

#### EASTCOMBE. ROUTE 4. *An almost level walk!*

*Eastcombe until recently was just a maze of small lanes and modest cottages. It grew slowly over the last 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 and, long ago, weavers and others in the wool industry. 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 is a map of the village – and a defibrillator. The whole of this walk should be within mobile phone signal.*

Begin this walk at the foot of **The Green**, with the **shop/post office** above you, **The Lamb Inn** behind you, and the **Baptist Church** to your right. You will see from a street sign that you are about to enter **Dr Crouch's Road**. To your left and right are graveyards attached to the Baptist Church, usually referred to locally as the **Chapel**. Long ago, any Eastcombe villager needing to go to church would have crossed the fields to nearby Bisley – much the most important place around here before the development of Stroud. It is known, however, that by the eighteenth century there were nonconformist meetings in the neighbourhood. An energetic minister named Thomas Williams baptised four people in 1801, and from then on they constituted themselves a new Baptist Church. Land was bought here, and a foundation stone laid in 1801. The building seen today is as enlarged in 1863 – it will hold a vast congregation, and used to be the centre of village life. Attached to it is **The Manse**, first added around 1820 and still occupied by a pastor and his family.

Inside the graveyard on the left is the war memorial, placed there presumably because the pastor after the First World War was supportive of the scheme. The Reverend S G Johnson won the Military Medal for his work as a despatch rider in the Balkans. The memorial is to the local men lost in both world wars. On the opposite side of the road is the **Primary School**, built by Baptists on Baptist land and opened in 1878. One curious fact is that the foundation stone was laid by Sir Samuel Morton Peto, who built Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, London. Originally there was just a Sunday School in a room at the back of the Chapel, but in 1868 the Rev Thomas Keble, of Bisley, supplied Eastcombe with a most welcome day school. Unfortunately, in the time of his son and namesake it was decided that only children baptised in the Anglican faith could attend that National School. The Sunday School room did not meet Government standards (a twelve-foot high ceiling was necessary) so the Baptist congregation had to fund a new building. Philanthropic Henry Hook, a chapel-going Liberal, put up this school without seeking a profit. The cottage on whose land the school was built still stands next-door – **Baptist Cottage**; and next along, at right-angles to the road are **Jasmine Cottages** – originally three but now turned into two.

After the graveyard there is a drive up to two modern houses built behind it, and then come the bungalows built by the district council for elderly people. There is a path here through to the rest of that council development, which can be used to circle round to the left by people wanting a very short walk. Then to the right and left are mainly modern houses (including a hairdresser's), but **Highlands** is attached to another old house, **Brewer's Cottage**, on the lane below. The buildings on the right finish with a large Victorian house that was built in 1896 as a **Reading Room** for the village (and a home for the mason). Sir John Dorington, as he expanded the estate attached to **Lypiatt Park** (a mansion on the hillside opposite Eastcombe), developed quite paternalistic ways. He was a considerate landlord, and was interested in public works, so both Bisley and Eastcombe benefited from access to large rooms that could be used for reading and relaxation. This one here, at first called Jubilee House (Victoria's Diamond Jubilee) but then **Berwick House**, is divided into two now. Opposite are two stone buildings. **St Augustine's Church** was built to be the **National School** started by the Reverend Thomas Keble, and just before it is **Church House** which was the headteacher's house. There was great rivalry between the Anglicans and the Baptists, which was mirrored to a great extent by the villagers' voting habits (Tories versus Liberals). During the First World War the village was allowed to keep just one schoolmaster, so the Anglican school closed and the British (Baptist) School became the only primary school in the village. Keble had also had

erected a 'tin church' (these prefabricated corrugated iron churches were quite common in this area), so this was abandoned and the school here became the church. Above it up this side road is the **Village Hall**, replacing the tin church (used as a church hall till it burned down in 1962).

This crossroads is another point where the walk can be shortened. Down to the right the lane passes a number of old cottages before reaching another meeting of lanes where turning right takes one back to **The Green**. Up to the left, at the **Village Hall**, one can turn left into **Bracelands**, go to the end and then turn left to go back to **The Green**. Those who have time and energy, however, should go straight on along **Dr Crouch's Road**. On the left behind high walls is a gabled Victorian house which was built for a local-boy-made-good, Isaac Fawkes, who made his fortune in textiles in London and then returned to his native village to live in style. His tomb can be seen in the Chapel graveyard alongside builder Henry Hook, the village's other Victorian success story. This house is called **The Triangle** after the plot on which it was built. In the twentieth century **The Triangle** was lived in by doctors, and from 1952 by the Crouch family. Drs Hubert and Elizabeth Crouch, and later their son Tim, ran their **surgery** with partners in the stone outbuildings opposite **St Augustine's**. After it had to be moved, these became **Hubert's** and **Bessie's Cottages**. Past these is the **Old Coach House** that used to be part of the same property, and then there is the modern house, **Dovecote**, which is in the apex of the triangle.

On the right after the church crossroads are old cottages interspersed by modern buildings. **Green Hills, Glen View** and **Greystones** are out of sight, almost, below the road (following the line of the water supply), and then the next stone cottages are the pair called **Reform Cottages** (named for the 1867 Act?) Later houses take one to the junction with the main road, where a old converted farm building (**Fieldholme**) nestles below the level of the road. All the houses on this side of Dr Crouch's Road have magnificent views over the valley.

This main road comes all the way up the **Toadsmoor Valley** from the Cirencester-Stroud road – very old in its lower reaches, but relatively modern at this point. Opposite here one goes in to the parish of Chalford, and there is a huge new estate built (controversially) on the fields of Eastcombe's **Manor Farm**. The fields were enclosed (controversially) by Sir John Dorington as he reformed the ancient **Bisley Common** in 1869. Turn left here, staying on the verge on the left, and take great care as there is no footpath for the length of The Triangle's boundary. Sir John built **Manor Farm** (referring to his **Lypiatt Park** manor a mile or more away across the valley) between 1866 and 1872, spending £559 on it. The house can just be glimpsed behind a wall and paddock on the right, and then there is a little bit of woodland. One then reaches the **Bracelands** estate again on the left, and footpaths resume.

Staying on the main road, one can see a track off to the right leading to several houses and then **Manor Farm**. Opposite this on the main road is one old house, **St Mary's**, which in an earlier form was a pub called The Bear (long forgotten). Extraordinarily, this house was the home of the late Victorian schoolmaster Alexander Clegg and his wife – and they were gt-grandparents of the famous Attenborough brothers. It is followed by more **Bracelands** houses, but opposite is **Thomas Keble School** (a secondary comprehensive formerly called Manor School). The village playing fields and allotments then come on the right, with some modern developments facing them; but turn left at the crossroads towards the village and go down, past the turn into **Bracelands**, to a tree-lined drive on the left. This is private, but one can just see a large house (**St Elizabeth's**), now divided, that was built in 1878 by a Miss Isabel Newton. She ran a little orphanage, before going to South Africa as a missionary, and handed it on to an Anglican sisterhood which kept it as a convalescent home for Birmingham slum children, and then a small orphanage again, right up till 1942. Oddly this great work is now forgotten but it ran for many years alongside the Barnado's fostering scheme whereby many cottagers gave homes to orphans (in order to earn the few shillings a week that staved off destitution). Opposite the drive entrance is the nuns' gardener's house, and alongside the drive are conversions of the coach house and stable, chicken sheds, etc. Below the gardener's house half-a-dozen unspoiled cottages lead one back down to **The Green**, while opposite, on the left, are a few modern bungalows built in the former extensive grounds of the orphanage – finishing at the upper graveyard, and thence **The Green**.