

U3A Thames Valley Network - Historic Pathways Project

Finchampstead Walk

The Roman road from London to Silchester (Calleva), locally called The Devil's Highway, crosses just north of the walk running east to west and is still clearly marked on OS maps. Archaeological digs suggest the highway was there by 130 – 140AD when a Romano-British settlement existed in Finchampstead.

Alongside the Highway is the Queen's Oak (1), the only inn of this name in the country. Stories of Roman remains beneath its floors have led to its claim of being the oldest pub in the country. It could well stand on the site of a Roman hostelry set up to service pagan pilgrims.

On and around the green below St James' church are 3 stones, the first recording the planting of an Oak tree in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee – the inn which was previously named the White Horse was obviously renamed in association with this event; the second is a memorial of Queen Victoria's death in 1901; the third celebrates Queen Elizabeth II's golden jubilee in 2002 (2).

Approximately 1¼ miles from the start of the walk, the route crosses a driveway and then continues along a fenced path. Looking half right across the field, you can see what looks like a small stone gazebo. This shelters a roman milestone, which was transplanted from the nearby roman road and preserved here (3).

Longwater Lane (now only partially accessible to the public) was the original route south from Finchampstead to the Blackwater River, which is also the county boundary with Hampshire. There was no continuation of this lane on the opposite bank and travellers had to walk west along a stretch of the river bed - 'Long Water' – before they were able to access a lane on the Hampshire side (4).

As you proceed along Longwater Lane to the junction with Wysehill Path you will pass a plaque attached to a footpath signpost (5). This is where, on November 6th 1501, Prince Arthur is supposed to have been hunting on the Ridges, with his father, King Henry VII, when he heard of the arrival, in England, of his fiancée, [Catherine of Aragon](#). They immediately rode out to meet her, but found their way barred by a party of Spanish cavaliers who insisted that, according to Spanish tradition, the Prince could not look upon his bride until after they were married. The King would have none of this, rode on to Dogmersfield Park (Hampshire), where the lady was staying, and arranged for her coach to ride along the Finchampstead Ridges, where Catherine raised her veil for her awaiting groom. The marriage was thus cursed and Arthur died not long after exchanging vows.

The original St James' church building (6) was created by Sir Alard Banestra with the help of monks from Reading Abbey and local Villeins and surfs, etc. It is thought to have been started in the 1120's and completed in 1134. Simple Saxon Churches were improved by the later Normans, who engaged in an extensive building programme throughout the land and it was during this time that St. James' took its present basic form in c1150. Inside, the font is older than any other part of the building. A mason probably crafted it c1030. Looking down the aisle into the Chancel you can see the whole of the original Norman Church Nave, Chancel and Sanctuary crafted over 800 years ago. The circular shape of the Sanctuary is known as an Apse and is a rare feature in English Churches. Above the altar is a glorious stained glass window depicting the transfiguration. On the right of the Chancel is the Pulpit, which is decorated with mid 1400's tracery, probably, taken from the rood screen, which would have divided the Nave from the Chancel.