



The Ramblers' Association

# Ouse Valley Group

Ouse Valley Ramblers' Guided Walks

## Mike's Walk N° 7

## Felmersham, Bedfordshire

Area	Felmersham, Bedfordshire.
Walk Leader	Mike Dawson
Start Point	Felmersham Church at 10:00 am
End Point	Felmersham Church at 12:30 pm (approx)
Places Visited	Odell -> Yelow Lane -> Sharnbrook -> Felmersham
Approximate Distance	6.0 to 6.5 miles
Time To Complete	2 to 2:1/2 hours depending upon walking speed and duration of stops.
Difficulty	Easy- Undulating countryside with no real hills.
Car Parking	Felmersham Church



Felmersham - Odell - Sharnbrook Loop Walk

### Walk Itinerary

The itinerary below is a guide to the walk

- [1] Depart Felmersham Church and walk West along the Felmersham to Carlton Road
- [2] At about the one mile mark we turn North and pick up a footpath to Odell and the old water mill.
- [3] At Odell we head North and through the Eastern side of Odell Great Wood to Yelow Lane, a B.O.A.T. (Byway Open to All Traffic) which is closed to traffic for the winter.
- [4] Upon reaching Yelow lane we will take a break at a suitable break.
- [5] After the break we head East along Yelow Lane and into the Western side of Sharnbrook.
- [6] At Sharnbrook we have the option of taking a short-cut back to Felmersham along set aside opened under the Countryside Access scheme or to use the footpath along the river.

### Notes On The Walk

This walk is mix of footpath, woodland, ancient byway and ploughed fields. Due to the amount of recent rain the land is waterlogged. If the weather is mild then the going will be very sticky indeed in places. Please take care when walking as it can be very slippery indeed, even when walking on grass at the edge of fields. Yelow lane is rutted in places by four wheel drive vehicles but is not too bad as long as you pick your route.

Some parts of the walk go through or past fields that are occupied with sheep, geese or other fowl so please keep dogs on a lead when directed.

### Notes On the Walk Area

#### Felmersham

The history of Felmersham village goes back beyond Saxon times when it is believed there was a settlement on the raised ground south of the river Ouse. The village was mentioned in the Domesday Book, originally named as Felmersham or Flammeresham. The church and the tithe barn are the oldest buildings in the

village. The church, once connected with Trinity College, Cambridge, is regarded as one of the finest examples of the Early English style to be found in the county of Bedfordshire; the tithe barn, once reputed to be owned by monks from Lenton Priory, has now been converted into four dwellings.

Early in the 20th century the squire held his annual Ram Sale which was a major event, being a social gathering as well as a sale. People came from far and wide in quantities of beer, bread and cheese (no doubt remembering to buy the odd ram or two!). The occasion was rounded off with a smoking concert.

The Felmersham Feast was traditionally held on the first Sunday after the 26th August. It centred around the Sun Inn with roundabouts in Harvest Yard (the site of the present houses numbered 1-6 in Grange Road). By the 1930s the traditional Feasts had been replaced by garden fetes which were introduced by the owner of the Grange, Sir Richard Wells. A fete is still held in the village every year, profits being applied to the restoration of the church.

Although there were three public houses here that traded under the same names as they did 200 years ago, only one remains, the Sun. The other two, namely the Six Ringers and the Plough have been closed and converted in to private dwellings.

### **Odell**

In Saxon days the village was called Woadhull (or Woad Hill) because of the amount of woad grown in the area. A Saxon stronghold stood on the banks of the river and when this fell to the Normans the land was granted to Walter the Fleming who promptly started to erect a motte and bailey castle. By Tudor times the 2902 acre estate was in ruins. Heiress Agness de Wahull married into the Chetwood family and the estate was leased to William Alston who, after much restoration work, bought the entire estate in 1633. The Alston family was still in residence in February 1931 when fire gutted the building and the property was bought by the Lawson-Johnston family. The 2nd Lord Luke is still in residence today. In nearly 1000 years only three families have held title to this estate- quite a record.

On the neighbouring hill stands the 15th century church with its Perpendicular tower. Records show that a church has stood here since 1200 at least and many worthy names appear on the list of incumbents, including one Sir Oswald Butler who was made to pay public penance for the sin of marrying! There was also John Bulkeley, a dissident priest unable to come to terms with the

modern church and who found it politic to flee, together with family and friends, to the New World where the settlement they founded grew to become the modern town of Concord, Massachusetts.

Odell is a tranquil place today and it is hard to imagine the pocket handkerchief village green being the site of a thriving market large enough to rival that at Olney. A horse fair was also held regularly and on these market days, by merely displaying a green bough by the door, the villagers claimed their right to sell beer without licence. This happy practice of 'Tapping' however, was stopped in 1858.

Above the village is Odell Great Wood, once part of a vast forest stretching to the Fens. Not so large today Odell Great Wood is still a haven for wild flowers which, in their season, carpet the ground in primroses and bluebells providing a beautiful walk for those prepared to climb the hill. This vantage point gives an excellent view of the river winding its way through the village, past the ancient mill with its waterwheel where in olden days the local lord demanded 100 eels a year for rental.

It is reputed that the Hartwell family discovered a cure for rabies and that people came from miles around to take the 'cure'. Today their home is once again a home having been used for years as a public house aptly named The Mad Dog.

Tradition holds that Odell is haunted by Sir Rowland Alston who sold his soul to the Devil. When the Devil came to collect his dues Sir Rowland fled in terror to the church and the Devil, seizing the church by the tower, shook the building in his rage and, it is said, left his fingermarks in the stonework of the southern jamb of the west-door. Recently, an over-zealous builder, carrying out maintenance work, removed these 'offending' marks. However, once in every hundred years the ghost of Sir Rowland repeats that last frantic ride to avoid the Devil, and his next desperate gallop through the village is due in 2044.