



New Barnes Mill



Railway bridge by Butterfield Lane



Oaks in Holyrood Crescent

The Farming Connection Areas of interest

These five circular history walks have been designed to highlight the rich history and beautiful green spaces in the area south of St Albans called Sopwell. Sopwell, named after the 12th century nunnery where the nuns lived on bread and water (sops), became a manor in medieval times.

The project to research Sopwell's early history and collect more recent local memories for the benefit of future generations was begun by the Sopwell Residents Association (SRA) in 2009. The amount of material generated resulted, in 2012, in a self-published book *Sopwell a history and collection of memories* by Sandy Norman. ISBN: 978-0-9567399-1-9. It was on the strength of this original research, carried out with minimal help and resources, that SRA was awarded £10,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund All Our Stories Project. The money has been used to build a website www.sopwellmemories.org.uk and to produce these leaflets.

The book is on sale in St Albans at Waterstones bookshop, St Albans Museum and Tourist Information Centre and Sopwell House hotel, price: £15.00. It may also be ordered online via the link on the Sopwell Residents Association website: www.sra.org.uk



Sopwell History Walks



Walk 2

The Farming Connection

Approx Distance
2.3 miles / 3.75 kilometres

Published by Sopwell Residents Association and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

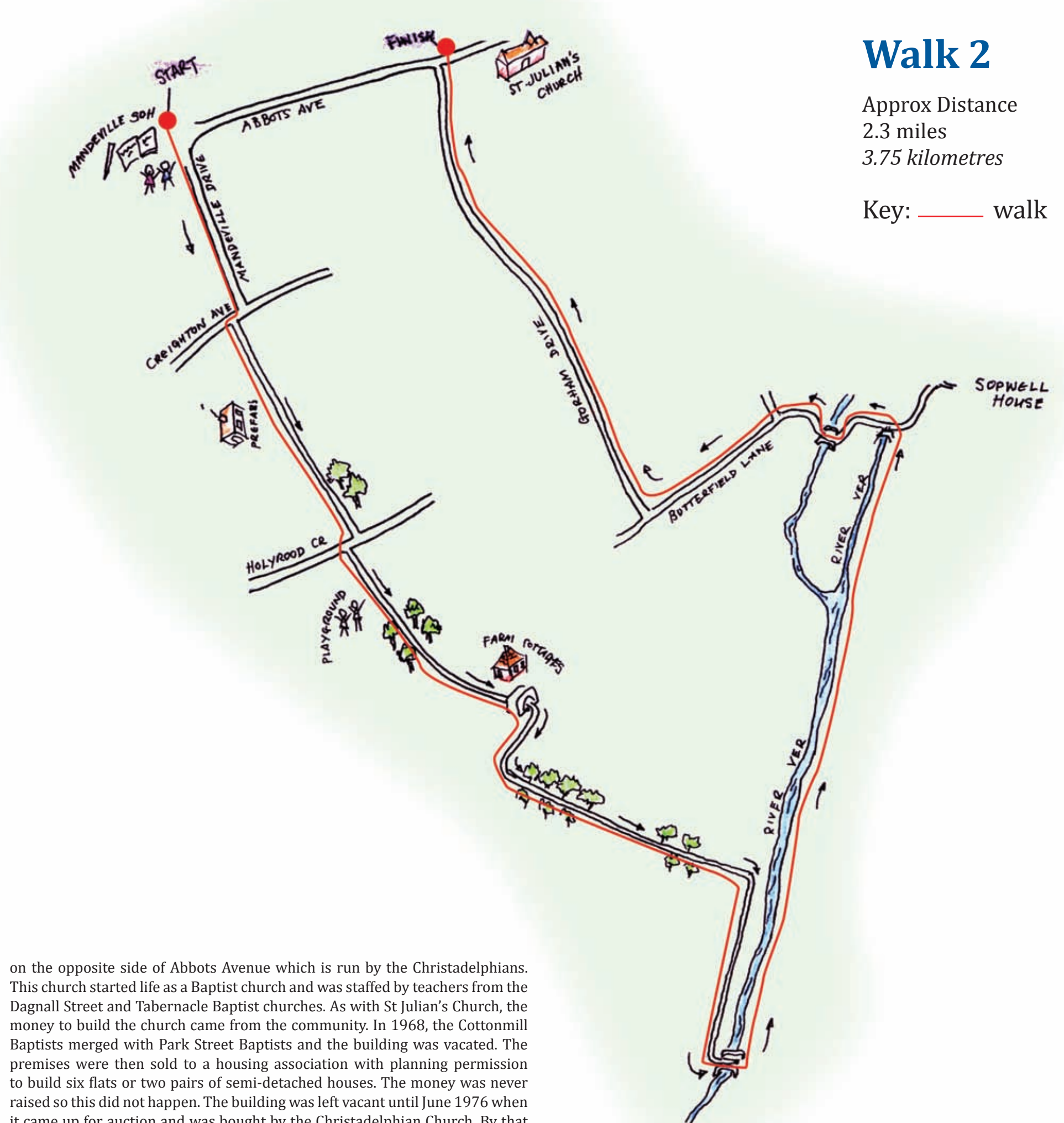


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The Farming Connection

There is limited car parking at the top of Mandeville Drive where there are garages, or in the street in Abbots Avenue West.

1. Start outside Mandeville School and walk down Mandeville Drive towards Creighton Avenue. The school was built in 1951 on farmland which was part of St Julian's farm. Cross Creighton Avenue and take the footpath which leads down to Holyrood Crescent. On the right you will see some prefabricated buildings in Mitchell Close. These were built just after the Second World War. Many of the first houses built after the war were prefabricated because they were easy and quick to assemble. They arrived in four pieces complete with fittings and only took 20 to 30 minutes to put up. These bungalows were 'Hawkesley's aluminium dwellings' and were described as being a permanent type of bungalow with an estimated life of sixty years and ideal for a family of three or four. The prefabs in Mitchell Close are this type of dwelling and, remarkably, are still there. The provision of these aluminium bungalows had ceased by October 1948. However, the other, smaller, prefabs continued to be built. Note the line of oak trees on the left going down to the end of the footpath.
2. Cross over Holyrood Crescent towards the playground and proceed in a straight line across the open space. The avenue of oak trees continues down here from the footpath. This used to be an ancient hedgerow. Pass the cottages on your left and follow the path round to the bridge under the railway. These were once farm cottages belonging to Little Sopwell Farm or Sopwell Barnes. The railway is the St Albans Abbey to Watford Junction line.
3. Turn right under the bridge and follow the field path for about 1.5kms. The path is uneven and can sometimes be overgrown. The path eventually runs parallel with the river Ver. After a kissing-gate, cross the bridge, turn left and follow the river back on other side to New Barnes. This was once a popular place for picnics, bathing and catching tiddlers. Watch out for cattle in the field.
4. The path comes out at a bend in Cottonmill Lane. There used be a working watermill, New Barnes Mill, here which is thought to have been on this site since at least the 17th century. It was rebuilt in the 1890s by the Earl of Verulam. The British Flour Research Committee ran the mill from the 1920s and then Whitworth Brothers until 1957. The present buildings are used for light industry and business. There was also a farm here called Sopwell Home Farm. The area around was called Sopwell Park, or just Sopwell. All the buildings near the river, apart from the mill, were farm buildings and cottages. Black's Pine to the right is situated in a 450-year-old tithe barn. Beyond it is the entrance to Sopwell House Hotel, a lovely stop for some refreshments!
5. Turn left out of the footpath and follow the road round and over the bridge. Be careful of traffic as this is a busy corner. Turn left into Butterfield Lane. Butterfield Lane is named after the Butterfield family. George Butterfield came to St Albans in the 1890s and worked as a master miller at Sopwell Mill.
6. Turn right up Gorham Drive and then left into Abbots Avenue West, past the King Offa pub and the shops and back up to Mandeville School. The bridge goes over another part of the St Albans to Watford railway line. This was just a cattle bridge until the estate was built up after the war - there were no houses in this part of Sopwell until the 1950s. On the right, a little way down from Gorham Drive, is St Julian's Church. The church has an interesting history. After the war, many newly housed residents on the Cottonmill and St Julian's estates wanted somewhere to worship. In 1948, permission was granted for the use of a converted Nissen hut in Cottonmill Lane as a Sunday school. This was an old wartime hut which had stood in the fields as part of an anti-aircraft searchlight emplacement. The present building dates from 1956, and was partly paid for by individual community subscriptions of sixpence. The church was built as a daughter church, to be the responsibility of St Stephen's. There is another church



Walk 2

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2.3 miles
3.75 kilometres

Key: ——— walk

on the opposite side of Abbots Avenue which is run by the Christadelphians. This church started life as a Baptist church and was staffed by teachers from the Dagnall Street and Tabernacle Baptist churches. As with St Julian's Church, the money to build the church came from the community. In 1968, the Cottonmill Baptists merged with Park Street Baptists and the building was vacated. The premises were then sold to a housing association with planning permission to build six flats or two pairs of semi-detached houses. The money was never raised so this did not happen. The building was left vacant until June 1976 when it came up for auction and was bought by the Christadelphian Church. By that time the building was in a very poor state and the roof leaked. Members of the church set to and repaired and extended the building and the grounds.