

ELMLEY CASTLE

A WALK ROUND THIS QUINTESSENTIALLY ENGLISH VILLAGE

Elmley means a clearing in the elm woodland. There was a settlement here from about 600 AD and some of the stonework of the oldest part of the church shows its Saxon origins. **Castle** was added to the name when the supporter of William the Conqueror to whom these lands were granted, built a typical 'motte and bailey' castle on a spur of Bredon Hill (up behind the church) in the 1080s. Over the next 400 years the castle was enlarged, changed hands, eventually fell into disrepair and in the end was used as a source of good, dressed stone and used in the mid-1550s to build part of the grand mansion house, a picture of which you can see in to the right of the bar in the pub, and over the years to repair other buildings and the old bridge at Pershore which had been partly destroyed in the Civil War.

Standing with your back to the main door of the pub, you are looking at the oldest part of the village and some of its oldest houses, in particular the range of buildings immediately opposite. The names given to what are now private houses with the narrow gap for the road between give a clue to their origins. The niece of the builder of the castle had inherited and had married into another Norman family, the Beauchamps, later to inherit the earldom of Warwick and the castle there. In 1308 Guy Beauchamp established a chantry chapel at the castle with 7 monks and 2 lay clerks who lived in *The Old College*, with the Warden, who was also the Rector of Elmley, living in *The Cloisters*. The wide space between the pub and these buildings is believed to have been required for the market which, from 1254, was held each Wednesday. The hub of village life was thus around the 'square' with those who lived here plying various essential trades including shoemaking, tailoring etc. By the 1800s *The Old College* had become a bakers, the village shop and in due time also the Post Office

Turning to your left and looking down the main street you will see to your left, a row of old cottages (now much modernised !) which also date back some centuries and the name *The Smithy* indicates clearly the trade plied there. Continuing down the main street, you pass on your left the first of the buildings which were part of the main Manor Farm; *Farm Court* (still referred to locally and somewhat irreverently as 'the piggeries' !), *Manor Farm Cottage*, and *Manor Farm House*. Reaching the foot of the main street where the road forks to go to Evesham and Pershore you will see an old stone cross, dating from the mid-1200s, and very probably associated with the market which had been granted to the village at that time. The buildings facing you were those belonging to another farm.

Turn back up the main street and you pass first on your left the building of *Elmley Castle Church of England First School*. You will notice the inset stone in a gable giving the date 1869, when this building was erected to replace the previous school up near the church, which was in a poor state of repair and which could no longer accommodate the number of children it needed to. Beside the school buildings on the corner of Mill Lane is what was one of Elmley's 3 pubs, this one *The Plough* becoming famed far and wide as a cider house. Turn down Mill Lane and you will see the buildings which were used to make the cider. Continuing down Mill Lane you pass a lovely black-and-white cottage called *The Old Post Office*, which had taken on this function after it moved from *The Old College*. The various old buildings at the foot of the lane were associated with the main village mill (you can still see the mill pond if you turn to your left, but the mill wheel has long since gone), and the stone building opposite the pond was for many years Elmley's 3rd pub, *The Mill*.

Returning up Mill Lane, the village cricket field is now on your left and if it's the right season you may want to pause and watch part of a match in progress – a quintessentially English scene in a beautiful location ! At the top of the lane turn left up the main street again, passing the Victorian manor house on your left, and then the entrance to the cricket ground with the plaque showing the ground was given to the young people of the village as a playing field by Mr Stevens of Chapel Farm, Netherton.

Passing through 'the square' you are now facing the churchyard. To the left is the drive to a large, handsome house, built in 1875 as the new Vicarage to replace an older one in Hill Lane, but now a private house. To the right the road named Parkwood, serves a development of houses built in the 1960s on what had been the front lawn of Park House – you can still see the stone bases of the entrance gates to the 'Big House'.

At this point you should continue up the path to the church, a historic building the earliest part of which traces back to Saxon times, but which substantially dates from the close of the 11th century, with major enlargements in 14th and 15th centuries. Take time to look around and read the boards describing the font, the alabaster Savage monument and marble Coventry monument as well as the texts of various other monuments, including that above the lectern to Col Thomas Henry Hastings Davies, who fought through the Peninsula and at Waterloo with Wellington and then became MP for Worcester. Col Davies bought Elmley Park in 1822 and the family, distinguished military men in succeeding generations, did much in service not only of this country, but also this village. There is much to see which, as with most ancient churches, tells you a great deal of the history of the place and its associations with important national events.

One such event, and of course of particular importance to the village, was the visit of Good Queen Bess from 20-22 August 1575, accompanied by a large retinue of distinguished persons. She stayed at the then recently built Park House with Sir William Savage and his wife (William is the recumbent figure on the monument in the church, nearest the north wall). The Savages, a Cheshire family (of Norman descent) had been granted the Lordship of the Manor of Elmley and Constable-ship of the Castle after the Battle of Bosworth (1485) when the Beauchamp descendants had backed the losing side and the Savages had fought with distinction for Henry VII.

And this brings us back to the Queen Elizabeth Inn, or Queen's Head as it was first named around 1900. The pub sign, which has been successively copied from previous ones as they became too weathered, depicts the Queen on the one side (copies of different famous portraits have been used over the years) and on the other, the Queen and her cavalcade arriving in the village, being greeted by Squire Savage and his wife and recording the date of her arrival in August 1575. The Queen herself stayed in the luxury of the mansion house, but with such a huge retinue accompanying her, every half-decent building of any size in the village, of which this was one - and it does date back to those times - must have been pressed into service to accommodate them all ! The Inn thus provides a tangible link with that momentous occasion.

Should you wish to extend your walk, go up Hill Lane for as far as you wish to. It leads to paths to the top of Bredon Hill, but even if you do not wish to do the full climb, there are superb views across the valleys and on your way up, you can enjoy more black-and-white cottages that are characteristic of this part of the country. The houses in Hill Lane nearest the pub are again part of the village that would be fairly easily recognised by those who lived here 400 years ago or so. You will come, on your left, to a fine stone-built building *The Old Vicarage*, built around 1710 by the Savage squire of the day to replace an older vicarage which he had demolished – but it was never lived in by a vicar until 1861, when the incumbent deemed it insufficient for his requirements and had a new one built down by the churchyard as we have seen ! Just past this house a lane (locally known as Dog Walk) goes off to your left and if you walk to the end of that, you will come on your right to the magnificent walls (now enclosing a private house) of what was the walled garden for the Big House. Stand with your back to the corner of those walls and looking up the hill you will readily perceive the flat top of Castle Hill, the site of the Norman castle which gave **Elmley Castle** half of its name.

(Our thanks to Mary Mackenzie for creating this historical walk, which we hope you enjoyed)



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THE ENJOYMENT OF OTHERS !! THANK YOU**