

Clun Castle, St George's Church Clun and Hyssington Church



Clun Castle is a typical Norman motte and bailey construction

On a beautiful day in mid-August my wife Magda and I decided to explore two of the churches in the Clun Forest area of Shropshire. We set off from Sedgley around 10.45am, reaching Clun just after noon. The Satnav took us on a route out through Bridgnorth via Craven Arms to Clun.



Ruins of the castle on the motte at Clun castle

Despite being called a town, Clun resembles a large rural village and remains very agricultural. We parked in a free car park (complete with 'auto-loos'!) near the bridge over the Clun river. After a picnic lunch we crossed the wooden river bridge and made our way up the steep hill to Clun Castle, a typical motte and bailey affair built by a Marcher Lord to control this part of the border with Wales. It's now in a ruined state but has some excellent interpretive panels that show what it might have looked like in its heyday.



Harvest time - the view from Clun Castle in August.

One of the best aspects of the castle is the glorious views of rural Shropshire - these were spectacular at harvest time. Local farmers were busy harvesting the wheat in the surrounding fields and transporting it away on giant trailers. Another feature was the floodlit bowling green built by local residents on part of the bailey. Other parts of the castle grounds are used every year for the town's Green Man festival, which celebrates the coming of summer to the Clun valley.



The lych gate at St George's, Clun



St George's, Clun



Inside St George's Clun - note the brightly coloured hassocks (kneelers) in the pews.



Graves of playwright John Osborne and his fifth wife Helen in St George's churchyard, Clun. He lived in a Regency house in Clunton near Clun in his retirement.

Our next port of call was the local church, St George's. To get there, you have to walk up a steep hill and you are greeted by a very impressive lych gate and war memorial. Inside, the church has a wide nave with some charming features. However the most surprising find (for me at least) was the name on one of the gravestones - John Osborne.



John Osborne, playwright, lived in Clunton



The Hurst, a former manor house at Clunton where John Osborne lived, is now a writers' centre.

The original 'angry young man' who shot to fame as the author of the play 'Look Back in Anger' in 1956, is buried there, alongside his fifth wife. For the last 10 years of his life he lived in a magnificent house called The Hurst in Clunton near Clun, which is now owned by the Arvon Trust and has been turned into a centre for writers. He called the view from the Hurst 'the best view in England'.



Bridge over the River Clun, site of the battle between the Ice Queen and the Green Man in May each year.



The Green Man battles the Ice Queen on Clun Bridge during Clun's Green Man Festival.



A harvest-time tractor travels through Clun with bales of hay.

We returned down the hill and crossed the famous Clun river bridge that gives access to the main part of Clun. This is the site of the annual battle between the Ice Queen and the Green Man, to allow summer to enter the town. (Alas the festival was cancelled in May 2012 due to heavy rains.) We found a pub in the Square where we sat outside and had a cider and Guinness and watched the people of Clun go by. Along the main street, opposite The Sun pub, there's a newsagent who sells a selection of guide books for walkers and local OS maps. Quaintly, they were closed over the lunch break from 1-2pm.



Hyssington church



Embroidered hassocks at Hyssington church showing local scenes



Entrance door and ancient yew at Hyssington church. The step bears the marks of the 'demon bull of Bagbury' who is rumoured to be buried beneath.

We then set the Satnav for St Etheldreda's in the hamlet of Hyssington, which is in the direction of Bishop's Castle - but across the Welsh border in Montgomeryshire. The village is very remote and had we not seen the brochure about Clun Forest churches, we would never have known about it.

[St Etheldreda](#) is an interesting figure in the development of Christianity in Saxon Britain - we had encountered the stone that marks where her shrine once stood when we visited [Ely Cathedral](#). She founded a monastery at Ely in 673.



The nave at St Etheldreda's, Hyssington

The most delightful discovery at St Etheldreda's were the hassocks (kneelers) in the pews, that have been embroidered with many beautiful local scenes. Also, the floral display at the entrance was magnificent. In common with many churches, there is a magnificent yew tree in the churchyard that probably dates from Saxon times.

The church is probably best known for its local ghost story, [The Demon Bull of Bagbury](#) about a witch who places a spell on a wicked local squire, who on his death turns into a bull from hell who terrorises the village. The bull is eventually cornered in the church, where he is exorcised by the local priest. The entrance porch bears marks in the shape of a bull, rumoured to have been buried beneath the entrance step.

We 'satnavved' our way back from Hyssington to Craven Arms, at which point we needed petrol. It's advisable to fill up at home because petrol prices in rural areas tend to be a lot higher than in the city so we only stuck £20's worth in. The drive back to Bridgnorth is particularly beautiful and we arrived back home around 5pm.

There are scores of equally beautiful churches in Clun Forest out there to be discovered and a day trip or a short stay in the area is highly recommended.

Martin and Magda Jones, August 2012



A488

Free Car Park
Toilets

New Invention
Knighton

Newcastle
Anchor

To Church

Newtown
B4368

Clun
Castle #

Clun Community Area
& Car Park

Oncoming
vehicles
in middle
of road

'Toutes directions': a signpost near the bridge in Clun

The [Bishop of Ludlow's brochure](#) about the churches of Clun Forest is available in most churches in the area, eg at St George's in Clun.