

EASTCOMBE/BISMORE. Route 3. *Do not attempt to drive this way unless feeling very brave.*

Eastcombe village until recently was just a maze of little lanes and modest cottages. It grew slowly over 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 great architecture to look at, but there are lots of charming cottages and corners that will give pleasure. Some of these are in outlying hamlets in the Toadsmoor Valley, of which Bismore is one. Outside the excellent shop on The Green there is a map of the village – and a defibrillator – and possibly mobile phone signal.

This walk begins as Route 2 does. Mobile telephones will probably have no signal. At the foot of **The Green**, cross **Dr Crouch's Road** and go down between the **Baptist Church** and the **red telephone kiosk**. At the back of the Chapel there is a gate and door leading in to the Victorian schoolroom, which predated the building of the primary school. This room continues to be available for community purposes, though there is no longer the coke stove that unemployed men used to huddle around during the '30s Depression. Opposite this side of the Chapel are two modern bungalows that developed from a new house and shop built more than 50 years ago (at a time when the village had more than one shop), moving the business from **Beam Ends** further down.

Next on the left is a footpath that passes four houses on its way back up to **Dr Crouch's Road**, joining it between **The Manse** and the **Primary School**. On the right is **Chancewell Cottage**, which stands next to a footpath leading down to **Wells Road**, emerging opposite **Red Lion House**. Then on the left is a very old cottage, still named **Brotherstones** after previous occupants, a couple who lost both their sons during the First World War. (They are commemorated on the village war memorial in the upper graveyard opposite the Primary School.)

The lane now reaches a little crossroads. On the left is a lane back up to **Dr Crouch's Road**, passing half-a-dozen old cottages on the way. Sharp right takes one into **Wells Road**, described in Route 2. Straight ahead is the private drive to an ancient homestead, **Rodways Farm**. To the right of this is the lane leading down to the hamlet of **Bismore**. This used to be called **Old Hill**, but very few residents know that today. There is no name now, it is just 'the way to Bismore'. There are fields all the way down on the left, but the houses on the right begin with **Springfield**, which with its neighbour, **Bakery Cottage**, enjoys a wonderful view across the valley to **Lypiatt** ridge. A little digression here, while admiring that view. **Lypiatt** describes the settlement on both sides of the lane on that hilltop that runs from the Bisley-Stroud road to Quarhouse on its southern slopes. Like Eastcombe, it is part of the civil parish of Bisley-with-Lypiatt. Ironically, it feels more removed now from Eastcombe than in earlier centuries. Previously, this lane down to and through Bismore led to the Lypiatt farms and manors and was the short route to Stroud. Recently, the status of the lane as it mounts the opposite hillside was changed with a ban on motor traffic, and what used to be a normal route has now been forgotten. Village children used to walk to Stroud schools by this way, men went to work, women went to market, the workhouse could be reached easily...

Along that hillside opposite are the fine houses along the springline, most of which date back to mediaeval times, and earlier. In view from the left are **Nether Lypiatt Manor** (recently owned by Prince and Princess Michael of Kent), **Middle Lypiatt**, recently owned by the composer Geoffrey Burgon but a site of Stroud Brewery in the eighteenth century, **Berrimans** – old cottages made into a big house recently – and **Ferris Court**, a farm which marks the remains of an old manor whose estate was subsumed in to **Lypiatt Park**, the great house to the right that used to be known as **Upper** or **Over Lypiatt Manor**. One can also see **Copsegrove Farm**, whose history also probably goes back to the Conquest and earlier. Further north are the Bisley manors. **Lypiatt Park** was bought in the 1950s by the sculptor Lynn Chadwick and his family continues to live there so occasionally one can see his metal sculptures glinting in sunlight in the parkland. It had many

owners through the centuries, one of whom may have connected it to the Gunpowder Plot, but the most famous name must surely be Dick Whittington.

Back to the nineteenth century. When the Antill family lived in **Bakery Cottage**, the bread oven supplied part of their income (and cottagers could pop their Sunday dinners in the oven after the firing and the bread had been removed), but also Jacob Antill used his outhouse as a slaughterhouse. Occasionally Sir John Dorington of **Lypiatt Park** required him to slaughter and butcher cattle in order to give portions of meat to tenants. After Jacob's death his widow and three daughters lived at **Cyprus Cottage** on **The Green**, where they ran the **Post Office** and undertook sewing jobs.

Next one passes several garages, and then on the right there is a lane up to **Wells Road**, quite recently rendered impossible for all but the smallest cars. **Old Hill** grows steeper at this bend, and plunges past the beautifully situated **Crow's Nest** cottage. At the next bend there is a stile, and a footpath that drops down what used to be called **Lower Common** to **Bismore Farm**, and **Cuthams Cottage** which is all that remains of the hamlet called Cuthams, where clothworkers lived. From here one can choose a high or low route to **Toadsmoor Lake**, and the hamlet of **Toadsmoor**. Staying on **Old Hill**, however, leads one straight down under trees to a fork in the road.*

Rounding the bend to the left takes one past the old **Fairview** cottage on the right (facing up the track to **Bismore Farm**) and then one reaches **Bismore Bridge**, *and this is as far as a vehicle may go*. The bridge is of great antiquity, and an indication of how important a route this was for wheeled traffic. It crosses the Toadsmoor stream, and the fall on the left (in rainy weather a thundering cascade) perhaps shows that this was once used for one of the many little mills that studded this watercourse in past centuries. The track to the left leads to Toadsmoor, and the London road (!), the track to the right leads to the Victorian gamekeeper's cottage, built by Sir John Dorington, where it becomes a woodland footpath following the stream up to the hamlet of **Hawkley**. From there one can turn right up **Fidges Lane** and follow it all the way up to **The Green**, or part-way up one can fork right into the woods and follow that track past **Kitlye** to the main hamlet of **Bismore**.

*Supposing, however, that at the fork at the foot of the **Old Hill** one chooses to go uphill to the right, one soon sees the old cottage called **Little Orchard**, and the modern house called **Badgers Brook** (which replaced the artist's studio that originally belonged to Little Orchard). After this there is a T junction. To the right one goes up to the entrance of **The Glen**, which is shown on Victorian maps as the site of a lime kiln (another forgotten cottage industry). Here it is possible to take an extremely steep but short footpath back up to **Wells Road**, and then up again to **The Lamb Inn** on **The Green**. Or one can take a look at the oldest cottages in the hamlet, thought to date from at least the early part of the seventeenth century. **Bismore Cottage** is up the bank next to The Glen, but down at road level is the rather larger house that is now called **Honeyhill**. It was called Bismore House in the 1841 census, but after that presumably was split into two cottages and only turned back into one just before the Lypiatt Park estate was broken up at auction in 1919. The woodland was added to the garden at that point. After that it was gentrified, with car- and telephone-owning occupants, unusual then – and extended in 1955 and 1970. Walking past the house along the boundary of the garden, leaving **Little Bismore** cottage and the path to **Woodlands** on the left, takes one to the main path through the woods. This ends at the hamlet of **Kitlye** and joins **Fidges Lane** (turn right for **Eastcombe**, left for **Hawkley**) – or one can shorten the walk by heading up to the right just before reaching the first **Kitlye** cottage on the right. Keep alongside its boundary, and then climb steps up to **Fidges Lane** (right for **Eastcombe**, left for **Hawkley** – or one can cross the fields to **Nash End** hamlet and then **Bisley** – or descend to **Hawkley** and up the pitch there, turning right into the wood to follow the course of the stream to **Bisley**). Straight up **Fidges Lane** takes one back to **The Green** at **Eastcombe**, of course.