Churches West of Shrewsbury: Ford, Alberbury and Melverley; Cardeston (not interior).

This was our second foray to the area west of Shrewsbury, to view churches located off the A458/B4393 between **Shrewsbury and Welshpool.** We'd been to the area in March 2016, but alas found three of the churches we wanted to see closed (it's always best to ring up first!).

They looked so beautiful that we resolved to return, but this time we called **Revd Val Tait** the Priest in Charge to let her know we were coming. She kindly arranged for two of the churches, at Ford and Alberbury, to be open - the churches proved to be very rewarding and well worth the visit. Our reference was the brochure **'A Guide to Shropshire's Churches'**, published by the **Shropshire Churches Tourism Group.**

Magda outside St Michael's Church, Ford.

St Michael's Church, Ford is situated in a tranquil conservation area just west of Shrewsbury. The building dates back to the early 12th century and boasts many interesting features. The restoration in 1875 added some fine glass, in particular the East Window depicting the Crucifixion. There is a splendid hammer beam roof, possibly 15th century. The 'Humphrey Kynaston Walking Route 5' passes by the church.
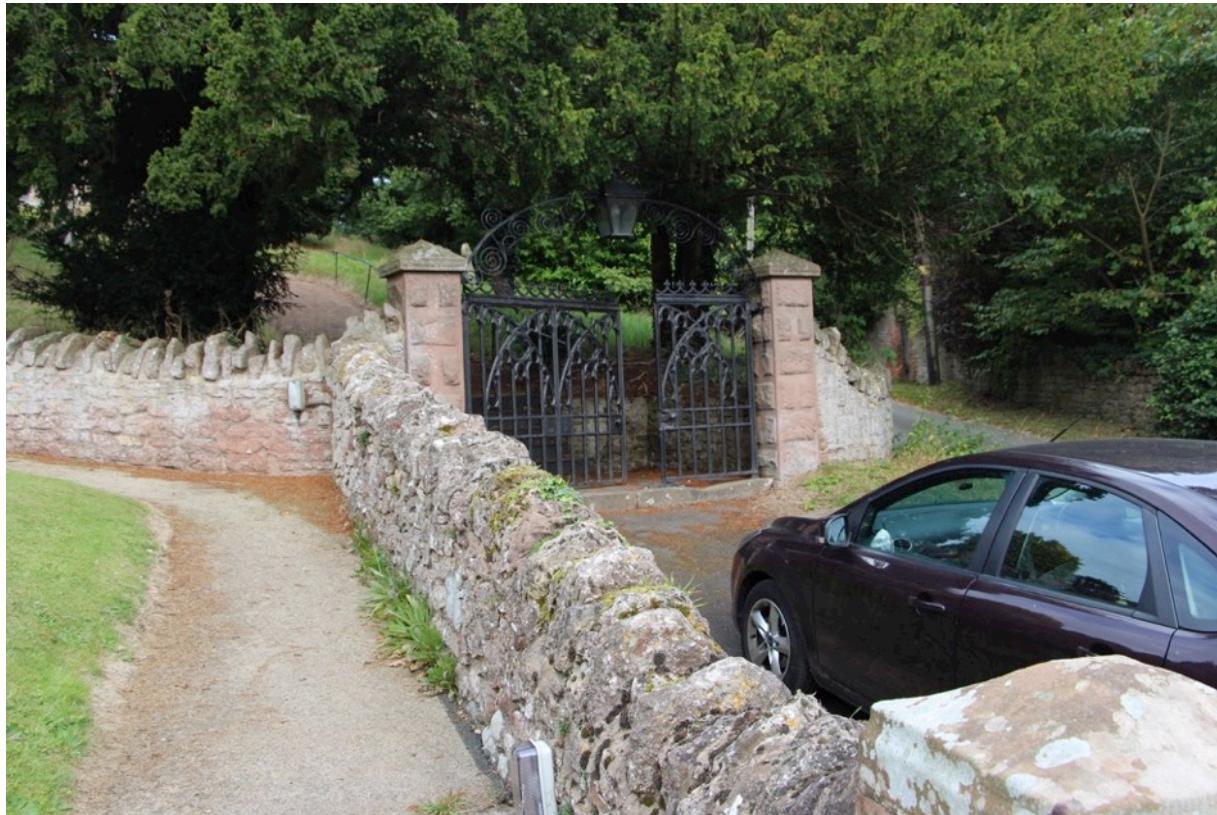
The approach to St Michael, Ford. The church is in a secluded location on a hill, set behind impressive iron gates.

The beautiful oak entrance door at St Michael, Ford.
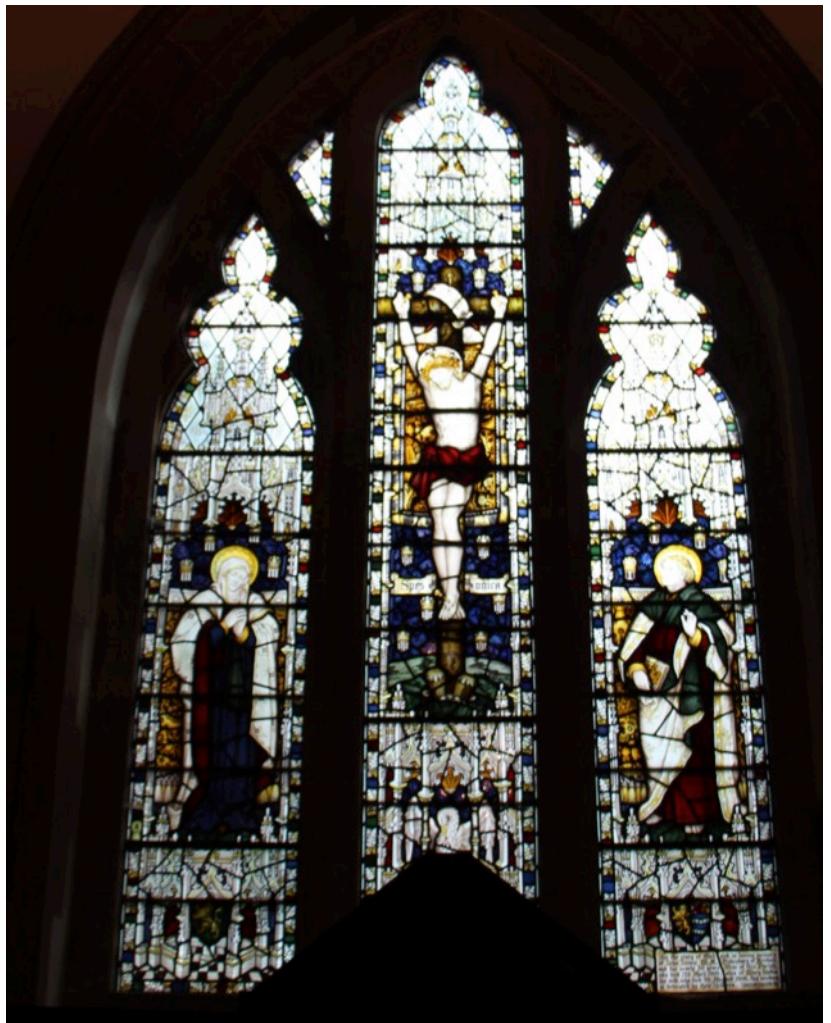
The Crucifixion depicted in the East Window at St Michael, Ford.

The nave and arches at St Michael, Ford.

The glorious hammer beam roof at St Michael's, Ford.

The beautiful altar and reredos at St Michael, Ford.

The organ at St Michael, Ford.

The 12th century church of St Michael at Ford sits at the top of a hill.

The second church that **Revd Val Tait** arranged for us to be open was **St Michael and All Angels, Alberbury**.
It's a Saxon Collegiate Church founded between the 7th and the 10th centuries. It was reconsecrated in 1290, once disputes on the Welsh border had ceased.

The nave is described as the 'finest example of a late medieval roof in all Shropshire' by Nikolaus Pavsner.
It has an impressive saddleback tower built around 1200. The Loton Chapel was added in 1320 and contains a Burne Jones Pre Raphaelite window.

The carved wooden noticeboard at St Michael and All Angels, Alberbury.

The chancel at St Michael and All Angels – external view.

The beautiful chancel at St Michael's Alberbury – the back wall is covered with The Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed painted as wall murals.

The superb nave and organ at St Michael Alberbury, from the Choir.

The roof of the nave, 15th century: 'Arch braced collar beam form with short hammer beams and cusped windbraces forming five rows of quatrefoils to each slope, with four moulded purlins'.

The unique cross in the Loton Chapel is the four bladed propeller possibly from a RE8 World War One fighter plane. It was given by the comrades of John Burgh Talbot Leighton MC (see below).

The cross commemorates John Burgh Talbot Leighton MC, a Royal Flying Corps Officer who died in 1917.

A carved angel looks down from the roof in the Loton Chapel.

The Loton Chapel viewed from the Nave. It is named after Loton Park, the family seat of the Leighton family. During the Second World War bunkers beneath Loton Deer Park were used to store chemical and incendiary weapons, guarded by the US Army's Air Force.

An unusual 'saddleback' tower at St Michael and All Angels Alberbury built around 1200. It has the appearance of a defensive structure – the area was subject to incursions from Wales and may have been built partly as a place of refuge in troubled times. There are a number of such buildings mainly near the Welsh border.
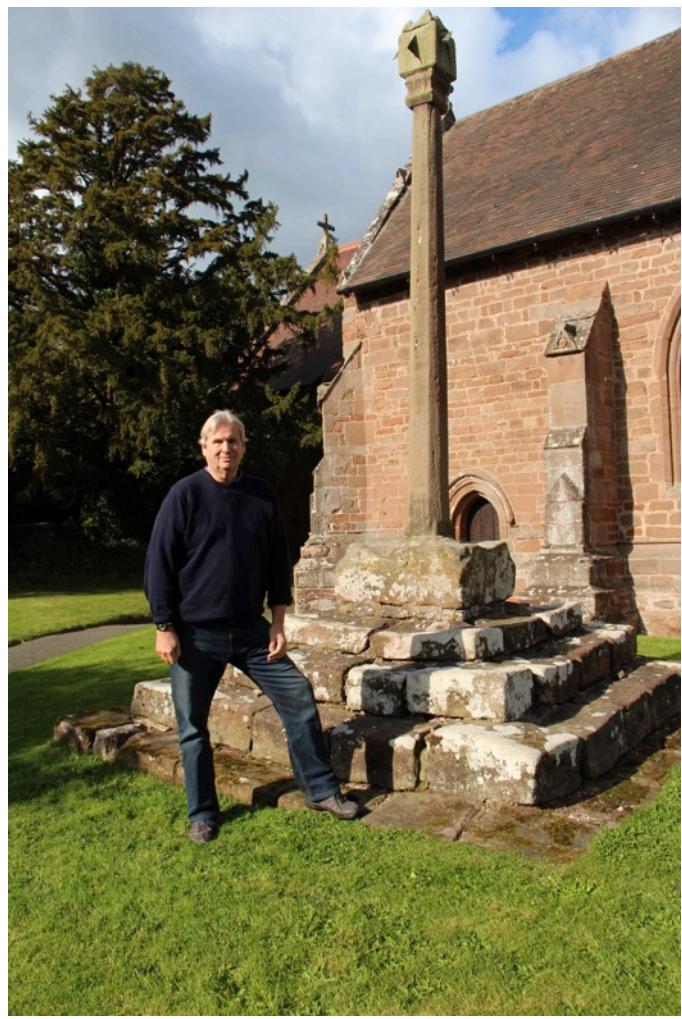
A medieval stepped churchyard cross, with a sundial at the head probably added in the 17th century.

The beautiful carved noticeboard at Alberbury.

In the 13th century the village was at the centre of a dispute with King John, when the Marcher Lord **Fouke Fitz Waryn III** fell out with the king over his right to inherit Whittington Castle and became a romantic, notorious outlaw. He was however reconciled with the king and later went on to found nearby **Alberbury Abbey**.

We conclude this article with a church from our first visit to the area in March 2016 – a **wooden construction** high above the River Severn at the confluence with the **River Vyrnwy**, on the Welsh border.

The black and white church at Melverley.

There has been a place of Christian worship in Melverley for over 1,000 years, when there was a hermitage on the ancient river bank near the crossing of the rivers Severn and the Vyrnwy. The manor of Melverley was held by the Saxon Lord Ealric. After the conquest the manor passed into the hands of Rainault, deputy to Roger de Montgomery, a kinsman of William the Conqueror.

The church of timber, wattle and daub construction is mentioned in a document of 1141, but in 1401 the church was burnt to the ground by **Owain Glyndwr** and rebuilt in 1406 - rather optimistically once again using wood! The entire structure, of Melverley oak, is pegged together, with not one nail being used.

The altar at Melverley

The altar and pulpit are both Jacobean; the lectern holds a chain Bible dating from 1727. The font is Saxon and survives from the pre-1401 church.

The pews date from the 1700s.

The church at Melverley – the fields around are frequently flooded. The river bank was found to be unsafe under the church and between 1990-1992 a 100 ft steel wall 30 ft deep was inserted into the ground between the church and river.

Still outstanding is a visit to view the inside of **St Michael Church, at Cardeston**. Unfortunately we didn't have time to arrange to have a look inside. One unusual aspect of the church is its octagonal tower.

According to the Shropshire Churches guide it has a barrel organ, and a notable 20th century fresco depicting Jesus and John the Baptist, Norman windows and a wooden upper gallery.

Martin on his visit in March 2016, with the distinctive octagonal church tower at Cardeston.
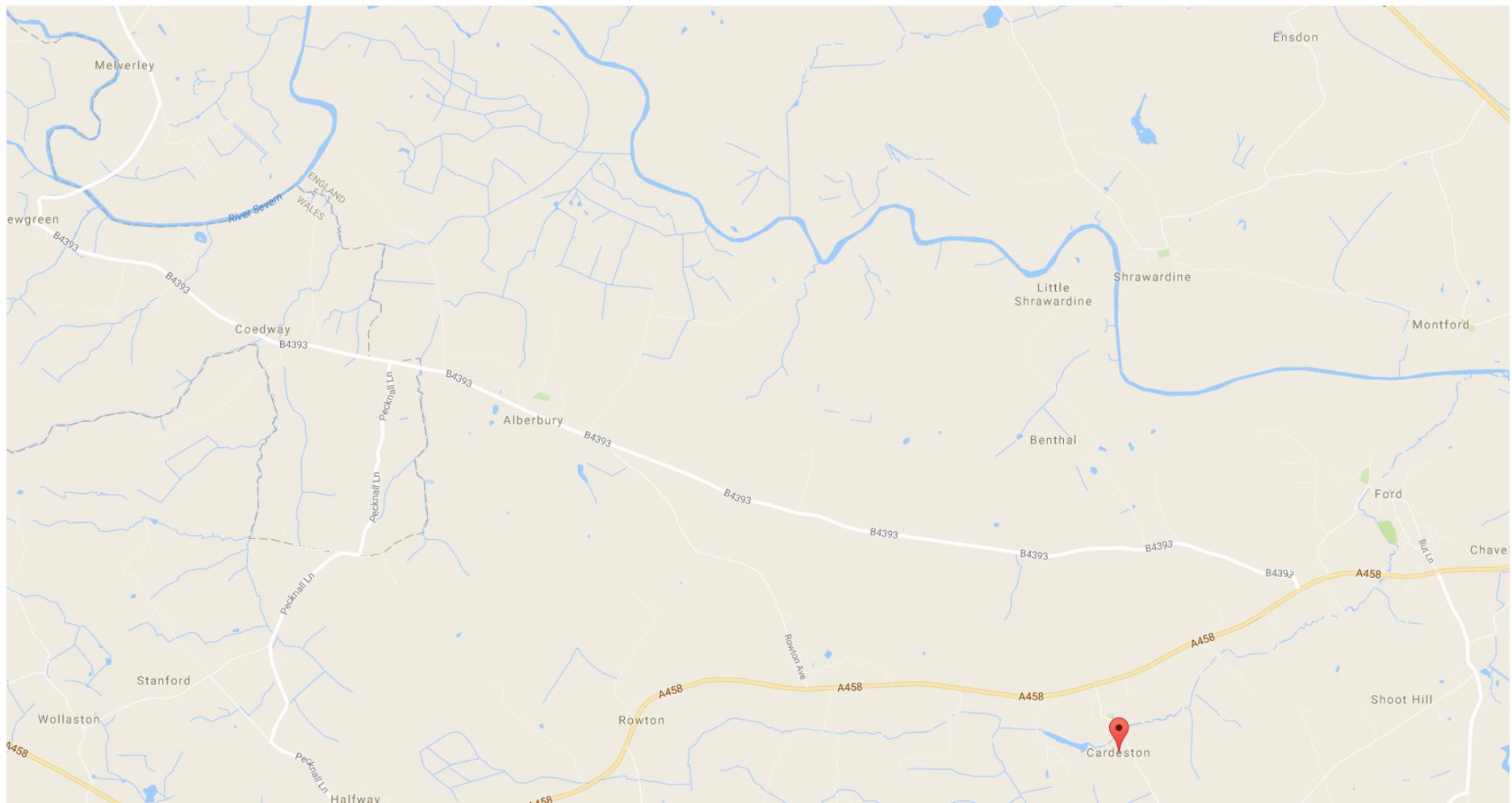
A map of the area covered during the visit - all four churches are marked and can be found off the main A458 or B4393 roads west of Shrewsbury.

Sources of information:

A Guide to Shropshire's Churches by Shropshire Churches Tourism Group

St Michael and All Angels Church, Alberbury - A Short History and Guide by David George, 1988.

St Peter's Church, Melverley: printed Church Guide, dated 2004.

Shropshire Star article: **St Michael's Alberbury**

Martin and Magda Jones.

First written: March 2016, updated October 2016.