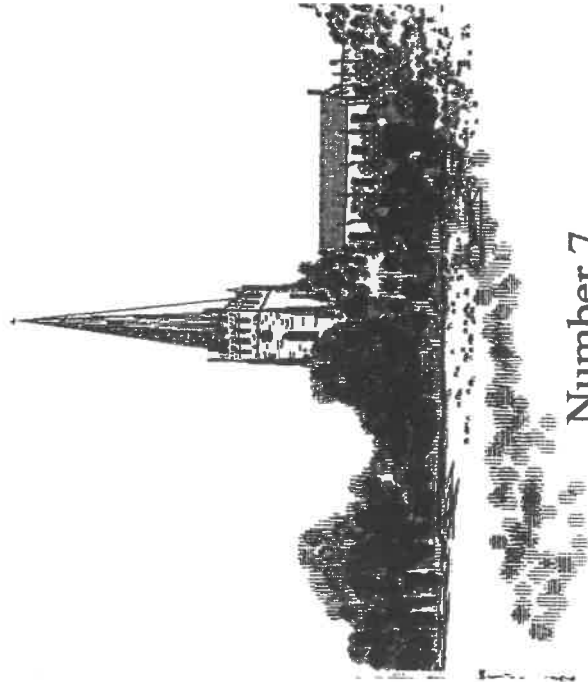


COLESHILL CIVIC SOCIETY

WALKS AROUND COLESHILL



Number 7

Colesleys/Duke Bridge/Hawkeswel



Countrywide Service

COLESLEYS/DUKE BRIDGE/HAWKESWELL

O.S. Map Sheet SP28/38 1:25000
Distance: 3 miles (5 km)
Time: 2 Hours

Start this walk at the junction of Maxstoke Lane and High Street. Walk east, down Maxstoke Lane to the last of the row of houses on your right. You will then see a tarmacked driveway between that house and the fields beyond.

Turn right into this driveway, with the field hedge on your left, pass a gateway on your left and continue on a two-track gravel drive, with a wooden fence of the gardens of a new housing estate on your right.

At the end of this drive you will see a painted iron gate which leads into the grounds of St Gerards Hospital. Immediately to the left of this gateway is a stile with a waymarker.

Cross this stile into an arable field with extensive views to the east across the Blythe valley. The river Blythe is one of the few rivers in England designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is rich in fauna and flora and the water is pure enough to be extracted for drinking supplies at Whitacre.

The line of the right-of-way crosses diagonally to the right, across the field to the bottom right-hand corner. In the corner you will see a short section of post and rail fencing containing another stile. The field may be under crop at certain times of the

the year and the path difficult to see. Line-of-sight walking to the south-east will bring you to the stile and waymarker.

Cross over the stile into the next field and turn right. Follow the hedgeline for 10 to 15 metres to the corner of the field where the hedge gives way to a short section of wooden post and rail fencing with a stile and waymarker.

Cross the stile into a large arable field, turn immediately left and walk eastwards along the side of the field; keep the hedgerow on your left hand side.

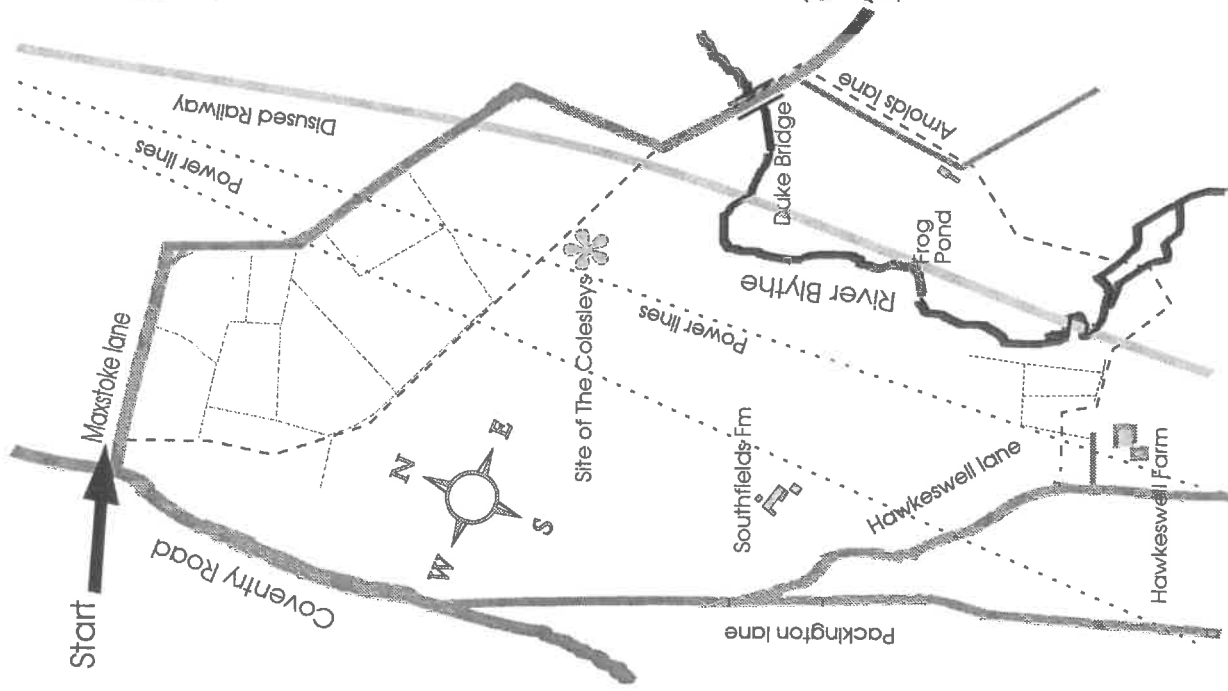
You will see that the hedgerow is largely hawthorn, with some elderberry and wild rose interspersed with two or three standard oak trees. To the right, in the distance on a slight rise, you will see Southfields Farm.

As you approach the top of the field, you will see a small gap in the hedge with a stile and waymarker. Cross the stile into a large open field; keep straight on and head for the right-hand side of a small reedy field pond, surrounded by hawthorns. The pond is almost obliterated but still marked on the O.S. map.

As you cross the field you will see a square mound on your right. This is the site of the 'Colesleys' - a Georgian farmhouse that was demolished earlier in the century. Several farm buildings survived until quite recently, including the 'Haunted Barn'. Part of the old redbrick barn wall can still be seen.

Cross the new stile in the barbed wire fence, just to the right of the pond, and continue diagonally left to another stile. Cross this stile and keep straight on, keeping the hedge on your

right; you will notice hawthorn and blackthorn growing in this hedge. You are now walking in the former driveway to the Colesleys. Walk eastwards and the path leads towards a bridge.



The sandstone-built bridge was originally quite an imposing structure. It crossed over the old Whitacre-Hampton Railway line which opened in 1839. Over the years stone has been robbed from the sides and those of you with children should be aware that there is an unprotected drop of 10 to 15 metres to the old railway track.

The path leads straight on, through a small field to a gateway which opens on to Maxstoke lane.

At this point, if you wish, you can turn left and follow Maxstoke lane back to Coleshill. However, to continue our walk you should turn right and follow the roadway. Although there is no footpath alongside the road, there is an adequate, if banked, grass verge on the left.

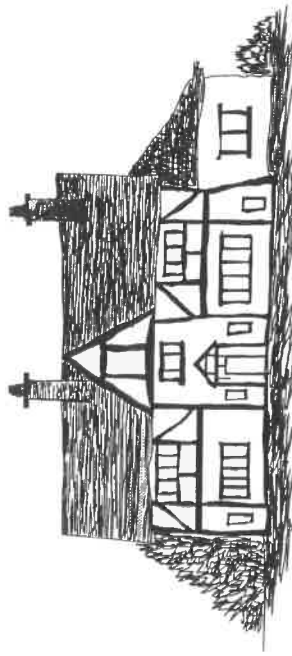
Walk along Maxstoke lane for about 100 metres and you will come to Duke Bridge. The bridge is a seventeenth century sandstone structure of four arches. It was widened on its eastern side in 1967. Two hundred metres downstream was Maxstoke Mill and you can still see the mill-race, also known as a leet.

Why not pause here for a few minutes and watch the river Blythe bubbling its way towards the east. When the water level is low, trout and other fish can be seen, and not surprisingly this stretch of the river is very popular with local anglers, including moorhens, mallards and the occasional Kingfisher. Cross over the bridge, Maxstoke lane curves round to the left by a garage. Just before the garage you should take the fork to the right down Arnolds lane. As you walk southwards notice the deep, water-filled ditches alongside, while the hedgerows, particularly on the right, contain a wide variety of species, including

grey willow and alder. This section of Arnolds lane formed the eastern boundary of the great tract of open meadow land that ran along the River Blythe, beyond the hedge to your right

As you continue down Arnolds lane you will pass 'Duke End Cottage' and next to it the beautiful timber-framed 'Frog Pond Cottage'.

Just past 'Frog Pond Cottage' there is a sharp left-hand bend. Your path continues straight ahead at this bend into a delightful fordrift, or green lane, that leads down past the garage of 'Frog Pond Cottage'



The lane beyond the cottage is lined with old willows and oaks. The rather overgrown hedgerows also contain alder, willow, blackthorn, hazel and broom. Two frog-ponds lie either side of the lane, with banks full of bluebells and campion in may and flag irises in June. The flood-meadows of the Blythe lie to your right. The ground here can be quite boggy at times, and the grass

grass and undergrowth flourish under such damp conditions. In May the meadows, leys and cottage are a mass of wild flowers. You will also notice Nature attempting to reclaim a spoilheap of building rubble.

For a short length, the track twists and turns until it reaches a small 'T' junction. Turn right and almost immediately cross the stile on the left hand hedge, then turn right along the hedge into the corner of the field. Cross the wooden bridge and the stile. Ahead of you there is an iron bridge over the river Blythe. Walk across the small paddock to reach the



The iron footbridge

This is an ideal place to rest if you wish, and absorb one of the highlights of the walk. It seems quite unspoilt with the willowed banks of the Blythe. At this point the river divides. The first footbridge crosses over the northern channel. It seems likely that this is man-made and represents a mill-race.

The late Eric Miller noted that, at low water, pieces of timber framing from a demolished building could be seen in the silt of the river bed to

to the west. It is probably the site of a wire-mill that produced nails in the last century.

Cross over the first bridge, to a small, grassy, and often waterlogged island. In front of you is the second footbridge over the original course of the Blythe. Here the river is narrow and more meandering, with larger, older willow trees along its banks. The parish boundary of Coleshill follows this section of the river.

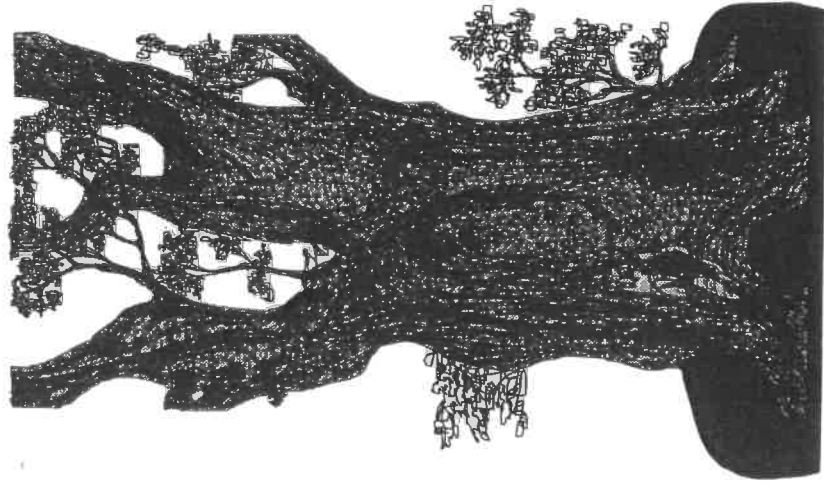
Cross over the footbridge and walk straight across an old pasture field with reedy grass tussocks, which indicate damp conditions. Cross the new stile, then the concrete beams over a stream at the field edge into a pasture field. Follow the waymarker to the right, you will see a tall thick hedgerow growing alongside the old disused railway. On the way through this field you can see a magnificent oak tree on your right that is one of a line of oaks that mark the course of an old hedge line. Head towards the thick hedgerow and you will see another tall thick hedgerow, growing alongside the disused railway. Head towards the hedgerow and you will see a break in the hedge, with a stile.

Cross over the stile and up the embankment of the old railway line, but do not go along it; instead, cross the new double stile into the corner of a large, arable field.

The path leads straight ahead, with the hedgerow on your right-hand side. The ground rises slightly and ahead of you are the buildings of Hawkeswell Farm. The hedgerow here is tall and overgrown.

The path leads straight ahead, with the hedgerow on your right hand side. The ground rises slightly, and ahead of you are the buildings of Hawkeswell Farm. The hedgerow here is tall and overgrown. Although of no great age it contains a magnificent oak, probably over three hundred years old, with a gnarled, burred trunk that could have hidden King Charles I.

How many walkers have passed this old oak I wonder? What tales the tree could tell!



The Gnarled Old Oak

As you approach the top of the field the hedgerow on your right gives way to the grassy slopes of an old marl pit, surrounded by standard oaks and ash trees.

Look back the way you have come and admire the magnificent view of the Warwickshire countryside.



Magnificent Warwickshire

Each modernisation is under way in the backyard of Hawkeswell Farm, so keep to the left and pass all the buildings on your left hand side. The path becomes fenced on both sides and leads to Hawkeswell Lane, where there is a stile.

Just ahead of you is the growing hill of the Kingdon Tip, a very modern and efficiently landscaped enterprise, which is advertised as being environmentally friendly. Its owners encourage visitors by prior appointment.

At the stile you may, if you wish, turn left and walk down the lane for a few metres. Then turn right over a stile into a wide green lane leading past 'Loaches Rough', into Packington Lane and back to Coleshill.

Our route, however, turns right and follows Hawkeswell Lane northwest back to Coleshill. You will notice that the hedgerows on both sides of the lane contain an abundance of holly, as well as the more usual blackthorn, hawthorn and a host of other species including wild damson and hazel.

The presence of holly often indicates a very old hedgerow, and in this case, combined with the meandering nature of the lane itself, the evidence suggests that this is a very ancient track that linked Coleshill and the small farming hamlet that once thrived at Hawkeswell.

During the summer months you will notice that the base of the hedge is, in places, filled with bracken, a reminder that a large tract of the southern part of Coleshill parish lay, until the last century, as open heathland providing rough grazing for cattle and sheep.

Hawkeswell Lane itself makes a very pleasant walk, although during wet weather sections of it can become flooded. Notice Coopers Cottage on your left. A cottage at least 200 years old and virtually unaltered externally. The lane leads on to Packington Lane, which takes you past Southfields Farm, to the junction of Packington Lane and Coventry Road. At the end of Packington Lane, notice the beautiful timber-framed thatched cottage on the left. In Coventry Road, opposite the junction, you will see a double cottage which must be over 200 years old. Turn right at the junction and head towards Coleshill town centre.

As you walk you will be able to compare the old with the new, original and modernised, and observe at first hand how Coleshill has evolved over the centuries. The Town Centre is a meld of ancient and modern, with an ancestry that probably predates Roman occupation.

What you wear for this walk is entirely up to you, however, waterproof footwear is advisable in all weather; and remember that after a period of heavy rain the river Blythe can flood, making the route across the river quite impossible.

This is a lovely walk, best enjoyed during the summer and autumn months. But remember to leave nothing but footprints and take nothing but memories.

Happy Rambling!