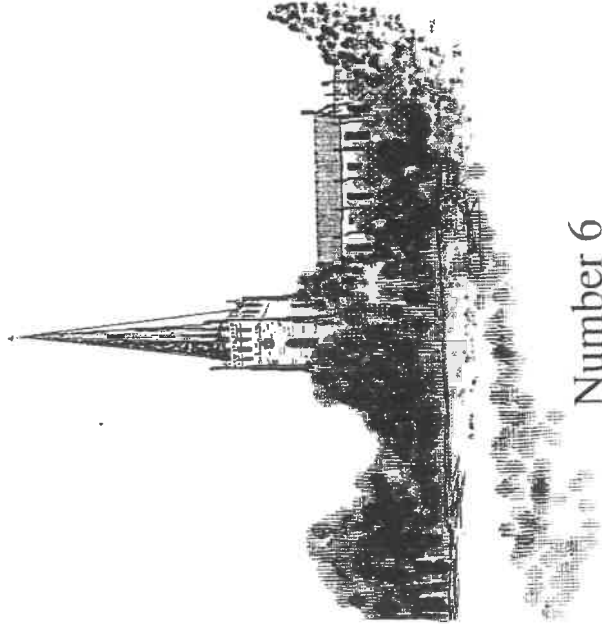


COLESHILL CIVIC SOCIETY

WALKS AROUND COLESHILL



Number 6
Church End, Shustoke, Hollyland,
Dumble Wood, Metlins.



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Countryside Service

WALK 6 CHURCH END, HOLLYLAND, DUMBLE WOOD, METLINS

Time taken: 2 hours.

This walk starts at Shustoke Church. Just past the Church gate there is a small car park where you may leave your car. The area was originally the playground of Shustoke school, which occupied the left-hand building of the group on the left, known as the Huntbach Almshouses. The car park belongs to the Almshouses, so if you see one of the occupants, please ask if they mind you leaving your car there.

The Almshouses are named after Thomas Huntbach, who erected the buildings in 1699 and gave them to the people of Shustoke and Bentley. His gift enabled the children of the villages to receive a free education, and provided the elderly poor with housing.

Before you walk back towards the road, take a look at the beautiful Church, dedicated to St Cuthbert. It is well worth a visit when you pass this way again. As you walk towards the small grassy island at the junction with Shawbury lane, you will see a stone cross on the island. This is the pinnacle of St Cuthberts, that blew off the tower in a tremendous gale some years ago. It stands as a silent reminder of nature's power.

Turn right at the island to the main road, where you turn left, down the hill towards Holliers Farm. Continue along the road, past the farm on your left and you will approach a row of small, white-painted cottages known as Tuckley's Row on your left. Immediately before you reach the cottages you will see a farm gate with a stile beside it and the familiar waymarkers. This is where you cross into the corner of a pasture that extends right back to Holliers Farm.

Head in a southerly direction along the headland, keeping the hedge that is alongside Tuckley's Row, on your right.

This leads you to a metal five-bar gate, with a stile on its right. Cross over the stile into a narrow field and continue in your present direction, you will no doubt see a field pond on the other side of the hedge as you walk, and the path takes you to another five-bar gate this time with a stile on the left. At the corner of this third field you will see a gateway at an angle, and to its left there is a plank bridge over a running water ditch. There are two waymarkers here, one suggesting you path turns left, eastwards, and the other inviting you to turn right.

Cross the stile and turn right, following the path along the northern headland of this old pasture. Keep the hedge, and a deep reedy ditch, on your right. At the other side of the field you will find an open gateway with a waymarked stile beside it, leading into a smaller, narrower pasture. Keep walking, with the hedge on your right, over another stile in a hedge and into another field.

Stretching away ahead of you are several fields and, over to your left you will see an old wood, known as Moat House Covert. When you reach the edge of the field you are presently walking across, you will find a waymarked stile in a hedge, and a two-plank bridge over a very wet ditch. Cross the stile and bridge into a much larger arable field.

Continue walking along the northern headland towards the corner of the field, where it runs alongside a conifer plantation. At the end of this plantation there is a gap in the hedge on your right and a five-bar gate with a stile to its left.

Cross the stile into a small triangular gore, originally this was a continuation of Hollyland lane. In front of you there is a farm track leading off alongside the plantation, northwards towards the main road. Do not follow the farm track, but turn left, between, on your left, a field pond with a very large standing ash tree and a fallen one; and on your right, an overgrown mixed species hedgerow containing several ivy-covered ash trees.

Continue along the side of the hedgerow, into the field in front of you. Keep following the left-hand side of the hedge, across which you will see, and probably hear, Shustoke School, which has occupied the site since 1957. In the corner of the field there is a short section of fencing in the hedge, with a stile and a waymarker.

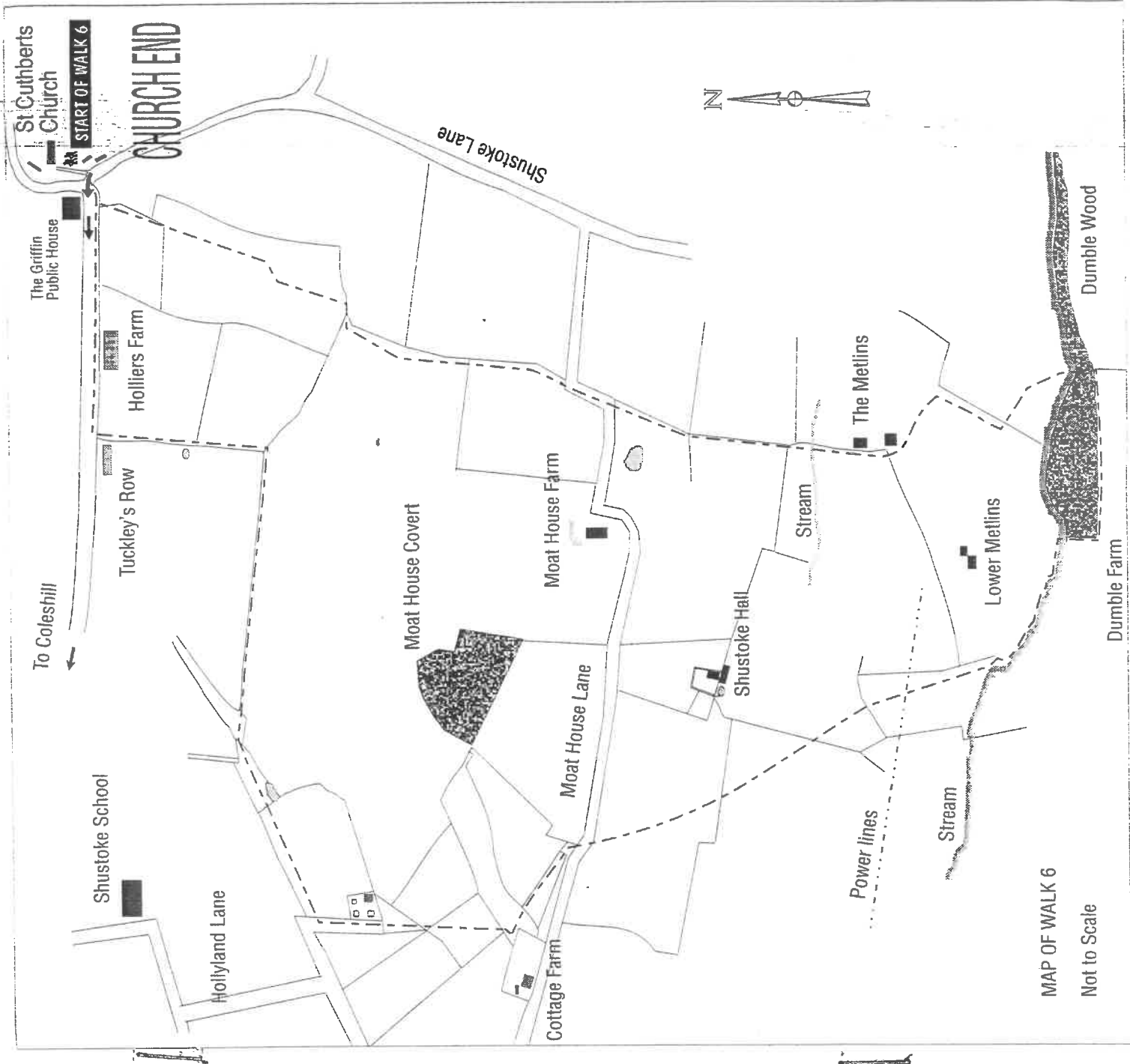
Cross over the stile on to a metalled trackway, and turn left towards a group of sheds. In front of you, and to the right of the sheds, is a yard which contains a metal five-bar gate. About 8 yards (7 metres) to the right of the gate there is a stile in the hedge. Cross over the stile into a very small field used by horses for jump practice. In the far right hand corner of the field there is a short length of rough post and rail fence, with a stile in the middle. Cross the stile and a two plank bridge, and go through the hedge. There is a waymarker on your right directing you diagonally along a well-trodden path to the opposite corner. Here you will find an open gateway, with a stile on the left.

Go through the gate, and walk beside the very deep ditch with a hedge bordering it. You are now walking towards the garden fence of Cottage Farm. On the fence you will see a waymarker directing you to the left. There is a field pond behind the hedge on your left, which you can see easily because the ground is much lower than the path.

When you turn left, keeping the pond on your left, you will be walking along an embankment that used to support a hedge. You will pass, on your right, a rather patchy spinney, containing a number of large old trees. You will also see several in a row that marks the line of an old hedge.

At the end of the path, turn right through what is sometimes a boggy area, to a metal gate with a stile on the left. Cross over the stile into Moat House Lane, and as you walk look out for waymarkers on several trees.

Cross Moat House Lane walking slightly to the left,

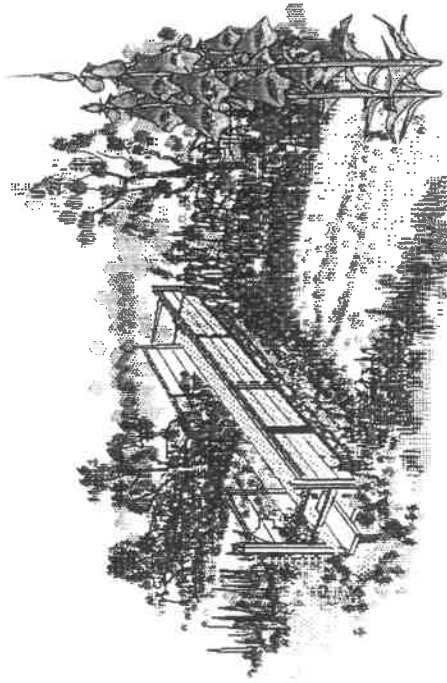


MAP OF WALK 6

Not to Scale

where there is a plank bridge and a stile. Cross over the stile and you are in a very large field. Straight ahead of you, on the horizon, is some scrub surrounding a field pond, and if you look to your left you will see Shustoke Hall, with its farm buildings clustered around it. This is the former home of the Huntbach family.

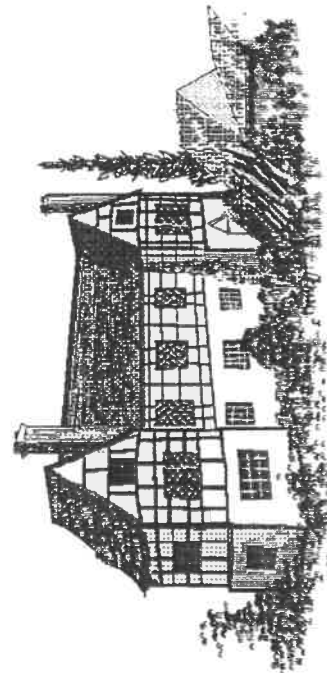
Our route lies across the field, heading between the pond and the Hall. In the middle of the field you will come to a stile crossing a post-and-barbed-wire fence - the wire is well covered and presents no difficulty. When you reach the top of the rise, you will be rewarded with a broad view across the fields. Notice the large modern irrigation reservoir on your right. It is encouraging to learn that the supply was sufficient to cope with demands during the prolonged drought of 1995. You can also see a long hedge on the left hand side of the field, with a stile almost exactly in the middle. Make your way towards the stile and you will find that there are in fact two of them to negotiate. Cross over the first on to a plank bridge over a wet ditch, then over the second and into a large field. Our path lies about 45° to the right, just to the right of a pylon you can see ahead of you. When you reach the pylon you will find a lovely new wooden bridge, with a stile at each end, across a stream.



Cross over the bridge and into another large field. The route is diagonally across this field, under the power lines. You will see an old stile, just past a large oak tree, on the other side of the field. Ignore this route - there are no waymarkers.

Walk towards the corner of the field, where you will find a new stile, with waymarkers on it. Climb over and immediately turn sharp left. Pass under a large fallen willow tree and you will come to a wire fence with a stile. Cross over the stile into a very large open arable field, devoid of most of its hedgerows. You will see in front of you an extremely old cottage, known as the Lower Metlins. It seems to be almost stranded amongst the furrows.

Turn right and follow the headland southwards as it twists and turns alongside an attractive stream. There are numerous old willows in the hedgerow and, in the distance you will see a solitary Scots Pine, rising high above the hedge. Walk past the pine, and keep going for some distance, until you reach a dense wood. You are now at one of the oldest areas of woodland in North Warwickshire. This is Dumble Wood and, just as you reach it, there yet another new bridge, on your right, crossing the stream that you have been following. Cross the bridge and stile at the far end of it. Just inside the field there may be an electric fence, but it is well insulated to enable you to cross safely without a shock! Dumble Wood is now on your left and our path rises up the field towards Dumble Farm.



Dumble Farm - a medieval building

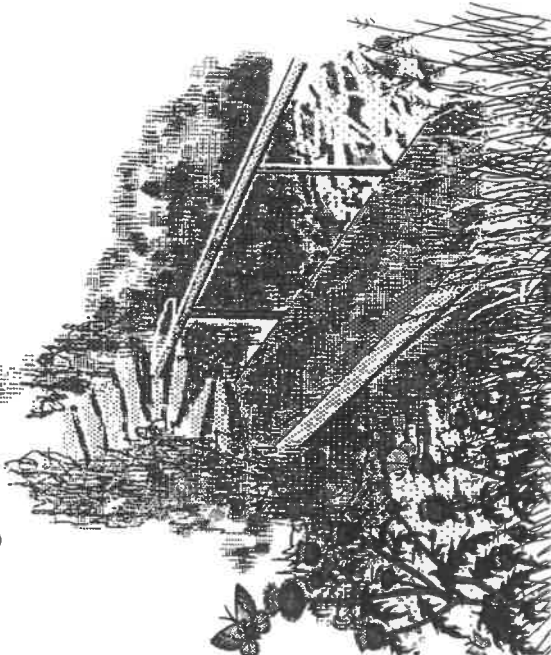
Walk up the slope, beside the woodland, and when you reach the corner of the wood, turn left. There you will be delighted with a wonderful view of Dumble Farmhouse.

It is a genuine medieval, timber-framed building; and judged on the quality of the framing, it must have been one of the most distinguished contemporary buildings in the area.

Continue along the south side of the wood until, at the very end, you will find two stiles - you will only see them when you are a few yards from them, for they are well concealed at the end of a bank, marking the line of a former hedgerow.

The right-hand stile would take you up a steep slope on a path towards Fillongley - not our route on this occasion.

Take the left-hand stile, which will lead you into the corner of the woodland, on a well-defined path. You are now on the Heart of England Way. At the end of the wood the path drops down a series of steps to a new bridge over the stream.



Cross the bridge and climb the four steps on the other side, into another very large arable field. The well trodden path leads you towards a solitary tree in the middle of the field. From this tree head on up the field towards another large tree in the hedgerow. The path runs along the far side of this old hedge. There are no stiles on this part of the walk, because the land is used for arable farming, with no cattle to contain within fields.

The path is very clear and waymarked; it leads to the crest of a rise where it turns left across open ground, and under the powerlines carried by a pylon that you pass on your right.

You will see a field pond beside the pylon. This is a survivor from the past when ponds were found in almost every field. They were dug out by farmers to provide drinking water for the horses and oxen used for ploughing and carrying. Some field ponds are found at the junction of four fields - thus providing for all. Although it is often difficult to see where old hedgelines run, a pond may provide a clue, for they are either alongside a hedge or at a junction of two or more. Field ponds are easily spotted from a distance because they tend to be surrounded by tree and bushes

Walk towards the pair of cottages that you can see to the front. These are known as The Metlins, and are late medieval, timber-framed buildings that have, unfortunately, lost much of the timberwork. The footpath skirts to the left of the cottage gardens, crosses over the drive of the lower Metlin, leads behind the barn and to the east of a conifer plantation.

The old farm buildings of the Metlins are obviously disused, without roofs, but the old threshing barn is in use as a garage. The threshing barn was a common building on farms. They had two sets of great doorways for the haycarts to pass through after their loads were dropped for threshing. It was a dusty job threshing and winnowing between the open doors, with the wind blowing the chaff out into the yard. Most of the Metlin buildings are Victorian, although some are a little earlier. They are well-built structures and are certainly not past restoration.

Our path continues alongside the conifer wood in an almost straight line. In front of you is the spire of Shustoke Church, and this will remain in view for most of the time from now on. Cross over a stream on a new bridge with a stile at each end, and continue in a straight line over grassland.

These fields may contain cattle, hence the necessity for stiles once again. Follow the headland of the field until you see the next stile. It is not in the corner of the field, so you must leave the hedgeline which turns slightly right. The moated Shustoke Hall is over to your left - you are seeing the other side of it now, and you can also see the extent of the farm buildings. This is very much a working farm with a large dairy herd.

Cross over the stile and walk straight across the middle of the field to another stile in a hedge. On your left you can see Moat House Farm. This farm is also a working farm, and follows a traditional mixed farming business. As its name suggests, the building is moated, although, unlike Shustoke Hall farm, the moat has silted up. Moat House Farm was owned by the Huntbach Almshouse Charity, and was given by Thomas Huntbach to provide income in perpetuity. Unfortunately, over the centuries it became more of a problem than an asset, so it was sold and the capital was used to maintain the school and almshouses. Both Moat House farm and Shustoke Hall farm are presently part of the Merevale-Dugdale estate.

Walk past a small field pond, just before crossing the next stile into a narrow, but quite long, arable field. Cross the middle of this field, passing two lone trees that obviously mark the line of a long-since uprooted hedge. You will reach another stile that leads you into a small field that is sometimes under cultivation. Once again there is a hedge on your right, and straight ahead you will see a gap in it, in the corner of the field. Go through the gap and into Moat House Lane. Walk along this dogleg section of the lane for about 50 yards (45 metres). You will realise that the farm has a great problem as it lies in a dell and water drains into it from all directions. The farm has a more or less permanently muddy farmyard

Straight ahead of you there is a stile, to the right of a gate. Cross the stile into a pasture with a well-maintained hedge on your right. Your path lies straight ahead, to a metal gate and stile on the right.

When you reach the gate you will see a two plan bridge gives access to the stile. Cross the stile into the field; keep the hedge on your right, and a pond, thirty yards away, on your left. In the corner of this field there is no gate, but a short section of substantial wooden fence with a stile in it. Cross the stile into the next field and walk straight across the middle, past a electricity pole. The houses that you can see on your right are in Shawbury Lane, which runs roughly parallel with this last part of the walk.

The oldest cottage hereabouts is the Old Rector, where Sir William Dugdale, the seventeenth century historian, was born. It was from here that he married Margaret Huntbach, so uniting the two families. The Old Rectory is a cruck-framed building and it also has a cruck-framed tithe barn.

The next stile is in the hedge in front of you. Cross over and head towards the twin-poled electric transformer, which you should pass to your left. The final stile, leading into Shawbury Lane is ahead of you. As you walk back towards Shustoke Church take a look at Church Farm, a collection of listed buildings, on your right. The farmhouse is an early medieval, timber-framed hall with later additions of stone on one gable and brick on the other. Although is no longer a working farm, the whole group of buildings make an attractive picture.

On your way back to the Church you may decide on a small diversion to the Griffin Inn, there to partake of an excellent bar meal, and sample its own brew of beer, Church End Beer.

This is a most pleasant walk and we are grateful to the Shustoke footpath group for excellent waymarking and maintenance.