

EASTCOMBE. Short Walk 1. Do not attempt to drive this route – there is nowhere to turn or park.

Eastcombe village until recently was just a maze of little lanes and modest cottages. It grew slowly over the past 600 years. There are three or four big Victorian houses, but this was really a community of working people – domestic servants, seamstresses, farm labourers, masons, plasterers, carpenters, factory workers... There is no grand architecture to look at, but there are lots of charming cottages and corners that will give pleasure. On the outside wall of the excellent shop at the top of The Green there is a village map – and a defibrillator – and possibly a mobile phone signal.

Beginning at the bottom of **The Green**, on the corner by the **red telephone box**, you will see a cottage named **Two Pillars**. This was converted to a dwelling in 1989, but earlier was a farm building that had various uses through the years. The part nearest The Green was a hay barn, and there is a record of its upper room being used for prayer meetings in the eighteenth century before the Baptist Church was built next door. The lower portion was an open-sided cart shed (though in living memory it was a coalman's store). On this north side are two old pillars which would have been brought here from Bisley (there is nothing new about architectural salvage). This building was part of the farm complex that predated the building of The Lamb Inn on this site.

Down a private drive alongside Two Pillars are two 1970s houses, also on the farm's property. **The Lamb Inn** itself was built about 1855, and was privately owned for many years. A seventeen-year-old son of the then publican scratched 'Richard Ridler Dutton 1878 fammar [farmer]' on a window pane that can still be seen in the main bar... For long after the inn passed into the hands of the Stroud Brewery, which in turn was bought by Whitbread's, it remained a modest village pub with a succession of long-serving landlords. The village was taken by surprise to discover that Whitbread's had sold off The Lamb to a pub-owning company, thereby making a community buy-out impossible. A very large remodelling and extension of the premises followed, complete with the addition of a large dining room overlooking the valley. By now, 2017, this has become a popular venue with a welcoming and supportive attitude to the community.

Passing along the road across the front of the pub, **The Green** becomes **The Street**. Walk down here and, past the pub's old outbuilding on the left, pause to look downhill. From this vantage point it used to be possible to see down to the hamlet of **Bismore** in the **Toadsmoor Valley** but the view is now blocked by weed trees that the District Council refuses to allow felled. Across the valley, however, one can see the long ridge called **Lypiatt**, with its ancient farms and minor manor houses. On the right of The Street are two 1960s houses, hugely controversial when they were built on what was a high grassy bank but now just part of the scenery together with many other later 'infill' properties. (New planning applications are still, naturally, viewed with as much dismay, distress and distrust as there was in the 60s.)

Next on the left is a footpath leading down to the parallel lane, Wells Road. After it come three old cottages, the middle one of which was established as a bakery before Victoria came to the throne. The Hook family all worked hard in this and other trades, but one son became locally famous in the building business called Wall & Hook. In about 85 years of trading, this company had a finger in many pies but particularly was involved in building or restoring 108 churches. An auction sale prospectus in 1871 described a 'stone-built MESSUAGE, with front and back Courts or Yards, Bakehouse, Flour Loft, Cellar, Brewhouse, Two Stables, Sheds, Cart-house, and large Garden, planted with choice young Fruit Trees, Pump and Well of excellent Water' – a pretty good indication of how different the village was then.

Opposite here a grassy path leads up to Fidges Lane, the parallel road higher up the hillside, and beyond that path is a pair of **Model Cottages** built by Henry Hook, which had 1869 on the gable. By that time the Hooks owned and let several houses in Eastcombe, property being the popular investment for people with some money to spare. The Model Cottages were presumably inspired by Prince Albert's earlier campaign to house working families fittingly, beginning with an example Model Cottage at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Next on the right come the delightful **Rose Cottage**, and **Lypiatt Villa**. Long ago, Lypiatt Villa was the home of the Skertons, two of whose eight sons were killed in the First World War. Their names appear on the War Memorial in the chapel's upper graveyard – but one of them was posted 'Missing in Action' rather than 'Killed', and as a result his mother never gave up hope of his returning. For the rest of her life she kept the porch light burning at Lypiatt Villa, wishing to guide him home.

On the other side of the road a lane goes down a steep pitch to meet the end of **Wells Road** at the tiny spring which was a water supply for this end of the village well into the twentieth century. Indeed, some people still preferred to use it even into the twenty-first century!

Alongside here is a fine house called **The Laurels**, which was divided into two dwellings long ago. It was built by Henry Hook for himself, a stone's throw from the bakery where he grew up. It is very much in the Victorian style, and has sculpted heads decorating it (reflecting his firm's church work and possibly done by his partner, George Wall). On the roadside wall by the garage door it is possible (just) to see election graffiti that have been there for well over a century.

After this The Street forks. The left-hand spur is a dead end, but gives access to six or eight houses. The right-hand fork leads up to **Fidges Lane**. On the right after Lypiatt Villa is what used to be a one-up, one-down cottage called Lewisville. Its fine stonework has always been remarked on, and is an example of what the highly skilled local stonemasons could (and can) do. Through much of the twentieth century, and maybe earlier, part of the large Winstone family lived there. The father was killed on the railway in the 1920s, leaving a widow with a son and daughter. The son, Lewis, was in the Grenadier Guards in the Second World War. He was killed in his tank as they crossed the Rhine. His name too is on the war memorial in the chapel graveyard. The cottage has been extended recently, and about ten years ago was renamed '**Stick Heaven**'.

Past here is a fairly new house, and then (in 2017) a difficult building site where sadly a house was recently demolished.

One can pause here on reaching **Fidges Lane**. There is a well placed bench where one can sit and admire the view over the village rooftops. To the south-west, on the skyline, it is possible to see Nether (or Lower) Lypiatt Manor, where Prince and Princess Michael of Kent lived until recently. Here, to the east of the Toadsmoor stream, humble little settlements were built clinging to the edge of the old common land, but on the hill to the west are many fine farms and manors. Beginning with Nether Lypiatt on the left, 'reading' along the springline opposite this seat one may get a glimpse of Middle Lypiatt, Berrimans, Ferris Court, Upper (or Over) Lypiatt now known as Lypiatt Park, and also Copsegrove Farm. With woodland lining Fidges Lane to the right, it may now be necessary to climb up to the field behind the seat in order to get a look at Lypiatt Park and Copsegrove... and Bisley a little further to the north. These estates have all been in existence for at least 500-600 years, and their histories go back possibly into Saxon or even Roman times.

From this bench one has the possibility of descending Fidges Lane into the valley, or entering the fields behind the seat and heading in the direction of Bisley. Either choice would give a satisfyingly long walk – but the easy thing now would be to head back into the village. Leave the bench on your left and The Street on your right and walk up Fidges Lane. There are bungalows and modern houses on your left, built on what used to be farmland. The farmhouse itself, Sheephouse, is now in ruins in the fields behind the seat, and the land belongs to the farm at **Upper Nash End**, half a mile away up the Bisley road. Opposite the bungalows are two 1970s houses with enviable views over the village and valley.

After this on the right is the top of the footpath coming up from the Model Cottages on The Street, which also gives access to an old cottage called **Troops Hill** (nobody knows how it got its name). When Lypiatt Park estate was broken up by auction in 1919, Troops Hill was described as a 'Stone-Built and Tiled Cottage of five Rooms with usual Outbuildings and capital Garden in all about 34p[erches] Let to C. Winston at £4:0:0 per annum'. The cottage is now well out of sight from all angles.

The **Laburnum Cottages** follow, and then there is another footpath which curves round past two cottages back to The Green. Opposite Laburnum Cottages, on the left of Fidges Lane, are two old cottages and then more modern houses and bungalows. On the right there is one last old cottage, **Normandie**, whose outbuilding alongside the lane has 'Slaughterhouse' written on it, and then one is back to the house and shop on the top corner of The Green. Below the shop are two old cottages, **Cyprus Cottage** – itself the Post Office back in the early twentieth century – and then **Woodview on the Green**, with its well visible in the front garden – and then this stroll finishes back at **The Lamb Inn**.