

THE WEST WORCESTER RURAL CHURCHES CIRCUIT (ONE LONG OR TWO SHORTER)

This route takes you through quiet villages and some beautiful countryside amidst the hills (many the eroded remnants of the Malvern Hills lava flows) of Worcestershire west of the Severn, but north of the Malverns themselves.

The route round 15 churches can be split into two circuits - one round the Lower Teme valley and one further north through Martley and Clifton on Teme, but can all be done in a day. Almost all are on OS map 150 Worcester and The Malverns, except the last 4 on OS 149.

Public transport is negligible so you need to cycle/drive from either Worcester or Malvern to start the routes - both quite lengthy - and get home at the end.

ROUTE OVERVIEW: Lower Teme Valley

Worcester Ring road to Crown East ...0.4 mile

Crown East to Cotheridge2.2 miles

Cotheridge to Broadwas...2.5 miles

Broadwas to Knightwick...2.8 miles

Knightwick to Suckley2.9miles

Suckley to Alfrick via Crews Hill...3 miles*

Alfrick to Leigh...2.5 miles*

Leigh to Bransford chapel ... 2 miles

Bransford chapel to Worcester ring road...2.5 miles

TOTAL 20.8 miles with 2 steep climbs(*) for cyclists

Mid Teme Valley

Worcester to Martley church ...8.6 miles

Martley to Wichenford ...2.6 miles

Wichenford to Shelsley Beauchamp...5.5 miles

Shelsley Beauchamp to Shelsley Walsh... 1 mile

Shelsley Walsh to Clifton upon Teme.... 3.5 miles*

Clifton upon Teme to Old Sapey...1.6 miles*

Old Sapey to Harpley ...2.5 miles*

Harpley to Worcester ...13.2 miles*

TOTAL 38.5 miles with several steep (*) climbs for cyclists

If you want to do both routes together, I suggest you start with the Lower Teme valley route to Broadwas, then follow instructions to get to Martley and do all the Mid Teme route. From Harpley follow Malvern instructions as far as Bromyard, turn left and follow the A 4103 back to Knightwick and before you cross the Teme, turn right and pick up the route to Knightwick.(10.6 miles). About 53 miles in total.

LOWER TEME VALLEY ROUTE

1 St Thomas, Crown East WR2 6RJ

Getting Here: From Worcester or Malvern make for the roundabout on the southern Worcester by-pass where the A 4103 to Hereford goes off, but take the A44 west marked Bromyard and Leominster. Crown east church is on the right after 400 yards on the junction with the road signed to Elgar's birthplace. Small car park behind the church is often open.

What to expect. Rarely open except for Sunday services, but it has a peaceful well-kept graveyard attached.

History and Features. Originally a private chapel for nearby Crown East (now Aymestry) Court which was moved to this site in 1876 less than 20 years after it was built. Picturesque Decorated style with timbered south porch and small bell turret.

2. St Leonard, Cotheridge WR6 5LZ

Getting Here: From Crown East continue on A44 towards Bromyard, with good views of the Malvern Hills to your left, for just under 2 miles into the scattered village of Cotheridge. Watch for a sign to the church down a lane on your left. About another 300 yards to the church.

What to expect: Large south porch is usually open even when the church is closed and still has in it a Victorian funeral bier for carrying coffins and part of the memorial to Sir Thomas Berkeley (local squire) who died when on an embassy in 1669 from Charles II to the Sultan of Turkey. His father had fought for Charles at the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

History and Features: The church was originally Norman built of sandstone as so many local churches are in this area, but much adapted in C14 and C15 with larger Decorated/Perpendicular windows and buttresses. Some stained glass by Preedy. A remarkable C16 timber framed south tower above the large porch is the notable external feature.

3 St Mary Magdalene, Broadwas WR6 5NQ

Getting Here: From Cotheridge church, back down lane to A44 and turn left for 2 miles. Again views of Malverns to the left of rather windy main road. Go through village of Broadwas (the Royal Oak pub does refreshments) and turn left just after the pub (signed to the church).

What to expect: Though close to the Teme, the river is barely visible across the field. The timbered bell turret is at the west end of the church and look for the base and stump of the C15 cross in the churchyard. Church is normally closed.

History and Features: Another sandstone church dating from c 1200 but with C14 south chantry chapel added. Simple Norman north door clearly visible on outside. The WWI memorial in the south porch (with seat) has no less than 5 Lanes on it – I wonder if they were all brothers?

4 Chapel of St Mary and St Andrew, Knightwick WR6 5QF

Getting Here: From Broadwas back to the A44 and continue left towards Bromyard for 2 miles. For much of the way the River Teme is on your left, but rarely visible within its steep banks. Once over the Teme, turn left, marked Suckley and continue straight on for ½ mile. Go left up the lane marked “No through road” for 400 yards and park just after the chapel’s lych gate.

What to expect: Rural peace with quiet fields, a few sheep and the sound of wind in the trees. Chapel is kept locked. A beautiful spot.

History and features: The medieval church on this site was demolished in 1856 and a mortuary chapel build in 1879 for the surrounding well-kept graveyard, reusing some of the earlier stones.

Simple nave and chancel in one, the whole only about 12 yards long. Lychgate commemorates a C19 Vicar.

5. St John the Baptist Suckley WR6 5DE

Getting Here: From Knightwick, back down the lane and turn left, following road for about 2 ½ miles through attractive scenery with Crews Hill – an eroded spur of the Malverns- on your left. Turn right just after Holloways garden and furnishing centre (it has a good café) to the church.

What to expect: The church is often open and, innovatively, during the week is used by the adjacent village school as its hall/gym and acts as a venue for a range of community events for the scattered community of Suckley.

History and Features: A large Victorian church from c 1880 by Hopkins (who also built the huge Hallow church) in Cradley stone. It replaced a medieval church on same site. Large west tower with bells and south porch with seats. The Churchyard cross (C14-C15) is similar to that at Broadwas.

6 St Mary Magdalene, Alfrick WR6 5HH

Getting Here: from Suckley church go back to junction and turn left back down the road towards Knightwick. After a mile at a cross road (by a splendid Georgian house with a notable plastered portico) turn right and follow the lane which eventually takes you steeply up Crews Hill. At the top pause to admire the view of the Malverns. Then down and up and down again to a cross roads where you keep straight on and you will find St Mary Magdalene on your left after 300 yards.

What to expect: A pretty, small village church in a tidy attractive church yard. Open in normal times. There is a community run shop and café about 3 mins walk away (turn left after memorial cross), open mornings only at weekends.

History and Features: A Norman nave with chancel added in C13 or C14, windows of varying dates from medieval to C19 at time of Victorian restoration. Exposed C15 wagon roof. Square timbered west bell turret.

7. St Edburga's Leigh WR6 5LB

Getting Here: from Alfrick church go to Memorial cross and turn right. Follow road for 2 ½ miles till you see church ahead framed by trees just where road turns sharp right. Park on verge in front of church. The river Teme - invisible - lies about 150 yards behind the east end of the church.

What to expect: Large medieval church, Grade I listed, with high west tower with bells and clock. C17 Leigh Court is next door (private), as well as the largest medieval tithe barn in the country (English Heritage) open most hours to visitors. Portaloo in church grounds. Cream teas in church yard on summer Sunday afternoons. Church open every day in normal times.

History and Features: Leigh was owned by the Benedictine abbey at Pershore till the Dissolution, hence the rare dedication (Edburga, a C10th nun, was a granddaughter of King Alfred of cake fame) since they had some of her relics. Nave and chancel Norman with later additions of C14 south aisle. South vestry includes the renovated c1100 statue of Christ Giving a Blessing that was originally on

the outside above the now blocked north door. A recent Tom Denny stained glass window in south aisle. Fine C15 west wooden porch with seats believed to have come from elsewhere.

8. Chapel of St John Baptist, Bransford, WR6 5JG

Getting Here: Turn right from Leigh church, go up hill and straight on to the roundabout (1 mile). Turn right onto A4103 towards Hereford. After 400 yards take first left (Chapel Lane) and follow it to the end (about ½ mile). Cemetery car park may be open or park by chapel.

What to expect: This Anglican chapelry of Leigh church also has an Orthodox congregation that meet here regularly to worship, but rarely open as so isolated. No electricity so services held by candlelight in the winter.

History and features: Delightful early C13 building, adapted in C14 and still with its wooden wagon roof of that date. Chancel E and S walls rebuilt in brick in 1812. C16-C17 small timber south porch. Small bell turret at west end.

To Get Back to Worcester/Malvern: back down lane and (for Worcester) turn right, follow A4103 back to roundabout on by-pass (about 2 miles). Straight on for Worcester.

(For Malvern) back down lane and turn right. After ½ mile turn Right (signed to Powick and Bear and Ragged Staff pub) and follow road through to Powick where you turn right for Malvern.

MID TEME VALLEY ROUTE

9. St Peter's Martley WR6 6QA

Getting There: From Worcester: cross the bridge and follow A443 up west side of Severn turning off onto B4204 through Broadheath towards Martley. About 8 Miles. Church on your left not long after you pass the Chantry school on your right. Take the left turn just after it and follow road round a house and left into the track to church car park

From Malvern: I suggest you do churches 1-3 on Lower Teme route then continue as for Knightwick, but turn right off A44 after 2 miles just before the river crossing and struggle up Ankerdine Hill (B4197) . It is long and very steep, parts 15%. Follow this road for 3 ½ miles into Martley (wonderful views on your right of the Severn valley along Ankerdine ridge) and turn right at the junction just after The Crown Inn. Turn right after c 300 yards down unmarked lane, round behind house and up lane on left into church car park.

What to expect: A large medieval church with varied opening hours. Admire the splendid sundial installed on the south face of the west tower to commemorate the Millennium and walk past the east end on the path along the south side of the church to see the olive tree planted in 2014 to commemorate the centenary of WWI . Seats in the large south porch with view over peaceful fields.

History and Features: Large aisle less church dating back to the early C12 with a few Norman remnants, with mainly C13 chancel and C14 chantry in south aisle. Well restored in 1909 by

Nicholson. Like Leigh, it has a Tom Denny window. Inside there are interesting wall paintings from C14 and C15. Large C15 sandstone west tower.

10. St Laurence, Wichenford WR6 6XY

Getting There: from Martley church, go back to the B4204 and turn right back towards Worcester. After just over a mile, turn left at the junction just before the Mason's Arms (food and refreshments) and church is on left after 1.3 miles. (just after the National Trust Dovecote –signed and huge C17 barn – both worth a quick look.) Park in layby by lych-gate

What to expect: A well-kept church yard around the originally medieval church in peaceful farming countryside.

History and Features: A C13 chancel and C14 nave and lower tower, much restored in Victorian times when the upper part of tower was added. Don't miss the splendid double decker Jacobean tomb in the chancel. One of the 2 wives above was a Lygon from Madresfield Court.

11. All Saints, Shelsley Beauchamp WR6 6RA

Getting There: A 5.5 mile run from Wichenford. From church continue on road to Wichenford village and left at the T junction. After ¾ mile bear right. After 1 mile reach a cross road where you turn left marked "Martley. Hillside". Straight on through lots of apple orchards owned by famous Bulmer's Cider firm till you reach the B4197. Turn right, then after only about 200 yards, left marked "Shelsley Beauchamp". Eventually there is a long 1:8 hill down into Shelsley with church on right towards the bottom of the hill. Park on verge.

What to expect: A C19 lych-gate to a former rector. Admire the former rectory next door topped with 4 rampant lions and its own private gate to the church yard. There is the stump of a C15 preaching cross opposite the south choir door now topped by a sundial. Good views across the Teme valley towards Shelsley Walsh.

History and Features: c1300 large sandstone west tower with ground floor ring of 8 bells. Most of church rebuilt around 1846-7. Search for the 2 old wooden dug out type chests in the north aisle

12. St Andrew, Shelsley Walsh WR

Getting There: Continue on down the hill and over the river Teme. Turn right at the junction. After less than a mile, turn left (signed C12 church) just before the entrance to the famous Shelsley Walsh hill Climb. Go up drive and park just past the church on the left.

What to expect: A church closed for refurbishment. If you stand with your back to the church door and look half right you can just see the Abberley clock tower on the top of the ridge on the other side of the Teme valley.

History and Features: Grade 1 listed. A small Norman nave and chancel built of tufa in C12 and C13 and restored in 1862 by G.E. Street. There are Norman decorated doorways on both north and south sides, with that on the north protected by the porch. Two fine boot scrappers there too!

13. St Kenelm, Clifton upon Teme WR6 6DJ

Getting There: Back down lane from church to the road, turn right and after 1.8 miles come to T junction with B4204, turn right and a steep long climb for a couple of miles to Clifton upon Teme. Church unmissable on your right soon after you reach the village. Pub next door and a village shop for refreshments.

What to expect: A well maintained and large, if rather dark, church with an originally medieval church yard cross, Victorian restored. The porch with its Victorian funeral bier is C19.

History and Features: St Kenelm's dates back to the C13 (especially the large sandstone tower) with a C14 south aisle, all much restored and added to in mid Victorian times especially by Cranston. Some glass by Preedy. Look for the knight's effigy from 1332.

14. St Bartholomew's Lower Sapey WR6 6HE

Getting there: straight on past St Kenelm's and take 2nd left –Hope Lane. After about ½ mile, there is a left turn (actually still Hope Lane) signed "Sapey Old church". For just over a mile go down a steep wooded valley, over the Sapey brook and up again, the church is then above you on a bank on the right just before a cluster of timbered houses where a number of gravel paths intersect. Park here and climb the steps on the bank to the church.

What to expect: rescued from being a farm building by some locals and since 1994 run by the Churches Conservation Trust with an annual church service each autumn. Beautiful remote countryside.

History and features: Little has changed since the small church was built in Norman times. The floor is gravel and clay, the walls plastered with faint images of various periods of wall paintings. The fine Norman south doorway is protected by the weathered oak porch. Easy to imagine medieval villagers standing there to listen uncomprehendingly to the Latin Mass.

15. St Bartholomew's Harpley WR6 6HG

Getting There: Turn round and back up the mile to the main road where you turn left and follow the road up and down for just over a mile to the first left signed "Harpley". Soon the church is on your left. If you go past it and take the next left it will lead you up into the car park.

What to expect: The last church in Worcestershire as the Hereford border is about 100 yards away! It was built to replace Old St Bartholomew's which by Victorian times was derelict. If you stand before the porch and look right, you can see back to the next ridge with Clifton on it and the spire of St Kenelm's about 2 miles away in a direct line. This church has a silver Eco award with specimen trees in the church yard and many wildflowers and is currently exploring how to adapt its buildings for wider community use.

History and Features: Built by Kempson in the 1870s, rock face with ashlar dressings, C13 font probably moved from the old church. Some nice tiles. The east window Nativity is unusual in that the 3 Wise men are 2 men and 1 woman...

Getting back to Worcester: retrace your route to Clifton and then back down the B4204 all the way to Worcester (13.2 miles)

Getting back to Malvern: turn left out of the church and follow the road for about a mile till you join the B4203. Turn left for Bromyard about 4 miles away. Take the A 44 towards Worcester and after just over a mile take the B4220 signed Malvern. After about 5 miles, turn left on to the A4103 (towards Worcester). After around 1.5 miles and just after a church on your right take the B4219 signed "Cowleigh" to Malvern. (16 miles in all)