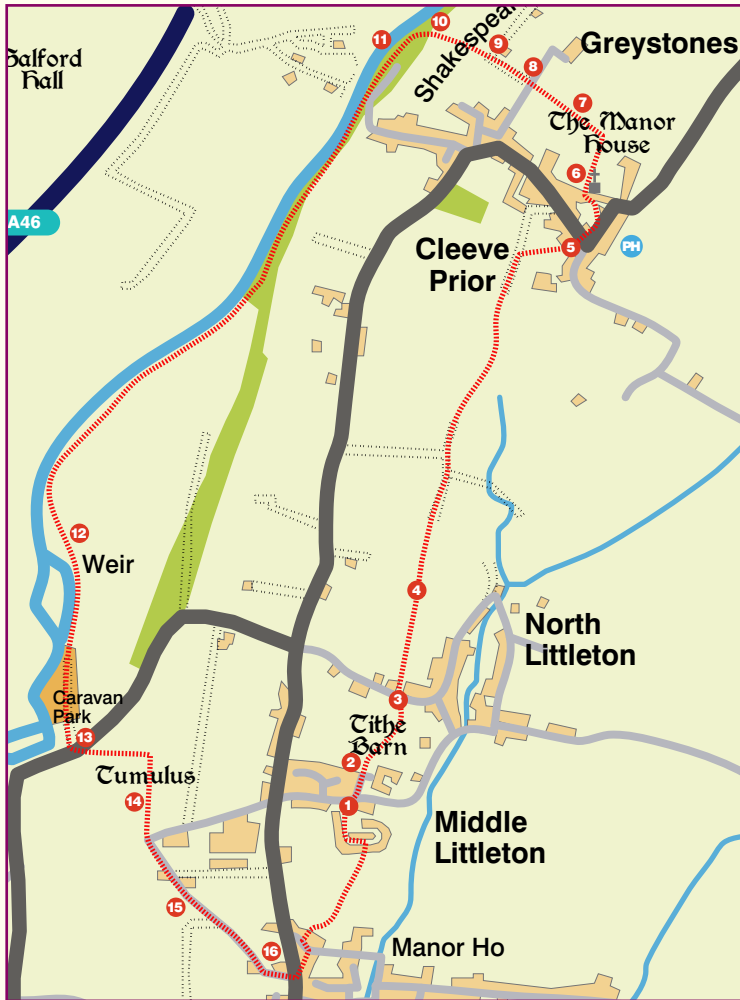


Walk 11

Middle Littleton



This is a level walk apart from one descent and a later ascent of Cleeve Hill. In between there is a leisurely stroll along the River Avon. The route from Middle Littleton to Cleeve Prior is through typical 'Vale of Evesham' countryside. Map reference of start SP 078 469.

The walk starts from Middle Littleton which is just off the B4085 Bidford-on-Avon to Badsey road, two miles north-east of Evesham. It is reached from the north and the B439 at Bidford by crossing the Avon and following the signs to Cleeve Prior and on to Middle Littleton or from the south by turning on to the B4035 and turning on to the B4085 just before the 'Round of Gras' at Badsey. Once in Middle Littleton turn into School Lane. Cars can be parked at the beginning of Manor Road, which is near the Village Hall, opposite Legion Court.

The three Littleton's – North, Middle and South – are sheltered on the west by slightly higher ground and away to the east by the Cotswold's. The Littleton's lie in one of the most important market garden districts in 'The Vale' and this walk goes through some of the market gardens, with their crops of rhubarb and thyme, onions and asparagus (known locally as 'gras'). In the 1930's there were some 3,000 small units of between three and five acres around Evesham and the same around Pershore. The break-up of the large estates in the 19th century was greatly encouraged by the acceptance of the 'Evesham Custom', whereby tenants owned the improvements they made to holdings and could realize the added value as 'ingoin' paid to the new tenant. Life in 'The Vale' was almost in another world- hard work for little return, save the freedom of working the land for oneself and being one's own boss in the open air.

1. To start, walk the few yards back to the 'T' junction and turn right into School Lane. Go around the bend to the left and when the road turns right keep straight ahead into Croft road signed to the National Trust Tithe barn.

The barn can be visited without charge between 2pm and 5pm and is still used by the farmer. Built about 1300 by the Abbey of Evesham and restored by the National Trust in 1977, it has eleven bays and is partly aisled.

2. Continue the walk by going through the gate at the end of the Croft Road, (don't turn right down to the barn unless you want to visit it) bear right across the field to two adjacent gates in the right-hand hedge. You will have a good view of the back of the tithe barn.
3. Go through the left hand (furthest) gate, and turn left keeping the hedge on the left. Carry on until you reach the road on the edge of North Littleton.
4. Cross the road and follow the track which is signposted to Cleeve Prior without turning off for 1.3 miles until you reach Cleeve Prior. Along this track, after three quarters of a mile you will cross a stile and a wooden bridge and then pass by the Severn Trent water works, eventually entering Quarry Lane into the village of Cleeve Prior.

Cleeve Prior was held in the Middle Ages by the Prior of Worcester – Prior's in contrast to the Bishop's Cleeve which was held by the Bishop of Worcester. The remains of a number of Roman period settlements have been found in the area and Cleeve Prior was one of over forty early medieval farms established on the highly productive land of 'The Vale'.

5. Go straight across the road to 'The Green' and bear right into the churchyard.

6. Bear left, following a faint path to the left past the church to a gap in a row of poplars, go through the gap into the present graveyard, cross to a gate and follow the path past a large old chestnut tree. On the right is the very fine 16th century Manor House.

7. At the end of the field cross the footbridge go through the gate. About 60 meters further on there is a gate in the left hand hedge. Go through the gate and walk across the field keeping the hedge on your right.

8. After 150 metres, at the end of the hedge go through the gate and turn left continuing until you reach a lane. (Froglands Lane).

9. Cross the lane and continue to a second crossway, keep going straight ahead until you reach the ridge.

10. On reaching the bridleway along the ridge, cross straight over through a set of upright posts to go down and round to the left following a garden fence and past a house, the path goes down through a wooded area to a wide turning area for cars near the river.

11. Here a track (Mill Lane) comes down from Cleeve Prior. Start up the track and after a few meters on the right you will see a path off right towards the river. Follow this path along the river for just over half a mile to the point where a track comes down from the left.

If you walk quietly you may see a heron, as this is one of their favourite haunts. Another bird often seen here is the kingfisher.

12. Continue to the right along the riverside passing through the ends of many long narrow fields, crossing the occasional stile. After one mile the path goes to the left of a chalet, opposite the old mill house at Harvington. Continue along the

path for 500 metres to a caravan park, walk through the caravan park and out to the road.

Along to the right is 'The Fish and Anchor Inn' and a natural weir, which strangely enough has a public right of way for people on foot along the top of it – but it is NOT to be recommended!

13. From the caravan park entrance bear left across the road to a gap in the hedge. Follow the path to the left across the field, through the gate and up to the gate at very top of the ridge. Turn right along the bridleway. There are excellent views of the river and the Vale of Evesham.

14. At the junction turn right and then left to follow the hedge on the left for ½ mile to the church at South Littleton. Cross the main road and turn left.

15. After 70 metres bear right along the front of South House, a fine Georgian building, with the old bakery opposite. Cross the beginning of Farm Lane to a footpath. This path takes you into the field which divides South and Middle Littleton.

16. Go through the gate into the field and walk diagonally across the field to a metal gate, go through the gate to a second wooden gate and pass between the houses to the road. Turn left and follow the road round to the right back to where you parked your car.

The switchback effect as you cross the field is caused by the ridges and furrows made by medieval farmers when they ploughed. It has remained unploughed ever since. Life before the 19th century was very different from that of today because most people were farmers. For example, in the 16th century the Vicar of Badsey, just down the road, was responsible for the parish bull – but in South Littleton the vicar was only responsible for the parish 'heyfur'.