

## WALK 7 ABBOTS MORTON

Abbots Morton lies about 9 miles to the north of Evesham, approached from the A441 Redditch road, which is off the A435 (T) Evesham to Alcester road. Alternatively, it can be reached from the A422 Worcester to Alcester road via Flyford Flavell and Radford.

Abbots Morton is a village which still has a late medieval look about it. Prior to 1803, when the remainder of the common land was enclosed, all the farms were in the village and all the villagers had some stake, however small, in the large, open, hedge less fields. The Act which enclosed the open fields stipulated that each landowner had to hedge his land. This was too expensive an undertaking for the small cottager who had to sell-out to the larger farmer. The result was a number of large units, soon to have their own farmhouses. Abbots Morton gradually lost its village farms. Only two remain. A few are still called farms but have tidy gravel yards, and a number of houses can still be imagined as farms. Today the countryside has many miles of hawthorn or 'quick' hedges. It is interesting to note that one of the complaints against enclosures was that the new hedges would harbour birds and vermin – but don't let the conservationists hear about it!

At one time the small houses between the larger farmhouses were occupied by important people in the village – the reeve, the Hayward, the blacksmith, the wheelwright. The farm hands lived in leas substantial houses which have largely disappeared.

Walk down the road and just beyond the telephone kiosk, follow the track up to the right of St Peter's Church. Beyond the gateway bear left to pass a moated side. Moated manor houses were first developed for defence after the Norman Conquest and they became widespread by 1200. With the rise of the non-manorial classes, 70% of recorded manor houses were built mainly in imitation of the upper classes. This moated manor farm was built on a hill top for all the locals to see how important the ruling family was in the parish. It would not have withstood a determined army, though a band of outlaws would think twice before attempting an entry.

Follow the grass track down the field to the bottom left-hand corner and a gateway. Pass through and bear left across the field to reach a footbridge in the opposite corner. Go straight on up the next field, keeping to the right of the trees in the middle, and then in the same line to a stile in the hedgerow. Cross the fence on the right and walk by it, up to the top of the field where there is a gate. Do not go through, but turn right here and follow the hedge round to a stile in the corner of the field. Beyond the stile keep to the left boundary and in 50 yards, at a gap in the hedge, turn right down the field to a footbridge in the trees.

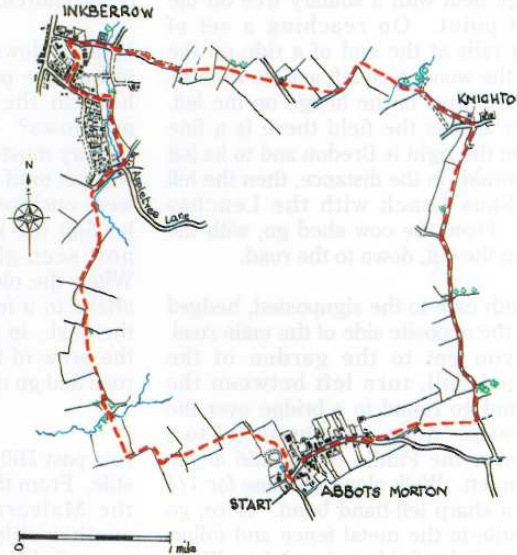
Starting in one of England's oldest villages, with its wealth of black and white cottages, this six mile walk passes through some delightful countryside to Inkberrow and Knighton, then back close to the Warwickshire border.

Map reference of start SP 027 549

6 miles

OS Maps:

Landranger 150  
Pathfinder 997  
(SP 05/15)



Follow the path up to a stile at the top of the bank. Bear slightly right to cut the corner, then keep to the edge of the field to arrive at another stile. A pleasing blend of woods and farmlands stretches off to the right towards Weethley and the Ridgeway. Keep the same line across the next field to a wide gap in the hedge about 50 yards from the left boundary. Beyond the gap, turn left, then right, to follow the hedge to the corner, where the route then bears slightly left to a stile opposite. In the next field go straight ahead with the hedge on the right. When the field slopes away, bear left to a stile in the corner. Follow the stream on the right, then turn right on to the lane. Walk along to the bend and before the cottages, turn on to a brideway and go over the stile on the left.

Beyond the stream can be seen a high bank which must once have been a dam across the valley – an ideal place for a fish pond. As Inkberrow was held by the Bishop of Hereford it probably supplied fish to maintain the large staff

required to run an important satellite manor.

Keep to the right of the paddocks and go up the field to the end. Cross the stile and follow the path beside the stream with its bulrushes, through the trees and down to a footbridge. Keep by the left hedge to reach a stile and then walk up the track. Notice the unusual dovecote in a cottage garden. Go straight ahead up the road and turn right just beyond the post office. Past the last house go down some steps and up the other side. Turn left along the edge of the churchyard and go out through the gate on to the lane.

The centre of Inkberrow village is up to the left. 'The Old Bull', picturesquely situated opposite the green, is said to be the public house on which the fictional 'Bull' in 'The Archers' radio programme was based. The cosy interior gives a clue to some of its past history. The bar, with its high beams, once housed harnesses and saddles, and was busy with a farrier's trade.

The route of the walk is now back down the lane,

past 'The Old Vicarage' on the left, where King Charles I is reputed to have stayed and inadvertently left a book of military maps, en route to Naseby in 1645.

A complete restoration of the church, which dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was carried out in 1887. The north face is interestingly adorned with battlements and pinnacles, and grotesque gargoyles stare down from the parapet of the ornate porch. St Peter's stands high on a bank overlooking the countryside, and seats have been strategically placed, on the east side of the neat churchyard, to take full advantage of this beautiful setting.

From the church go down the lane with care. Opposite the drive on the right there is a path in the woods to an overgrown, complete moated site. At the T-junction turn right, then left up a track, signposted Cladswell and Cookhill. Part way along the track there may still be, huddled in the corner of one of the fields, a small, ramshackle, ivy-covered shed. Could this be an obsolete privy, with a marvellous outlook?

Carry on along the track until you reach a stile by the side of a metal gate, then bear left up the hill. There is a splendid view from the top, looking back towards Inkberrow church, with the Malverns, Bredon Hill and the Cotswolds in the distance. Continue straight ahead through two fields to a stile in the corner. From here follow the hedge on the left to a stile in the wire fence ahead, then bear left down the field to another stile opposite Lench Farm.

Go across the road to a footpath. Cross the field to a gap about half-way along the hedge opposite, then bear right to a stile, again half-way along the hedge. Turn left and keep along the track for 200 yards to a prominent break in the hedgerow. Turn right here, over an almost-hidden farm bridge, into the corner of a field and go straight across, aiming to the right of the wood ahead. After the footbridge, follow the hedge on the left then walk up the track. In about 100 yards, opposite a wooden gate, go between a wire fence and ditch to emerge at a road. Turn left, then almost immediately right, along a track as far as the bend. Go straight ahead through the gate.

The path now follows the left hedge through two fields until it reaches a bridlegate. Beyond this, turn left to walk along the bridlegate for just over ½ mile. On the way you will pass a horse jump on the right and further down on the left, a clearing with 'No footpath' signs. Once past these, start to look out on the right for a low gate in the undergrowth. Cross the field now, parallel to the hedge on the left. Beyond a gateway keep the same line to arrive at a track by a black barn. A right turn at the road will take you back through the village to the car.