

Days Out with a Religious Connection: A trip to the south of Worcester Diocese – Ashton-under-Hill, Beckford, Overbury, Alstone and Teddington

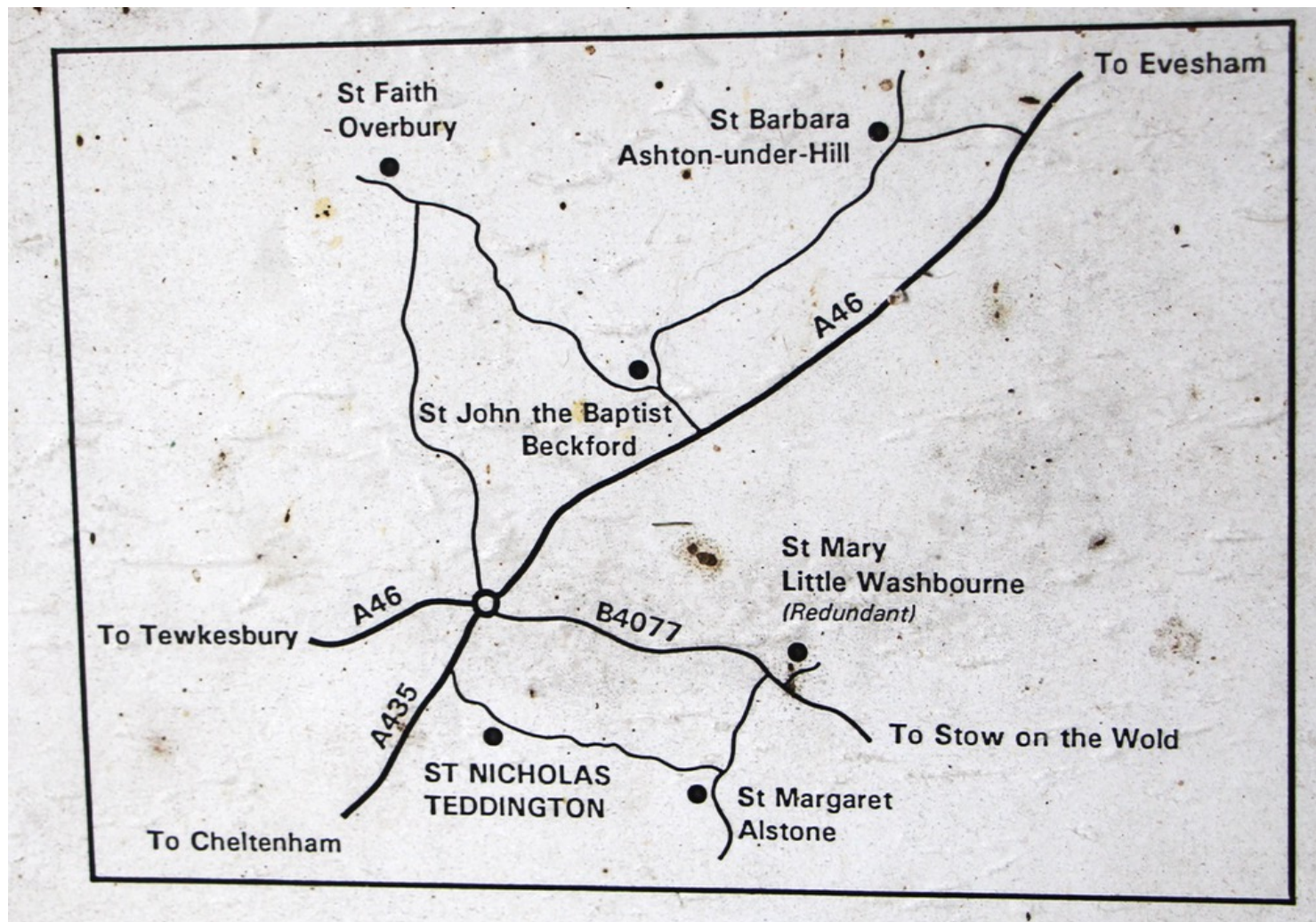


A model 'Jesus boat' bought on a trip to the Holy Land has become the symbol of the united parish of Ashton, Beckford, Overbury, Alstone and Teddington. The full size boat it was modelled upon was found buried in the mud on the edge of the Sea of Galilee.

In late January 2017 Magda and I travelled to visit a delightful collection of churches all of which are in Worcester Diocese, on the border with Gloucestershire. Our first stop was the village of **Ashton-under-Hill**, where there's an ancient prayer cross just off the road, outside the **church of St Barbara**.



Ashton-Under-Hill prayer cross.



All the churches we visited are in the Vale of Evesham, and accessible from Junction 9 of the M5. Take the A46 north eastwards to Evesham from the junction - churches are located north and south of the main road. Bredon Hill National Nature Reserve is to the north.

St Barbara's, Ashton-under-Hill

The picturesque village of **Ashton-under-Hill** is situated in the south of the county of Worcestershire, at the eastern end of **Bredon Hill** and overlooking the Vale of Evesham.

The church is dedicated to **St Barbara**, an early Greek saint and martyr who is reputed to have been imprisoned in a tower, then executed by her father for her Christian beliefs. She is patron saint of armourers, artillerymen, military engineers, miners and others who work with explosives - because when her father executed her, lightning is said to have flashed down onto his sword and killed him too; she is also patron saint of mathematicians! There is only one other in the Church of England dedicated to her - in Earlsdon, Diocese of Coventry.



The church noticeboard outside St Barbara's, Ashton-under-Hill.



A beautiful lake in the tranquil grounds of St Barbara's, Ashton-Under-Hill.

The South doorway with its characteristic rounded arch dates from Norman times. The Tower, which houses a ring of six bells, was begun in the 13th century. The Chancel was rebuilt in 1624 by Sir John Franklin, then Lord of the Manor.



The south elevation of St Barbara's, Ashton-under-Hill with South doorway, which is Norman.

The striking Arts and Crafts stained glass windows at the East end of the church date from the late 19th/early 20th Centuries.



The altar at St Barbara's, Aston-Under-Hill.



An astonishingly thick, textured Yew Tree trunk in the churchyard at St Barbara's, Ashton under Hill.

St John the Baptist, Beckford



The lych gate, built as a memorial to those who gave their lives in the first world war, at St John the Baptist, Beckford.



St John the Baptist, Beckford.

Our next church was St John the Baptist, Beckford. **Beckford** is a small village on the main Cheltenham to Evesham Road, five miles north-east of Tewkesbury, on the Worcestershire—Gloucestershire border. It has two Norman ‘tympani’; and a variety of unusual carvings.



The 12th century tympanum above the south doorway at St John the Baptist, Beckford. It has been suggested that the pagan beasts on the left and right are paying homage to Christ, as represented by the Cross. The circle/eye may represent the Father, the dove the Holy Ghost and the Cross the Son.



An idiosyncratic and much weathered doorway to the church from the porch at Beckford. It has a peephole on the other side.



Beautiful font with embroidered pedestal covers denoting the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and fire.

St John the Baptist was built in around 1130 on an earlier site; it was altered and extended over the centuries and then restored in the mid-19th century.



The chancel at St John the Baptist, Beckford.



Enigmatic carvings on the arch to the nave at St John the Baptist Beckford. Between the heads of two demons is a centaur, said to be the badge of King Stephen.

St Nicholas, Teddington



The church of St Nicholas, Teddington.

Our next church was **St Nicholas, Teddington**, which alas had no church leaflet available when we visited. There was however a very detailed typewritten, framed description on the south wall of the church.

The ancient church is thought to date from the 12th Century. The interior wall has a partially faded mural of the Lion and the Unicorn that dates from the second half of the 17th century. It also contains an arch from Hailes Abbey after the latter was destroyed following the dissolution of the monasteries.



The 17th century Lion and Unicorn wall mural at St Nicholas, Teddington.



A faded, overpainted mural at St Nicholas, Teddington, of the kind that adorned many medieval churches.



An unusual Epiphany scene with round shaped figures, sculpted entirely from wood in the chancel at St Nicholas, Teddington.



Roof timbers in the chancel at St Nicholas, Teddington, reminiscent of the construction of an inverted boat.



A beautiful altar cloth at St Nicholas, Teddington.

St Margaret's, Alstone.

St Margaret's dates from the 12th century. It was extensively restored between 1876 and 1880. The most striking feature is the black and white rectangular wooden bell tower, which is a Victorian replacement from an original dating from the 1700s. It has a single bell.



St Margaret's, Alstone.

St Margaret lived between AD 209 and 304. She was a native of Antioch and the daughter of a pagan priest named Aedesius. She was martyred for her faith when she refused to marry. The cult of Saint Margaret became very widespread in England, where more than 250 churches are dedicated to her, most famously, St. Margaret's, Westminster, the parish church of the British Houses of Parliament. Some consider her a patron saint of pregnancy. In art, she is usually pictured escaping from, or standing above, a dragon.



The church is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch.



The altar at St Margaret's, Alstone.



The pheasant topiary in the churchyard at St Margaret's, Alstone.

St Mary's Little Washbourne

St Mary's Church, Little Washbourne, is a redundant Anglican church. Set in an orchard, it's recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a designated Grade II* listed building and is under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. The church dates from the 12th century. Alterations were made to it in the 18th century, when the north wall and part of the south wall were rebuilt.



St Mary's, Little Washbourne, now a redundant church.

Inside the church are panelled box pews, an octagonal pulpit with a 'testa' (sounding board), communion rails, and a communion table, all dating from the 18th century. The octagonal stone font dates from a similar period. There are traces of paintings on the walls. On the north wall of the chancel is a monument in white and grey marble to the memory of William Hill who died in 1786.



Tiered pews at the back of the nave; and panelled box pews, at St Mary's, Little Washbourne.



The pulpit and 'tester' at St Mary's, Little Washbourne. A tester is a flat, horizontal canopy. It may be above an altar, or over a pulpit, when it is called a sounding-board.

The Washbourne family, who gave the village their name, owned the manor until it was sold in the early 19th century.



A medieval wall painting at St Mary's, Little Washbourne.



The very basic altar table at St Mary's, Little Washbourne.



Outside St Mary's, Little Washbourne.

St Faith's Church, Overbury.

The last church on our trip is the 'mother church' of the rest, in Overbury. It's one of only 35 in England dedicated to St Faith, who is said to have been a girl or young woman of Agen in Aquitaine. She died in AD268 and the hands of Dacianus, Roman Governor, for refusing to deny her belief - she was tortured to death with a red-hot brazier.



St Faith's Church, Overbury.

Overbury is a village in Worcestershire in the district of Wychavon. It is located midway between the towns of Evesham and Tewkesbury to the south of Bredon Hill.

The manor of Overbury was purchased by the banking family of Martin in the 18th century from the Parsons family, members of whom also owned neighbouring Kemerton Court. The Martins rebuilt Overbury Court in c.1740, and it is still occupied by their descendants.



The lych gate at Overbury, with a plinth on which coffins may be rested.



Arches in the nave.



Permanent lighting on the nave arch columns.



A beautiful altar cloth at St Faith's, Overbury.



Victorian stained glass in the East Window at St Faith's Overbury.

The church contains additions, improvements and replacements from the all eras in church architecture: Norman, Early English, Gothic, Perpendicular and 19th century.



A wooden eagle lectern – unusually, mounted on a marble base.



The beautiful chancel, with altar and stained glass at St Faith's, Overbury.



The lych gate is built over a stream.

The connection between the Overbury Estate and the Martin family (direct relatives of Mrs Penelope Bossom, the current owner) began in 1723. John Martin, a London banker with roots in Evesham, came to live in Overbury Court. The Elizabethan house burnt down in 1738 and a new house was constructed shortly afterwards.

The current house, Overbury Court, is constructed of golden, ashlar-faced Cotswold stone and has a fine Georgian facade, which faces south. The Court remains Mrs Bossom's home and much of the improvement to the village of Overbury has been due to Mrs Bossom and her family's activities.

The Martin family became associated with the banking operations of The Grasshopper at the end of the 17th Century, when Thomas Martin, the eldest of four Martin sons, came to London to work as a clerk at the Grasshopper in Lombard Street. Over the next six generations, the Martin family firmly established their name in the banking world.

It was however the third son, John Martin, who decided not to lose his links with Worcestershire and took on a lease of an Elizabethan manor house at Overbury in 1723, bringing the Grasshopper emblem with him.

Martin and Magda Jones

First written January 2017

Information sources:

St Barbara's Church:

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/ashton-under-hill-st-barbara/>

<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-148455-church-of-st-barbara-ashton-under-hill-w#.Wlcih8c5Owc>

St Barbara:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barbara

Ashton-under-Hill:

<http://www.ashtonunderhill.org.uk>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashton_under_Hill

Bredon Hill:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bredon_Hill

Beckford, St John the Baptist:

<http://greatenglishchurches.co.uk/html/beckford.html>

Beckford Church printed leaflet

Teddington:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teddington,_Gloucestershire

Alstone:

St Margaret's Aston Church leaflet.

Margaret of Antioch:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_the_Virgin

St Mary's Little Washbourne:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary's_Church,_Little_Washbourne

<http://www.britainexpress.com/attractions.htm?attraction=4210>

St Faith's Church, Overbury:

St Faith's Overbury Church leaflet

Overbury and the Martin banking family:

<http://www.overburyestate.co.uk/history.html>