

Herts & Beds Bike 'n Hike 2014

Dorothy Toyn reports on the recent local Ride 'n Stride event

I have been organising the All Saints' part of the Annual "Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust Bike & Hike" for getting on for 10 years. It is a great day where lots of money can be raised for All Saints as well as the Trust, just by visiting and signing in at various churches of all denominations. It is a co-ordinated event across the country with many counties joining in.

This year I began my trip at 10 am at St Mary's, Knebworth which is inside the park, with a helpful husband delivering me and my bike there. It was a lovely late summer day, warm and sunny and just right for dropping down into Knebworth to visit 2 churches there. I received a very warm welcome from the Catholic Church there, trying to fill me with biscuits and KitKats – who can resist a free KitKat when offered so kindly! I apparently cycled right past one church but cut my losses to begin the trek to Datchworth.



You may have noted that I said drop down to Knebworth, well that means going up to Datchworth. I try to avoid going uphill wherever I can, but I trundled off up Swangley's Lane, walking up the steep bits but coping better than I thought I would. (I have been cycling to and from work this year – all of ½ a mile each way...) From Datchworth it's off to Watton-at-Stone, and I managed the gentle uphill bits on the way, barely noticeable with my new found

fitness! 2 churches there and I do walk up to St Andrews, but a great ride down towards the A119! The worst part of the whole day is travelling from Watton to Stapleford. Cyclists appear invisible to cars on that road and, to me, it seems really dangerous, so I freely admit to cycling on the pavement there – well, if that is what it's called! It is overgrown, full of potholes and in some places lower than the road (Heaven help any pedestrians!) but I get there in one piece, then to Waterford, Bengoe and Hertford. One can tick off 9 churches in Hertford easily and having been fed and watered at the tail end of the All Saints' Coffee Morning I went up to Hertford Heath. I was greeted with open arms at Holy Trinity – I was the first to visit at ten past one! Sad that no-one else had been there.

Now on my "familiar route" from over the years it's downhill (almost) all the way now, and half way through my target of 36 churches! Into Ware now not forgetting Leaside Church tucked away, and their lovely Catholic Sacred Heart Church. I follow the New River, and burn more calories by pushing my bike up to St John's at Great Amwell. I need a drink here... then downhill again to Stanstead Abbots. The highlight of these trips is "Tea at St Margaret's" – plus fruit, cake whatever they can persuade me to eat (not difficult!) relaxing for a while and admiring their beautiful etched glass with local scenes. (Do visit – it is often open for tea!)

Off to St Andrews next then the final uphill bit to St James, but so worth the effort. It is lovely inside with a beautiful modern stained glass window commissioned by the late Mrs Trower for her husband, who used to live nearby, and the wonderful old traditional box pews, and even the path is just grass. It takes you back many years.

You end up following people around on these trips and I met up with Val Hurford here, who commented that she was

following Martin Bird around, but somewhat worried as he was on foot and she was cycling! I too followed Martin around, and he was going at a pace, as was Peter Ruffles who seemed to be about 15 minutes ahead of me. Great downhill run into Hoddesdon, pass the 'less than fragrant' sewage works, and another 7 churches here. I looked forward to visiting the Friends Meeting House as I have had a long chat for several years with the lady there, but just a signing in sheet this year. I hope she is ok.

Home territory to me now as Broxbourne is where I grew up. I arrive at St Augustine's amidst a wedding about to happen, and marvel at that and all the people and activity on the Recreation Ground, complete with Ice Cream van situated close by. I am making good time, so have an Ice cream and sit and watch the wedding, reminiscing about our wedding there almost 35 years ago to the day, remembering family and friends.

I decided to continue on my way, before I got too emotional, and although I had now visited 36 churches was still feeling fine – and Colin and Richard did sponsor me PER CHURCH, so I need to keep going! I followed the New River to cut through to the main road, deciding I would not work out how many years since I had been running up and down the pitches at Broxbourne Hockey Club as I passed! When I got to the far end I realised it had said 'No Cycling' – not that I had seen a sign, so I had to lift my bike over the fence as there was a wishing gate at the end. Oh well, I was not the only one doing just that and continued my journey into Wormley, Turnford and Cheshunt for another 4 churches finishing my journey at St Mary's. Thought I might see my friend Angela, but no, just another signing sheet. At 40 churches I decided to call it a day at 5pm and called for my "Rescue Squad" to come and collect me at Brookfield Farm.

It was a fabulous day and thank you to everyone who sponsored me, and to my "Transport Team". While I was tired and groaned at the thought of the stiffness to

follow (which amazingly never materialised) I knew I had raised around £350, half of which comes to All Saints. You don't have to visit 40 churches – a few will do! I just get carried away with the challenge!

PLEASE think about joining in next year – you can walk or cycle, locally or explore somewhere new. You can even get sponsored for sitting at All Saints' and signing visitors in! Half the money raised comes back to our church and the rest goes to the Trust – 2 very good causes!

It is usually the 2nd Saturday of September, and I will start reminding people in the summer, so please book the date now and join Martin and I for a great day out!