

## Small Pilgrim Places 10: Knight's Enham to South Stoneham, Hampshire

It would be easy to drive along the busy A343 towards Andover and have no clue that an ancient hamlet and Saxon church lie close by on a quiet lane.

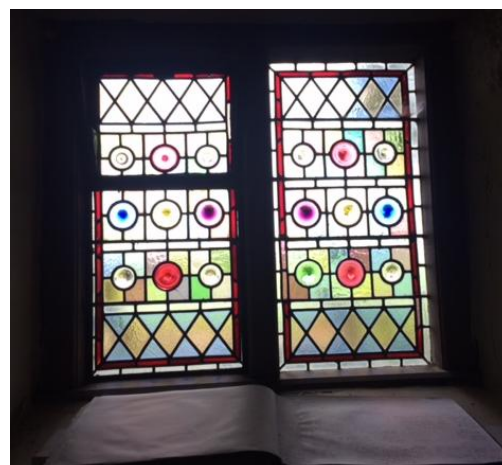


St Michael and All Angels, Knights Enham

The church stands just off the lane, its squat timber bell-turret dwarfed by mature churchyard trees. Approaching a low door in a small timber porch set between small square windows, I had the feeling of entering a Hobbit house as much as a church. Inside, warm light filtered through the windows' coloured glass.

The nave and chancel are simply and comfortably furnished. An ancient door on the north wall leads to a vestry. On the outside of the vestry wall is set a stone figure of a human head, perhaps originating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He seems to be thoughtfully gazing across the churchyard to the fields beyond.

Here in 1008 King Ethelred the Unready met his archbishops to discuss the Viking invasions and the role of the king and the Church. The king affirmed that he would uphold Christianity and just kingship. The site became known as King's Enham, and later Knight's Enham. The small Saxon church from those days is now the chancel of the present building. A nave was added in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and medieval knights travelling nearby ancient routes would rest here.



Coloured glass in a square window at St Michael's



A glimpse of the River Test

Leaving Knight's Enham I joined the National Cycle Route 246 southwards along the banks of the River Anton, at first through the suburbs of Andover and then villages of brick and whitewashed cottages under low thatched roofs. The Anton eventually joins the River Test, and from here the cycle route runs down the Test Valley sandwiched between the main road and the river. I gained only tantalising glimpses of the river itself; it was mostly hidden from view by strips of dense alder carr and wet meadows. Every track leading off the route bore warning signs: "Private Land – No Unauthorised Access". The Test is a celebrated trout- and salmon-fishing river, so only the wealthy and licensed may tread its banks. Part of my route joined the Monarch's Way running along the old Sprat and Winkle railway line which ended its days under the Beeching cuts.

I turned onto the NCR 24 to head to Romsey for an overnight stop, and had time to visit the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, a fascinating destination for garden-lovers with its arboretum and many plant collections.

The following morning I headed east towards Southampton, entering more acidic land where I noticed the bright yellow and red caps of early *Russula* toadstools popping up under birch and conifer trees. St Mary's Church, South Stoneham, is hidden beside university halls of residence amongst the busy northern suburbs between the M27 and M3 interchanges. As I arrived, hospitaller Ann Lewin was waiting for me (the building is usually locked, so I had let her know I was coming). Ann showed me round, pointing out the sundial high up on the tower wall, the fine organ in the gallery above the west door, and the font dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Recorded in the Domesday Book, the building originates from Norman times and features a pointed chancel arch with Norman pillars and capitals, showing the transitional style



St Mary's South Stoneham



Hospitaller Ann at the west door

that led to the Gothic period of architecture. Around this time the church was under the care of the Benedictine monastery at Winchester Cathedral. In the south transept, a Victorian addition, are attractive interpretation boards telling the long history of the building from Norman times onwards.

The chancel arch at St Mary's



Surrounding St Mary's, the largest Small Pilgrim Place on my journey so far, is a pleasant churchyard, tended weekly by a group of volunteers. As I left, Dave, who had been busy that morning mowing the grass, picked a handful of apples from a tree which, he said, had been planted by a former vicar. He told me the variety, and the irony of its name only struck me as I tucked into its pink-flecked flesh on my way home. Apparently it's called Red Devil.

The chancel arch