

## Golden Valley Walks

# Ewyas Harold & Abbey Dore

and North Wales. The few Parliamentarians of the village fought against the Royalists and Colonel Kyrle was commanded to go out from Hereford with a party to surprise the village, which he did on a Sunday morning in mid November. Killing the guard at the entrance of the village, they rushed in and taking the defenders by surprise, shot dead fifteen men, the rest escaping into the hills. The body of one of the dead was later found hanging from a tree near the church. This was the first attack of the war in the county.

### The Abbey at Abbey Dore

The Cistercian Abbey of Dore was founded in 1147 by Robert Fitz-Harold of Ewias. The Cistercian order had only been introduced into the country 20 years earlier in 1128 and the monks of Ewias regarded the new Abbey jealously, it being far wealthier and more impressive than their own little priory. Gerald de Barn, Archdeacon of Brecon, was a bitter enemy of all monks but especially those of the Cistercian order at Dore. In order to give them a bad name, he collected all the scandalous tales of evil doings he could find about them in a treatise he called 'The Mirror of the Church'. The monks of the abbey were considered, at the time, to be most unusual, wearing no colourful or woollen garments, furs or skins and ate only plain and simple food and never meat. They were wise, innovative and far-seeing farmers who developed the land beneficially until they became corrupt in the C15th. All the monastic buildings and the nave of Abbey Dore were destroyed in the C16th but what remains has an austere beauty and contains much of historic interest.

### The Abbey Dore Witches

The last trial for witchcraft took place in Hereford in 1712. Witches were blamed if people were killed or had fits, or if horses or cattle died. Some witches were particularly feared in the vicinity of Abbey Dore School house where no school master stayed for long, all giving the same reason: on dark nights a thump, thump would be heard, windows would shake as if the panes were about to fall out, noises would be heard as if people were moving chairs and the plates and dishes would rattle. This continued for years until the witch died and nothing was ever heard again. Even in the C20th a witch called Nanny Gunter lived in nearby Cockyard. She was said to have killed and buried some of her children in a wood and a stretch of road was given the name 'Nanny Gunter's Pitch'.

For bus timetable information contact Traveline 0870 608 2 608 (open 07.00-22.30 daily).



This walk takes you on a journey through the old kingdom of Ewias. Starting at Ewyas Harold village, walk over the village common to see fantastic views of the surrounding countryside including Abbey Dore. The C12th abbey and Abbey Dore Court gardens can be visited. Return via the ancient church of St Michael in Ewyas Harold, the village where the first blood in the Civil War was shed in Herefordshire.

OS Map no: Explorer OL13  
 Distance: Long route: 7 ¼ km, 4 ½ miles  
 Short route: 4 ½ km/2 ¾ miles



## **Please park with consideration on the road in the village.**

From the village centre take the right hand turn after the Temple Bar Inn past the school on your right. Cross the stile in the bank directly ahead and walk to top left hand corner of the field. Cross the stile and head to the top of the field where there is a stile onto Ewyas Harold Common beside a wonderful veteran oak tree.

*'Common land' is a misnomer as all common land is owned by someone even if it is the local council; in the case of Ewyas Harold Common it has two owners: one private owner and the Ministry of Defence. There are 35 registered commoners, with rights to graze sheep, cattle, horses, pigs, ducks, poultry and geese, and seven rights of estover (collecting vegetation for firewood and bedding and fodder).*

Follow the path to the crossroads by cattle grid, taking in the fabulous views down the Dulas Valley to the Black Hill and Black Mountains. Take the track signed to Foxes and Prospect Place taking the right fork just past the signs.

*The main spine of the hill is being actively managed to control scrub and bracken and to maintain the acid grassland. Cutting and baling allow the removal of the bracken litter, which otherwise would build up a deep layer suppressing all other grassland species. There is also mature woodland on site, and the scattered scrub provides hopping posts for birds to safely move around. The paths are kept cut, with extra wide scalloped areas where herbs thrive on the thin dry soil; these are really important for butterflies and other insects as sources of nectar and food plants for caterpillars. The springy turf on top of the hill supports large anthills which in turn attract green woodpeckers which trap the ants with their long sticky tongues. This is the place to spend time exploring or just enjoying the open space – perfect for kite flying on a windy day!*

Follow the main track to the renovated house, the Foxes. Continue past it straight up the grass track across the middle of the Common, passing a house on your right. Bear left then right towards two stone houses and cross the stile to the right just before the houses.

2. Follow the path and stiles down steeply to the Neville Arms and B4347. Turn left along road to Dore Abbey, go into the churchyard and down the right hand side of the Abbey. *Over the stone wall to your right is an ancient orchard with fruit trees heavy with mistletoe.*

For a short route back from Abbey Dore (Point A on map) cross the stile opposite the Abbey lychgate and walk up to the top left hand corner of the field, crossing stile. This brings you back into the field above the Neville Arms. Retrace your steps back to the Common. When you get to the houses turn right and carry on uphill. Where the concrete road begins bear left towards a concrete post to join the zig-zag track downhill and continue from † below.

Go through three kissing gates, cross the field and bridge over the River Dore, turn left and follow the black metal fence to a kissing gate then along the track to the

road. Turn left along the road past Abbey Dore Court Gardens. At the next road junction turn right and go straight up the hill ahead. *Keep an eye out along this road for buzzard and raven, the latter being given away by their loud 'pronk pronk'-ing!*

*This lane is Cwm Bank and it is glorious. The road, sunken by use over hundreds of years, is flanked by mixed mature hedges topping traditional hedge banks. As the lane twists and turns different conditions favour different plants. On the shady cool north facing banks ancient woodland indicator species thrive along with ferns. On the drier more exposed sunny banks are herbs requiring a lot of light and thinner soils. The hedges themselves provide cover, food and nesting sites for numerous species of birds, small mammals and insects, and are complimented by mature trees, including some magnificent multi-stemmed pollarded oaks. A small copse at the bend in the lane supports a noisy rookery. Mature hedges like this are invaluable as links between isolated woodlands, allowing movement between sites for dormice for example.*

3. At the top of the lane turn left along the 'no through road' over a cattle grid and back onto the Common. Follow the paved track round to the right and zig zag downhill † till you get to an old wind pump on your right. Turn left steeply down a track and through a gate and uphill to a cottage on your left. Turn right and go through a gate. Follow the stony track (very muddy now), through a gate with buildings on your left and turn right onto track, following waymarks, across stile and through garden in front of Weavers Cottage. Go out of the gate and continue along stony track for about 400 metres and cross waymarked stile on right. Go straight down field to stile. Cross and follow footpath to kissing gate. Go through gate and across playing field continuing to right of church and back to village centre and much deserved refreshment!

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## **HISTORY AND FABLES**

### **Ewyas Harold**

The origin of the name Ewias – or Ewas as it began to be spelt in the C13th – is unknown, though some believe it to mean 'Vale of the Yew Trees' or 'Sheep District'. St Michael's is an ancient site but no traces remain earlier than the C13th though there was a church in the vicinity of Ewias in 1100 and a flourishing priory in the C13th between the church and the castle. The mound and earthworks of Ewias Castle can be seen west of the church. For 500 years it was of high strategic importance and one of the first in Britain built in Norman style before the 1066 conquest.

### **The Civil War**

The village was important during the C17th civil war with its merchandise and military stores on the route through the Golden Valley to Radnorshire, Chester

