted into holiday accommodation, without spoiling the overall appearance of the group. You will have a good view of the farm as you follow the path round to a narrow corner, between two fences. Cross over the stile into the pasture and walk along the headland. The hedge here is very old, and like so many in the area, it is on a bank. These banks indicated the demarcation between holdings. Continue until you come to where the next fence has a double-step stile. Cross over and you will see a large stag-headed oak ahead of you. Just past the oak there is another double-step stile. Turn left and cross the stile, but ignore the double stile and plank bridge that invites you to turn immediately right. Instead, continue on your path, keeping the ditch and hedge on your right. You are now walking on Centenary Way, one of the Long Distance Paths, and the vast arable field stretches away to your left.

When you reach a drainage ditch, cross over on the two plank bridge and continue. As you walk, the hedge becomes broader, until it finally gives way to a hazel nut spinney. Many farms had these spinneys, which were copied to construct hurdles and make handles for farm implements.

Ahead of you there is a Centenary waymarker, bidding you to cross a plank bridge over the ditch, and continue the walk on the other side of the hedge. Cross the bridge and note the River Authority warnings. There are old sewage treatment ponds in the area, and you will be wise to keep to the designated paths.

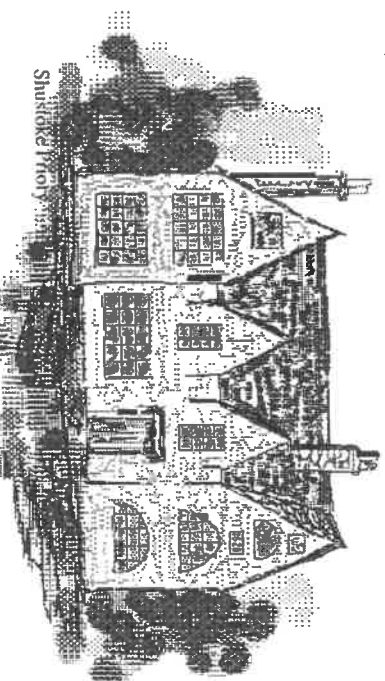
The path swings round to the left and brings you by the side of the Tamworth railway line, with Station Road beyond. Walk along the path towards the iron bridge. Croxalls Farm is in the distance on your left.

The Croxall family were probably the greatest benefactors of Shustoke. The farm is where the family started, but later they built a great house nearby - Shustoke House. To all intents and purpose, the Croxalls were lords of the manor.

Climb the steps beside the iron bridge and cross over the stile on to Station Road, don't cross the bridge, but turn left and walk a few yards to a stile that you will see on the other side of the road. Cross over the stile into an enormous arable field, and walk along the headland. After a short distance you will see a stile on your right, cross over and you will find yourself in an area full of wildlife. Walk straight ahead, and you will eventually arrive at an iron stile on to the railway, and another one on the opposite side. Take great care as you cross the line, and having climbed over the second stile, turn right and walk along the headland.

The path leads you to a Centenary Way waymarker post, directing you to the left. Follow the well-defined path, it is the old route used by the Shustoke villagers to walk to the railway station. The path takes you across the field to a well-built bridge over the River Bourne, then cuts diagonally across the field towards the main road. As you walk you will see the reservoir embankment on your left, and the barns and cottage of Shustoke House, where the last of the Croxall family lived, in the distance on your right. When you arrive at the main road, turn left and walk the short distance to the

Shustoke village. There is a good footpath into the village, so very little danger from passing traffic. Even though the distance you have to walk is short, there is plenty to look at. You will pass a large pond on your right, full of life at different times of the year, and another, smaller, pond on your left. You will not fail to notice Croft Farm, on your right. It is a lovely sixteenth century timber-framed building. Also on the right, partly hidden by a white painted house, you will be able to see Shustoke Manor. This small area is alive with history - The Plough Inn and the Priory on Shustoke Green are Grade 2 listed buildings.



Shustoke Priory

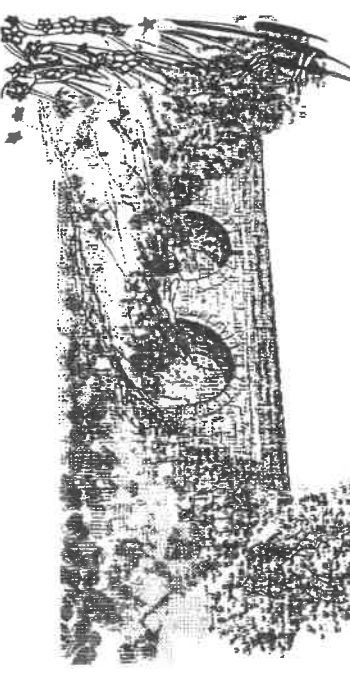
In the village walk to the junction with Brixhill Lane, on the left. Turn left into the lane and you are rewarded with a lovely view of Shustoke Priory - a stone building, and Rose Cottages on your right. Brixhill Lane is a very quiet byway and may be the original road to Furnace End.

Your route takes you past the sailing club, which is a fever of activity at weekends. The road eventually divides and you take the right hand fork, which leads you up into the field. Continue along the headland and enjoy the wonderful views across the reservoir, to the hills beyond. The path continues, past the Victorian Water Company House on the left, and eventually brings you to two stiles. Here you have a choice: Either to carry on straight ahead, following the path that winds alongside the stream, or to turn left.

If you decide to take the path straight ahead, you will follow a winding course, following the river, and skirting large bushes. This route will bring you back to the path beside the wood that once contained the old water mill.

If you decide to turn left, you will cross a stile on to the road again. Follow the road round the northern bank of the top reservoir, and you will arrive back at the stile, close to the start of our walk, that you did not cross.

Whichever choice you make, it will bring you back to the path that you started on. It is now a simple matter of retracing the short distance, past the picturesque railway bridge, and the old Smithy, then crossing the road into Church field, and arriving back at the car park beside St. Gilbert's Church.



The River Bourne

This is undoubtedly one of the prettiest walks in the area. The sight and sound of water is never far away, and the wildlife that inhabits the countryside around the reservoir is in abundance. It is certainly a walk to repeat several times a year, so that you can savour the variety of colour and character that is typical of Warwickshire.

