

U3A HISTORIC PATHWAYS PROJECT

BARKHAM

This walk of about three miles takes in some of the significant buildings of the village and a variety of paths and lanes around the parish. The paths are clearly marked; strong footwear is advised for a few sections which may be wet or muddy. There are four stiles and several veteran trees along the way.

Start at Barkham Church (Grid Ref. SU783664) where there is parking outside the churchyard wall. Refreshments obtainable from the Bull Inn, passed towards the end of the walk.

Barkham in the Domesday Book

The manor is recorded in a Charter of 952 and in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it was in the Hundred of Charlton and belonged to the King. In area it was 3 hides (about 360 acres) and was occupied by 6 villeins (unfree tenants) and 4 bordars (unfree cottagers) and their families, a population of around 50, and boasted 3 ploughs. There is no mention of a church or chapel. It was valued at £4 in the time of King Edward and £3 at the time of survey.

1. The Church of St. James

The first record of a priest in Barkham is in 1220, when there was probably a wooden chapel on the site of the present church. By 1315 a permanent church had been built, dedicated to St. James the Apostle. This was rebuilt in the 1870s and extended in the 1880s in a medieval style as we see today. John Walter III of Bearwood paid for the chancel and transepts at a cost of £1800. Inside there are an ancient wooden effigy and the remains of a doorway from the demolished church, and outside the graves of two notable rectors, David Davies (1782-1819) and Peter Ditchfield (1886-1930).

2. The moated site

This was originally the site of the Barkham manor house, which survives as a timber framed open-hall house of the late 15th century. It is a listed Grade 2 building and the moat is a scheduled monument. In recent years the building was converted to a pair of cottages used for farm workers, and farm buildings were located on the site of the present car park.

3. The lime tree avenue

The hedgerows in the fields round here were walked a few years ago to estimate their ages using the technique of counting tree species in a 30m length. Results show that most of the hedge boundaries contain 4 or more different species of hardwood, and using the rule of thumb of 100 years for each species to become established, suggest that the fields were laid out in the 17th century or earlier. The lime avenue, best seen from further up the field, was planted by John Walter III in the 1880s. It is absent from an 1871 map but drawn on the 1911 OS map of the area.

John Walter also diverted the route of Edney's Hill Lane, formerly a drift road, to pass north of the farm and to continue straight along the parish boundary to Mortimer's Lodge Farm; previously the lane had taken a dog leg course towards Brook Farm then turning right to Mortimer's Lodge Farm. The hedge along the latter part of this route was found to contain at least 7 species and could have been planted as early as the 14th century. The Barkham Enclosure map of 1821 clearly shows the original course of this road.

4. The Coombes

This area of woodland, which is separate from the Bearwood Estate, is marked as Barewood Common on the Pride and Luckombe map of Berkshire, dated 1790. It was part of the extensive Windsor Forest and in 1821 is recorded as Crown Allotment.

5. Barkham Rectory

Until the 1870s the Rector lived in the Parsonage House but the site of the dwelling is uncertain. About 1785 David Davies replaced 'a miserable cottage' with a new house costing £400 and this was replaced by this large Victorian Rectory in the 1880s, built on a new site. The building cost £3000, paid for by John Walter III, and is reminiscent in style of the public buildings in Wokingham, also built by the philanthropic owner of The Times. The Old Rectory is a fine building in Flemish bond, now a private house.

6. Barkham Manor

The present building dates from the end of the 18th century and is listed Grade 2. The stew (fish) ponds we pass, and the 450 year old plane tree in the grounds, are indications that there may have been a manor house on the site from the 16th century. The medieval manor was sited next to the church.

7. The Bull Inn

The present building was erected in 1728 as an inn with attached forge, but there may have been an earlier inn or alehouse on the site. In the 18th and 19th centuries it was the location for hearings of the manorial Court Baron and for dinners where the tenants paid their tithes to the Rector. In 1982 the smithy, which had been a working enterprise until then, was incorporated into the inn as part of its dining area. The building is listed Grade 2.

I am indebted to the staff at the Berkshire Record Office for assistance in locating the maps of Barkham parish and to 'Barkham: A History' by David French and Janet Firth for much of the historical detail above.