

# Chapter Ten

## Tour of Berkshire Ancestral Places

This section focuses on the places where our ancestors lived and worked. It takes the form of a tour guide and follows a sometimes chronological path from Blewbury to Venn Mill – a tour which I have had the great pleasure of taking seven of my kuzzins on in 2012 and others in 2015. The visit is illustrated by the photo on the left, which was taken 104 years after our ancestors left, showing Matt Webb, current owner of Venn Mill House talking about his home. Well into the 16th century, land was owned primarily by the nobility. Increasingly after that time, more successful “commoners” leased the more elaborate farms and manors from the owners, who were often absentee – usually the church, nobility, or Oxford Colleges. Venn Mill, for example, was owned by Lord Wantage, and Prior’s Court in West Hanney by New College, Oxford. William Long in Garford was probably such a lessee, or tenant. Equally likely, the many millers in the family were often employees of the “tenants” of the manor of which each mill was a part. This tradition changed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as leases were sold off. For example, Henry Prior bought the lease for the Old Mill at Blewbury in 1921 when the Wantage Estate, which owned the Blewbury Manor, was split up.

### The West Mills

Of the many occupations of our ancestors, the miller was foremost in the 19th century. There are nine mills in Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire) which were run by members of the West family from the late 18th century onward. (See Allan Stoyel’s letter in the Audio/ Visual archives, page 117). The first 6 on the list below were on the Letcombe Brook or its tributary, Childrey Brook. Letcombe Brook runs from south of Wantage through the middle of the town, originating in another of our ancestral villages: Letcombe Basset. The other 3 mills (East Hagbourne, Old Blewbury and Blewbury) were on Mill Brook. There is some evidence that at one point James West and his father Daniel simultaneously tended 3 mills within a mile of each other on the Mill Brook in the late 18th century. These are the 9 mills:

#### 1. Ham Mill.

This is the mill where WWW and Sarah lived for a short time after their marriage in 1868 and where eldest son Will was born.

#### 2. Hines Mill (upper Grove Mill)







Although Daniel (b. 1813) lived with his in-laws in Steventon from about 1845 onward, he commuted here from Steventon to a small flat on Mill Lane in Grove to tend the mill. The census of 1881 shows him resident here with Jane and his grandson Will. Accordingly, we can assume that at some point Jane moved here from Steventon.

### 3. Lower Grove Mill (now demolished)

Daniel installed WWW as Mill Manager here along with his eldest sister Fanny, aged 15, as a housekeeper. It was located between the end of Mill Close and Letcombe Brook in Grove.

### 4. Hanney Mill

Daniel James (b. 1856) was here from 1868 until 1903 when dust/lung problems caused him to move to Garlands Farm. It is likely that father Daniel was a partner with him until his death in 1883. As a boy, Jack Ireson remembers a large painted sign on the side of the building which read "West Brothers". It would also appear that the West brothers were in control of the Lower Grove Mill (see #2 above).



### 5. Venn Mill

Although William Westell West (b. 1847) began his career as a miller at the Lower Grove Mill in 1858 (at age 11) and remained there until after 1861, he seems to have taken the miller job at Venn Mill thereafter, raising his large family there and passing the miller's responsibility on to Grampa John briefly when he married Emma Long in 1904 when WWW and Sarah had moved to Reading. The family's association with Venn Mill ended when they emigrated to Canada in 1908. To hear the sounds of the mill in operation, visit the the audio/visual archives at the end of the book.



### 6. Marcham Mill

Will (Grampa's eldest brother) was Miller here from 1909, before taking up pig farming in nearby Drayton. In 1901, Will petitioned for such a tenancy at Marcham Mill (£50 for 2 years) and WWW guaranteed payment. It is not until 1909 that the owner responds with a £30 per year offer of his own, which Will accepted.



### 7. East Hagbourne Mill

Just south of E. Hagbourne on Blewbury Road (Bessels Way) is East Hagbourne Mill Farm. This was the location of the mill which was converted from a water wheel grain mill to a paper mill in the early 19c. This was where blotting paper was invented. Family history has an earlier West miller (James?) working at this mill, but not as a resident.



### 8. Blewbury Mill

Like East Hagbourne Mill, this was said to be part of the string of 3 mills which a West ancestor worked at during the 19c. Here we see the remains of the water wheel and the Mill House.

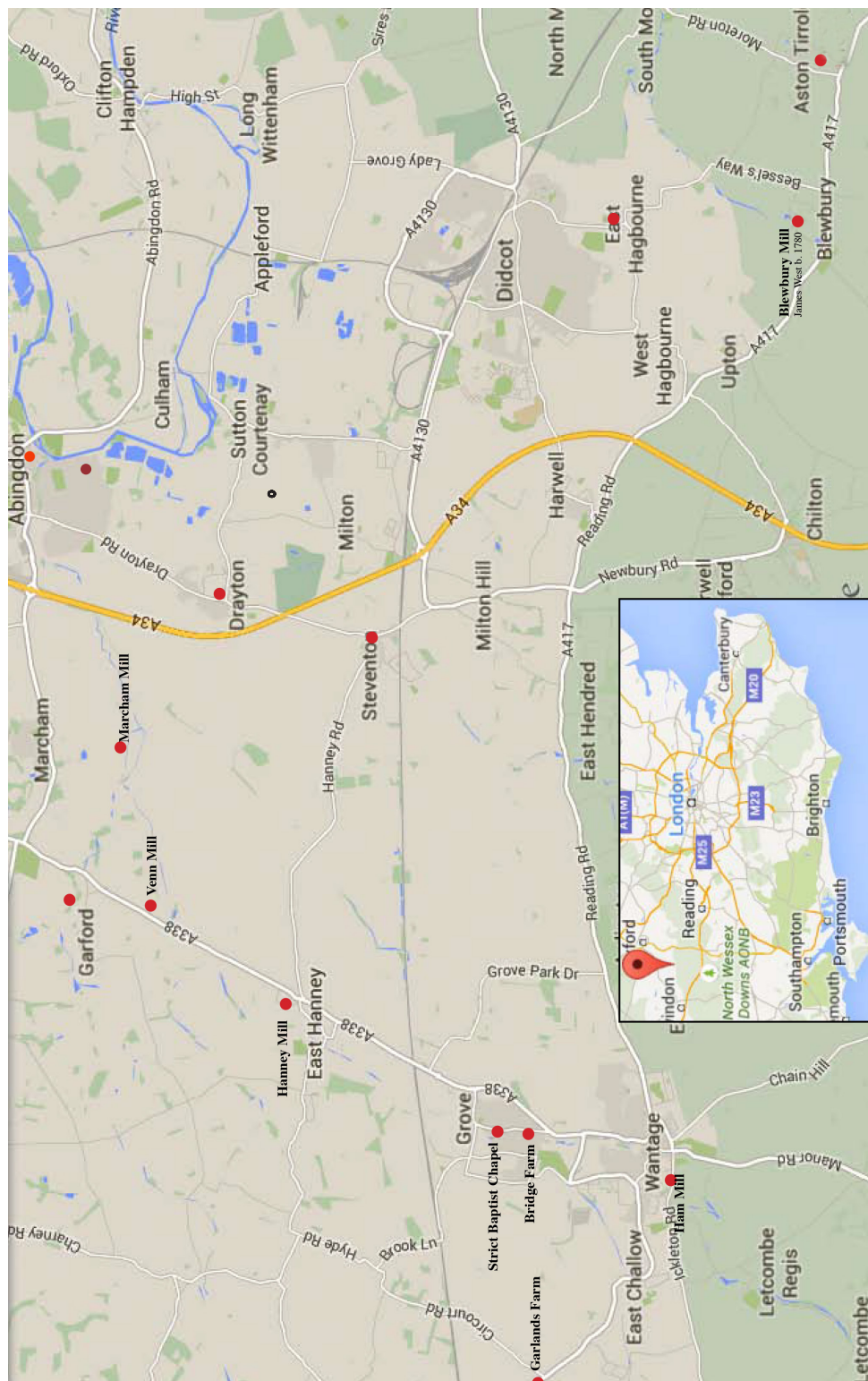


### 9. Old Blewbury Mill

This is the first West family operated mill in our records. James (b. 1780) was here from around 1800 until his death in 1857. The residence (at the left end of the mill) was built sometime after 1815. The current renovations made by owners Helen and Dermot Mathias are faithful to the original and with the landscaping have made it a showplace.







## The Tour

The tour makes no attempt to highlight places of interest beyond those which relate to our family and its branches. However, as you travel, you will pass or come near to a large number of intensely beautiful villages, churches, farm and hill landscapes and countless historical sites. You should allow at least a full day, but more would be better. If you have extra time, avail yourself of one of the many “circular walks” (country paths) throughout the district. They are clearly signposted and are a wonderful escape from the road. Enjoy! It is advisable to supplement the map on the left with more detailed maps. The Landranger Ordinance Survey Maps are available at any bookstore in the area. You will need #164 & #174.

The West family as millers go back at least to Daniel & James in the Blewbury, East Hagbourne & Aston Tirrold area. At one point Daniel (b. 1813) was at Hine’s Mill in Grove, William Westell West (WWW), at Venn Mill, WWW’s brother Daniel (b. 1856) at Hanney Mill, and WWW’s son (Grampa’s eldest brother) Will at Marcham Mill. The same stream, Letcombe Brook, ( at Marcham Mill, it becomes Childrey Brook) runs through all of them. The road which runs through “West country” between Venn Mill and Wantage/Grove is straight and true, built directly upon what many historians believe was originally a Roman Road.

The places are what make our visit so very special. This fact was brought home to me in 1995, back in Victoria, when Connie and I were awakened by a telephone call at 5am. It was David Rogers from the Old Blewbury Mill wanting to let us know that the mill and house were for sale. Lacking the million dollars plus, I politely declined. After you’ve seen it, you might think differently.

### STEVENTON AND DRAYTON

From Steventon town centre, follow the signs to the church and “the causeway”. Jog right with the road and crossing the railroad tracks, you will see:

**St. Michael & All Angels Church** The Causeway is a raised, cobbled pathway which runs between two roads from the churchyard to the railroad and beyond. Where you turned off the B4017, on the southeast corner is #1 the Causeway. This is the property, but probably not the house (too new) in which William Westell, daughter Jane, Daniel, and their children lived. They had been forced to sell their earlier property due to the construction of the Great Western Railway which opened in 1838. The census of 1841 shows William in Steventon with Jane and new husband Daniel, before the birth of their second son Jabez. The census of 1861 shows Jane and her father with her brother Fred at age 16, Mary at 15, Roseamelia at 8 and Daniel Jr. at 5. Husband Daniel was working at Hine’s Mill in Grove. Jane and Daniel’s eldest son WWW and daughter Fanny were at Lower Grove Mill and presumably Jabez had left home. At this time, they had a domestic servant named Sarah Higgs. Somewhere in the large churchyard are the faded grave markings of William and Christian Westell. Mr. Arthur Bayliss, who lives at The Old Vicarage at #103 the Causeway, has found an old transcription of the grave markings, made by an earlier parson. In the transcription are the names and dates of the Westells as mentioned, but the grave stones before 1880 are generally unreadable. Perhaps someone can find them. They will most certainly be together. If you can’t find them, the 1200 year old yew tree in the churchyard is worth the trip. (The yew tree is a standard feature of churchyards in England, since they

live for so long and have poisonous berries to keep the animals away). Mr. Bayliss also has a directory of Steventon which lists William Westell as Saddle and Harness Maker in 1854. Across the railroad tracks on your way back, where the road jogs across the causeway, keep going straight into Stocks Lane. Where that road meets the railway was a plot of land known in the 19th century as Westell's Close, now a brick ruin & fence. This was the land of two generations of Westells and where William lived with Jane and Daniel in 1841 before moving to the Causeway by 1861. The land has now been largely usurped by the railroad. At the end of the 19th century, WWW, who was the executor of his mother's will, reportedly had what Mary Irish described as "vexing problems" with Great Western Railway (later British Rail) over this land.

Return to the B4017 and go north (left) to Drayton. Turn right at the village green (High Street) and left on Church Lane (just beyond Hall's Close) until you reach the Drayton Parish Church. Behind the church, five rows from the far end of the churchyard, one grave over, you will find the grave of William (p5), Grandpa John's oldest brother, and his wife Eleanor. Note the beautiful specimens of yew tree.

## BLEWBURY AREA

Return on the same roads through Steventon, continuing south on High St. and left (east) on the A4130 toward Didcot for 2.7 miles. 1.3 miles later, going straight through the roundabout, the road becomes the 4492 (Hitchcock Way). Go straight through the next traffic circle (New Road) about 1 mile, into East Hagbourne. At the town cross, go right on Main St. and left at the second town cross onto Church Close and park in front of the Parish Church.

**East Hagbourne – St. Andrews Church** This is where James (p2) was christened in 1789 and where the family of Daniel and Mary (p1) lived for part of their lives. In addition to the lovely and well kept Parish Church and churchyard, this is one of the most beautiful old Tudor and thatch villages I've seen in England.

Return through the village, and at the first town cross, take the 4016 east, then south toward Blewbury for about a mile.

On your left you will see a sign for East Hagbourne Mill - still there but redeveloped. It is famous for the invention of blotting paper. Opposite, there was a sign for Blewbury Mill. The current owner didn't seem to mind my driving down this road to the lovely white farmhouse. Over on the left there were the ruins of the old mill wheel which I hope are still there. Neither of these mills are the historical homes of the Wests, although the existence of either could explain why James West (p2) lived in Aston Tirrold and his father Daniel (p1) in West Hagbourne in the earlier part of their lives. A possible scenario is that at some point in the late 18th century, Daniel (b. 1759) took over the Old Mill in Blewbury, having been at one of the two above mills and his son James worked one of these mills, while living less than a mile away in Aston Tirrold until the death of his father (approximately 1817). By existing footpath the three mills, "Hagbourne", "Blewbury" and "Old Blewbury" are less than a mile apart.

Continuing on the 4016 south, turn left on Hagbourne Road for about a mile, left again on Thorpe St. and right on Fullers Road for a third of a mile until you see on the right:

**Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church.** This was probably the church of James West

before the family moved to live at the Old Blewbury Mill after 1817. Nearby St. Michael's Church was the source of the records (now in Reading and Oxford) which show the baptisms of Daniel and his brother William (who died at the age of 14), but this doesn't necessarily mean that the Parish Church was the site of his baptism. Curiously there is another volume of church records available for Aston Tirrold from the local Genealogy Centre. The burial of one of Daniel's (b.1813) sisters, Ann, in 1817 (b. 1812) is recorded here. A long tradition of alternative (non-conformist) churches to the Church of England in the West family makes it likely that this beautifully restored old brick United Reformed Church housed the congregation to which James and his family belonged.

Continue on this road (now Spring Lane) to the A417. At this point you can go right to Blewbury, or if you have lots of time (an extra hour), drive up to visit the village of Aldworth and the historic roots of the Aldworth family:

Take the A417 southeast (left) 4 miles to Streatley. As you approach the "T" junction, (white house with bay window) turn right onto A329 and shortly when you see a sign to the left for Goring, turn right just before "the Bull" pub at their carpark sign. It is a very narrow lane and easily missed, but this is the B4009 to Aldworth.

Gordon Hope paints a fascinating scenario of a tribe of Angles or later Saxons travelling from the flatlands of East Anglia and encountering the relative safety and beauty of this hilltop location on the downs (hill country), founding the village of "Elleorde", later Aldworth, prospering in the subsequent centuries and "spreading over much of the County of Berkshire, forming...a solid backbone of yeoman farmers, tanners and successful Bristol and London merchantmen." The parish church is constructed of "flintstone", fist sized boulders, set in mortar and broken off to expose the black shiny inner material. The church has been refurbished with red brick in places. The main attraction in the church is the "Aldworth Giants" - stone effigies of members of a prominent 14th c. Aldworth family. In the churchyard, there is an ancient yew tree which saw the last millenium, but is looking as if it might not see the next. Elsewhere the small village is constructed of what appears to be the building material of choice in this area of the downs: red brick and flintstone. The trip is well worth it for the excellent panoramic views of the flat lands below. Streatley and Goring are two very pretty towns across the Thames from each other, with locks and dam spillways in between.

Return to the A417 and into Blewbury. Take the last exit right onto Westbrook Street. (If you see a sign for Sebastapol Wines, you have gone too far.) At the end of Westbrook Street, turn right on Church End; past the Post Office, bear left at the next intersection (Berry Lane), past Millbrook Close on the right and take the next left at the sign on a stone wall which says "the Beeches". Take the left fork and keep going until the road ends at:

**The Old Blewbury Mill** Family history has this as the place of work of millers Daniel West (p1-previously thought to have been named "James"); and James (p2). Family tradition notwithstanding, it is not at all clear how Daniel (p1) could have travelled from East Hagbourne to operate the old Blewbury Mill. More likely he worked for at least part of the time at one of the previously mentioned mills and then at the Old Mill until his death. It is likely that James lived with his family, growing to five children in the cramped quarters of the mill from 1817 until the attached house was built. (see photo p.79) . "Joseph Lou-



sley, the tenant of the Manor, wrote to his landlord in 1824, 'I have built the House at the Mill.' Before 1824, the miller had lived in the cramped quarters of the mill itself. This mill is possibly one of the mills listed in the Domesday Book. It was always leased with the Manor until its sale from the Wantage estate (to Henry Prior). The Priors, Henry and son John, were the millers for the latter half of the 19th century. Miss Prior, John's sister, died in 1958, aged 93 years. Mary Irish and Percy visited Miss Prior in the 1950s, and the owner of the mill at that time was G. M. Boumfrey, a well known author and BBC Director. In the 60s they visited again, and the mill had been converted to three separate dwellings. The subsequent owner was David Rogers, Head of Special Collections at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The current owners are Helen and Dermot Mathias, who have restored it beautifully after years of occupation by "squatters". The Mill is in a spectacular setting which is a "must see" on the tour.

Return as you came, to the A 417 and go west (right) for 9 miles to Wantage. As you enter the outskirts of Wantage (on Charlton Road), 100 yards beyond the Lord Nelson Pub on the right hand side, notice the substantial red brick house at #49, former home of Herbert and Doris Smith, built by Herbert "in his spare time". Continue west on the A417, following the signs to the town centre and market square. Park here.

## WANTAGE AREA

At the western edge is the **Wantage Parish Church** (St. Peter and Paul's). In 1545, Alice Aldworth of West "Hacbourne" left 16 pence for the installation of a "fleur de lys" decorated bell, which still hangs on the east side of the tower. A later Aldworth grandfather became lost on the Lambourn downs in a fog. When he finally found his way back, he gave money to the Wantage Parish Church to ring a curfew every night at 8pm to guide travellers. Mary Irish remembers the bells playing hymns as a girl, particularly the "Angel's Hymn". Indeed, to this day, the playing of this hymn is mentioned in the town's tourist map. While you are in the square, walk down to the right (Mill Street) and see The Baptist Church (also known as Zion Chapel) – built by William Aldworth (b.1818), an impressive display of masonry skills and an illustration of his prosperity in the community.

At the other end of the square (eastern end), walk by the "Savers" and "Boots" and further past the Waitrose store to # 31 on the left. This was the building which housed Miss Bailey's School, which Sarah Aldworth, Mary Irish and at least 2 of the Aunties attended. Walk back a block and turn left on Post Office Lane. At the point where the lane becomes Eagle's Close, look left at the row houses with gardens in front. These used to be the work houses which were part of the housing system which WWW was involved with as "Guardian of the Poor".

Return to your car and complete the circle around the square, turning right into Newbury St. (A4494 to Newbury), the next left (Ormond Rd.) and the next right on Chain Hill. Turn right into the cemetery, turn the car around, exit the cemetery and park at the bottom of Chain Hill next to the large brick apartment building, across the street from the bottom end of the cemetery.

**Chain Hill Cemetery.** Cross the street, enter the lower gate and on the left, 2 rows from the fence, you will find the sandstone, somewhat deteriorated graves of William Aldworth 1871-1909, probably the last son of William Aldworth (b. 1848) and his second wife Mary

Ann (1835-1911), who is remembered on the same grave marking. The graves of William and Emma Aldworth (in the older, "non conformist area of the cemetery) are not visible but are probably one of the nearby gravestones that are weathered beyond readability. In any case, a volume of tombstone inscriptions can be found in the Oxford Library (COS) which confirms their grave in this cemetery.

Return via Ormond Rd. and straight ahead at the junction with Newbury St. you will see:

**The Royal Oak Pub** that was run by Charles Collins, a brother of Great Gramma Sarah. Cousin Colin Smith gave me a copy of a poem written by some of the locals on the occasion of Charles' death in 1929. Nicknamed "Ratty" Collins, the poem read: *"Down comes the golden chariot, In jumps poor old rat. No more going up Mandrill to see what the men be at!"*

Turn right on Newbury St. and just before the square, note on the right:

**The National Westminster Bank**, a red-tiled, obviously re-furbished building. This was the house (or its replacement) on Newbury St. in which William and Emma lived until Emma died in 1857.

Turn left into the square, right at the end of the square and left into Mill Street.

The big mill on the left at the bottom of the street is Clark's Mill (now Wessex Mill). Mary Irish went to Miss Bailey's School with Freda Clark.

Continue past the Baptist Church, built in part by 2x great grandfather William Aldworth (b.1818) and up the hill to the Brick house on the left at 89 Mill St. This is:

**The Camel Cottage**, a house now owned by the convent across the street, where William Aldworth and his family moved after the death of Emma. I spoke with a sister from the convent who told me that the order had purchased the property around 1870 (probably from the estate of William).

Continue to the double roundabout and go west toward East Challow on the 417 and drive through East Challow. As you leave East Challow you see on the right:

**Nalder & Nalder** (now Challow Industries), a large stone building with a fan shaped window over the front door. This is where Percy West (p5) apprenticed to be a pattern maker in the late 19th century and later worked until 1913.

Continue on the 417 past the West Challow exit on your left, past the Denchworth (Circourt Rd.) exit on your right, up a hill, and take the next left before the brick house. At the end of the drive is:

**Garlands Farm.** This is the farm where family history has it that William Smith, grandfather of Jane Westell, lived. Daniel West (b. 1813) moved there in later years. It was then owned by his son James' wife, Brenda West. The house is an impressive two level brick building. In 2012, the farm was sold, but Joe West and his son still have a house on the property and are most delightful and friendly people.

Continue on the 417 (Faringdon Rd.) and turn left and south on B 4001 (New Rd.) through Childrey. As you leave town up a hill, you will notice the rather deep treed trench which the road occupies as it approaches the B4507. This is:

**Childrey Holloway**, where an Aldworth ancestor was murdered by highwaymen in the 17th century while returning to Wantage after buying a horse at an auction.

At this point, if you have a couple of extra hours, you might wish to travel the road on which the Venn Mill family took a once-a-year outing in a horse drawn trap to White Horse Hill. If so, turn right on the B4507 for about 3.5 kilometers and turn right through Kingston Lisle and north toward Baulking. Three kilometers further, just before the railroad tracks, you will come to Hale's Farm on the left.

**Hale's Farm** – During one of the family outings, the horse was tied up at the bottom of White Horse Hill while the family went to the top. Upon their return the trap was there, but the horse was gone. Everyone spread out to look for the horse and Fred came the amazing distance to this farm (10 miles?) to find help. After a few hours, the horse was found near the bottom of the hill, but Fred was lost. Later he showed up with a Mr. Partridge and another horse.

Go back to the 4507 and continue to the Whitehorse Hill car park:

**White Horse Hill** – This is a must-see in any case, but all the more enjoyable, imagining such a family outing 100 years ago. The historical markers give lots of information.

To Letcombe Basset. If you have skipped the last two attractions, continue on the 4001 from Childrey across the B4507 toward Letcombe Bassett.

If returning from the White Horse Hill on the B4507, turn right on the B 4001 until you come toward Letcombe Basset.

When the 4001 bears to the right in town, continue right at appropriately-named "Gramp's Hill" (sign to Downs Church). Up the hill, bearing right, you will see on the left:

**St. Michael's Church and Churchyard** (Forster Lane – park here). There is a volume of tombstone inscriptions of this churchyard which shows that this is the burial place of Thomas Newton (b.1743). The exterior of the church is not restored, but the inside is very nice. This is also a particularly lovely village and churchyard. As you leave the village, note the picturesque branch of the Letcombe Brook that powered many of the "West" mills further downstream.

Go back to the main road and turn right toward Letcombe Regis. There will be lots of twists and turns but follow the signs to Letcombe Regis and then north towards Challow. Turn right on B4507 (Ickleton Rd). and in .8 of a mile turn right on Ham Rd. The fork to the right will take you to the beautiful manor called The Ham, or go straight ahead and on the left is the...

**Ham Mill**, another restored building in an equally beautiful setting, where WWW and Sarah (b. 1845) lived and worked after their wedding in 1868 until after the birth of first son Will (1869).

Return on Ham road across the A417.

A short distance along Ham Road on the left was a fresh water spring which both Sarah Aldworth and Doris Smith remember drinking from on a hot day as children. A little further on the right is Lock's Lane and near the corner is a spring and the location of King Alfred's Bath, an ancient brick work. This area is called "the mead" and is the reputed site of King Alfred's birth.

Continue on Ham Road north to the double roundabout, turn right on Mill Street (Wantage town centre) and just before the town square, turn left on Grove Street (Midland Bank). Where the road turns to the right, on the left side is #41 Grove Street. The pattern for the brass knocker was made by Percy West. Since this is a dead-end street, return to the square, turn left and proceed more-or-less straight on to and around the square and out the 417. Then turn north (left) on the A338 toward

## GROVE AND THE HANNEYS

On the left and right (past Mably Way on the left), notice **Elms Farm** and a new housing development called Elms Farm Close, where Herbert Collins (b. 1849) and his family lived. This was the centre of the Smith's large farm. The agriculture part of the farm is still in operation, but 140 acres is now in solar panels and some buildings are leased for businesses. In its heyday, the farm also included a large dairy business serving a significant section of Oxfordshire.

Take the first left to Grove (Main St.) Continue a very short way down Main St. The first left is Bridge Farm Close, at the end of which is

**Bridge Farm**, the home of Roger and Helen Barker. Helen is the only daughter (4 brothers) of Billy and Joan Smith.

Return to Main St. and go left. The next left, just before the gas station, is Mill Lane.

**Hine's Mill** - The row house directly in front of you after the turn is where Daniel and Jane West lived until they died in the 1880's. At the end of the road is beautifully restored Hine's Mill, where Daniel worked. Gordon and Joyce Entwistle were the delightful owners in 1994. They are real "Mill Buffs" and well worth meeting if they are still there.

The next left up Main street is Cane Lane.

*The third cottage on the right is **Venbrook**, (named by Mary Irish), the cottage where Percy lived with his second wife Miriam until their deaths in 1975 and 1989.*

Continuing up Main Street, you will pass Mandhill Close on the left, and an equal distance further will bring you to a black iron fence on left.

This is the **Strict Baptist Chapel and Churchyard**. For me, it is the most impressive sight, since it holds the quite readable grave marking of at least three generations of Daniel (b. 1720) and his descendants. Much of the history of this congregation is the history

of this branch of the Wests and Aldworths. The grave stones you will find are: Daniel (b. 1813) and Jane, Daniel (b. 1856) and Catherine, Roseamelia and Martin Shepherd (b. 1841), Harriet and Herbert Collins (b. 1849), Miriam and John Smith, Mercy Smith (b. 1857), Lydia Smith, John and Miriam Collins, Joseph and Eunice Collins, Ann Collins, Stanley Pinnell, Percy West and Miriam, Ruth Collins Smith, Arthur and Daisy Smith, Billy and Joan Smith, Herbert and Doris Smith, Harry Pocock, and Daniel James West (b. 1856). Mr. Tugwell, a Deacon of this congregation, was a good friend of Percy West and has many stories to tell about Percy and the congregation. He also seems to know a fair amount about the West family.

Continue up Main Street and turn left on School Lane and right on Old Mill Close.

The end of the street is the approximate location of the **Lower Grove Mill** which WWW and sister Fanny ran while they were in their teens. Letcombe Brook is off to your left beyond the houses.

Go back to Main Street and turn left, then turn right at the next roundabout (Oxford St.) to the A338, and go north (left) toward East Hanney. Don't take the first road to West Hanney, but take the second left (blind corner). Stay all the way left & the first building on the right will be a white building

that was the **bakery and house of Philip and Harriet Long**, and the birthplace of Grandma Emma and her first born, Uncle Jack. Elsie (mom) was born at Venn Mill and the rest of the family were born in Canada.

Turn around and take the village road sharp left, past the red phone box turning left on the Green and then Halls Lane. Follow the road left and then right. Before you cross Letcombe Brook, take the left fork and you will come to

**Lower Hanney Mill**, where Daniel West worked for a time, and later his son Daniel. Jack Ireson remembers a sign on the mill saying WEST's MILL, although it is likely that this was removed in recent years by some history buff. (Well, really!!!) It is a tall thin building; quite unusual, now a residence; the nearby Mill Cottage is also occupied. Nigel Hammond in his book White Horse Country (Blackwell, Oxford, 1972) also refers to this mill as West's Mill (pg. 105). Kelly's Trade Directory for Berkshire shows a West (no initial) at Lower Mill, East Hanney in 1868 and Daniel (WWW's) brother at the same mill in 1869, 77, 83, 87, 91, 95, 99 & 1903. In the early century, Jack's father Allan Ireson was a land-owner who owned Morlands Farm, which you pass on your way to the mill.

Return to the Long's bakery and continue sharp right down that street, following the signs to West Hanney. At the town cross, turn left, go past the manor house on the right and straight ahead is

**The West Hanney Parish Church.** Prominently placed near the front door of the church are the graves of Philip and Harriet Long. To the left of the Church (as you come down the road) is a stone building which was Martin Shepherd's bakery. To the right is Prior's Court. An Aldworth relative, William Aldworth, took leases on this property in 1840, 47, 54 & 61. In 1847, New College Oxford (this manor having been granted to them by Hen-

ry VI) obtained a valuation (an inventory), describing this property as a rather large and elaborate house and farm estate. Elsewhere in Hanney, there was a house and farm called 'Aldworth's'.

Return to the A338 and continue north to:

## VENN MILL AND GARFORD

You can't miss it, and in fact if you don't slow down, you'll hit it!) It is thought that the name Venn (spelled Ven in 19th century documents) evolved from Fenn, meaning marsh-land. Very early documents refer to Fenn Mill. According to the Domesday Book, there was a mill here in 1086. The mill house dates to the 17th century. Recent excavations have uncovered foundations of the earlier house adjoining the mill itself. Kelly's Trade Directory for Berkshire shows W.W. West at Venn Mill in 1903 and J. West in 1907. William Westell West and Sarah came here first in 1870. The census of 1871 shows WWW, Sarah, William, age 1, John Aldworth, (brother of Sarah) at 15 and a domestic servant named Harriet at the Venn Mill house. All the children except for Will were born here as well as Grandpa John and Emma's second born, Elsie. The census of 1881 shows WWW, Sarah, (Will was at Hine's Mill with Grandpa Daniel), Emma at 9, Asher at 7, Fred at 6, Percy at 3 and Elsie at 1. All the boys went to Garford School, which was one mile north. They were taught by Mr. Neville (probably the father-in-law of George Long) and later by Mr. & Mrs. Harris, who particularly liked the Venn Mill children (well disciplined and intelligent). WWW was a visiting inspector of the school, who checked and signed the registers. Betsy Fox was the itinerant nurse who came once a month and when the new babies came. By the 1891 census (the Grove report was in William Westell West's handwriting and signed by him), Will, Emma and Asher had left, Fred was 16, Percy 13, Elsie 11, John (Grampa) 9, Mary 6, Heber 4 and Ruth 6 months with no domestic servant in residence. The family shared in the many tasks around the house and mill, baking the bread, making clothes for all the children and brewing the beer, apparently an acceptable beverage to the Strict Baptist, as opposed to gin. The nearest town was five miles away in Wantage and the nearest shop one mile away in Garford. The mill complex included meadow lands in which hay was grown. The family had two cows. A family story tells of the apples which were brought into the mill house and somehow misplaced. The family could smell them but could never find them, even when they rotted! In 1993, the owner of Venn Mill (not house) was Alan Stoyel, a geologist, who had restored the mill to operating status. It is a "breastshot wheel"- see diagram on page 117. On a Sunday, once a month, June through October, he would open and operate the mill for tourists, grinding flour for the observers. To see, hear and feel the mill in operation is a memorable experience. For a recording link, see the Audio Visual Archives at the end of the book.

North again on the A338, the building on the left is the Old Schoolhouse where the boys went to school, now three dwellings. The next sharp left will take you into

## Garford

As you enter Garford, there is a manor farm (now **H. Walker and Son**) with large stone barns directly ahead of you. This was the home and livelihood of Mr. & Mrs. William Long (Gramma Emma's uncle & aunt). Described as a horse and trap Manor Farm, it was one mile walk from Venn Mill over the fields. It was here on Queen Victoria's Jubilee in June of 1877 where Mr. Long cleared out a barn and a nearby meadow for a lavish dinner

(lots of beer, which Percy remembers “suited some and not others”) and a day of games and merriment. Stop here and walk between the Manor House and the barn and you will come to St. Luke’s Chapel on the right. There is a huge key to the church: as you enter the yard, on the right side of the door of the house (knock first), on a hook behind a vine. The tiny church houses a grand piano, an electric organ, and a pump organ. There are low pews in the front, seemingly for choir boys or children. In the Churchyard, in the far right-hand corner away from the church, you will find the graves of Philip Long, William and Eliza Long, and daughter Mary Eliza, in addition to the graves of Peter and Emma Hatton.

Continuing down the road through the village, you will come to the town hall, a curiously out-of-place wood-frame building, and the next building opposite on the right, now called “sundial cottage” was Peter Hatton’s shop – the closest store to Venn Mill. Percy said whenever they had a ha’penny to spend, he went to Mr. Hatton’s shop to buy sweets. Hatton used to chase them because they would taunt him: “Peter Hatton, Peter Hatton had a pig and couldn’t fatten’m.” Mr. Powell was a well-to-do man in the village. His son Claude went to the very upper class “Abingdon School”. Claude came home and told many exaggerated stories, and the boys (and Peter Hatton) laughed at him, getting them in much trouble with the wealthy Mr. Powell.

An alternate and much more “atmospheric” approach to Garford is to follow the route used by decades of our ancestors. Take the footpath which angles off to the left just north of Venn Mill and intersects with the incredibly narrow road to Garford.

Leaving Garford, (or Venn Mill) go north on the A338 again and take the right on A 415 to Marcham. At the town centre, turn right (south) on Mill Road (sign to Manor Farm) and go to the end of the road. You will find

## MARCHAM AND ABINGDON

**Marcham Mill**, where Grampa John’s brother Will lived and worked. Since the census of 1881 puts Will with Daniel and Jane (at Hine’s Mill, apprenticing), and we know he visited Canada in the mid 1880s, we can estimate that he lived at Marcham Mill from some time in the 1890s. Letters in the Berkshire Record Office document an Offer of Tenancy by the owner of Marcham Mill, subsequently guaranteed by WWW in 1901. Another offer by the landlord to Will, and Will’s letter of acceptance of 1909 is also there.

### Abingdon

Continuing east (right) on Marcham Road, under the A34, go through Abingdon following the road left on Stratton Way slowly curving to the right. Turn right on Abbey Close and park in the Waitrose parking lot. Continue to walk down Abbey Close, turning right on Checker Walk. On your left at #10 is a non-descript cement block building which is

**Abbey Baptist Chapel** (1832). This is the chapel where Jane Westell and Daniel West met (previous anecdote) and where William Westell West was baptized. In the years after 1830, a very popular minister, Mr. William Tiptaft, attracted great numbers of people from a large surrounding area to his Sunday sermons. This could explain why William Westell and his family would come all the way from Steventon by horse and trap to attend services. Nearby is a pub which amusingly is the only place church-goers could “park” their horse and trap; the same was true in Grove. Billy Smith and his family came to Abbey Baptist

Chapel from Grove and were a back-bone of the congregation. The Chapel was externally renovated in the 1950s, but it is the original building.

Thus ends our tour. There are far too few Wests in England now, so I’m not going to tell you how to get out of here!! Actually, before you leave England, be sure to take other days to drive to:

## OPTIONAL TRIPS STOWFORD, TROWBRIDGE

Set your GPS to Stowford Manor Farm - Camping.

You will find the impressive manor farm and mill of two generations of Bryants. In 1969, Jack and Phil Bryant took me to Farleigh’s Pub at the Farleigh Castle Ruin just up the road, another fascinating place (the ruin, that is). Stowford is now owned and operated by Phil Bryant (junior). They run a B&B and caravan park here. Check their website at: <http://www.stowfordmanorfarm.co.uk/>

## HEATHFIELD

Set your GPS to Ebenezer Strict Baptist Chapel, 5 Scotsford Cl, Broad Oak, Heathfield TN21 8UF - Take the M4, west to the M25 (London Orbital), south and east to exit 5 and south on the A21 and B265.

Here you will find Steventon, Broad Oak, the village where WWW and Sarah and Auntie Ruth lived after 1908. The Ebenezer Strict Baptist Chapel where WWW preached is here and the graveyard also, where he is buried along with Sarah and the four daughters.

