



Having been stuck in the house most of Holy Week 2013 due to the continuing cold snap, Magda and I finally broke free on Easter Saturday and headed out into the wilds of Shropshire in search of new and picturesque churches.

Our destination this time round was the countryside to the west of Craven Arms, described most famously by A.E. Housman in his 1896 poem '**A Shropshire Lad**': ***"Clunton and Clunbury, Clungunford and Clun, Are the quietest places under the sun".***

All the villages are located on or near the River Clun, which has its source near Anchor on the Welsh border and which winds eastwards, then south to Leintwardine where it joins the Teme.



**St Cuthbert's, Clungunford**



**The wood carving of St Cuthbert with his birds at his feet, above the entrance porch, Clungunford.**

Having previously explored **St George's Church** and the town of Clun in summer 2012, this time Clun was off our list in favour of Housman's smaller villages. The first church we visited was **St Cuthbert's in Clungunford**.

[Cuthbert](#) is commemorated in a wood carving over the porchway as one enters the church, and in the east window. He is said to have lived on a desolate island in the [Farne](#) group where he kept the birds from eating his barley by preaching to them.

We were greeted inside by one of St Cuthbert's Flower Ladies and had a lovely chat about the church, comparing notes with how things are organised at All Saints'. Indeed wherever you go, and however different a church may look, you always have plenty in common through our shared Anglicanism.

Apparently we were the first visitors to the church after the completion of the improvements to the building that began in January. These included a new kitchen area (similar to ours), new loos and a storage area.



**Easter flowers were being placed in church in readiness for Easter Day**



The nave and chancel at St Cuthbert's, Clungunford.



**Jacobean choir stalls at St Cuthbert's**

The spacious nave and chancel date from around 1300, lit by eight windows. The east window was made by John Hardman and Co of Birmingham and depicts saints John, Ambrose, Thomas and Cuthbert. The choir stalls are made up from many fragments, ancient and modern, some being Jacobean. There is a wonderful church organ was built by James Binns of Leeds in 1895.



**The Rocke Cottage Tea Rooms at Clungunford.**



The tea rooms at Clungunford are adorned with paraphernalia from the 20s and lit by Tiffany lamps. Being lunchtime we looked at various possibilities for a meal - in Clungunford itself there is a wonderful 'Rocke Cottage' tea rooms serving delicious home cooked food with a variety of chef's specials. The rooms ( and even the passageway to the loos) are all decorated to a 1920s theme.



**Martin at Hopton Castle, scene of a bloody siege in the Civil War**



**Magda at Hopton Castle**



The stark beauty of the snow covered landscape from Hopton Castle.

Hopton Castle was next on our list of places to visit. In 2010 this old castle underwent a major renovation and huge efforts were made by the Hopton Castle Charitable Trust to upgrade the facilities and to interpret the castle's history.

The castle was, most notably, the site of a bloody siege during the English Civil War, when the Parliamentarians attempted to hold out against a superior force of Royalists. Eventually the defenders succumbed to a murderous onslaught and the 28 Parliamentarian soldiers who survived were all put to death most brutally by their attackers.

The horrors of that day sit in marked contrast to the breathtaking beauty of the landscape at Hopton.



**St Swithin's Church, Clunbury.**



**Martin at the porch to St Swithin's, Clunbury.**



The impressive rood screen between chancel and nave at Clunbury.



**The wonderful altar decorated in Easter white and gold at Clunbury.**



**Wall niche for sacramental vessels.**

We travelled on to **St Swithin's Church** in the small village of **Clunbury**, which is dedicated to the patron saint of Winchester.

The church was built on an earlier site of worship by the Normans and has been added to at various times over the centuries, most notably in the 15th and 19th centuries. There is a fine Victorian rood screen separating nave and chancel and once again the flower ladies had been at work preparing flowers for Easter Day. An unusual feature is a wall niche used for holding sacramental vessels.



**Clunton church was closed**

Next we travelled west along the Clun valley to **Clunton**. This is a Victorian chapel of ease on the main road to Clun - alas it was closed. However we spotted a sign to a bronze age hill fort up in the hills and decided to return home in this direction.



Walks begin from the car park at Bury Ditches fort.



**The breathtaking snowscape view from Bury Ditches fort - on Easter Saturday!**

After a long winding drive, through increasingly deep snowfields, we eventually came to what seems to be a mecca for hill walkers. There are three designated walks of varying lengths from the Bury Ditches Fort car park - **the Hunter's, Druid's and Chieftain's walks**. Alas these were very difficult to negotiate in the conditions and we didn't embark on any of them, but the trip up the hill was worth it for the sensational views from the fort.



**The Arbor Tree at Aston on Clun.**

Our last port of call in the Clun Valley was **Aston on Clun**. The nearest church is at Hopesay, but in Aston itself there is a reminder of pagan days with the historic **Arbor Tree** in the centre of the village, right by the River Clun.

The tree is dedicated to Brigit, the pagan goddess of fertility, whose name was later adopted for girls about to marry - 'brides': village folk would decorate a tree in her honour. Later in history, King Charles II declared Oak Apple Day, May 29th a public holiday, also to be celebrated by decorating trees; and the wife of a prominent local landowner perpetuated the tradition in these parts by decorating a tree on the day of her marriage. The village still celebrates [Arbor Tree Day in May](#) each year.

All the destinations on the trail we followed are pretty close to one another and once we were in the area the round trip took us only 2-3 hours to complete at a leisurely pace. It's a little remoter than the Wenlock and Morville churches we saw recently, but the area does possess a very distinctive ambience and some memorable, dramatic landscapes.

**Martin and Magda Jones**  
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